

# SOME NOTES ON THE GOLDEN GLEECE GROUP

An incomplete history

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# The Golden Fleece Story

The very act of rediscovering and reinterpreting the past creates the clarity and confidence necessary to craft a distinctive story for the future. Even in the most trying circumstances, people can refresh and reinterpret the best of what came before as way to fashion what comes next. This is a partial account of some of the events in our story—the Golden Fleece group.

## 2001

### Events at the creation

Pre-2001 Various informal meetings on uses of storytelling in organizations at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough TN. Early pioneering work of Rick Stone, Steve Denning, David Snowden, and others. Denning and Snowden begin convening “Master Classes.”

Fall 2000 Seth Kahan creates the StorytellinginBusiness listserv

March 2001 Lisa Kimball and Rob Creekmore convene the Virtual Storytelling in Business Symposium, sponsored by the International Storytelling Center

April 2001 Steve Denning convenes the first Smithsonian workshop on organizational storytelling

May 2001 Initial luncheon at the World Bank to explore forming an organizational storytelling group in Washington, DC

July 2001 First meeting of the DC Organizational Storytelling Group (OSG -later known as “Golden Fleece”) at George Mason University. Paul Costello leads the Living Stories Process, supported by Seth Kahan and Rob Creekmore. Four “Stories of Our Beginnings” by Madelyn Blair, Sharon Cox, Patti Digh, and Lisa Kimball, are selected to represent the community’s beginning.

August 2001 Paul Costello concludes the Living Stories Process with the group, supported by Rob Creekmore. First meeting at Van Ness Condominiums, hosted by Lynne Feingold. Draft “Description” for the OSG prepared by Madelyn Blair and Rob Creekmore.

October 2001 Dave Rippey leads OSG session on “Leadership Stories” at Alicia Korten’s home. Annette Simmons and Jimmy Neal Smith convene a meeting of major organizational storytelling practitioners during the National Storytelling Festival. Rick Stone, Steve Denning, and others make presentations on organizational storytelling at the Festival.

November 2001 Madelyn Blair leads OSG session on “Storytelling and Appreciative Inquiry” at the World Bank. Three “Future Stories” are created by the group, including one entitled “The Good Ship Golden Fleece,” from which the name “Golden Fleece” emerges for the OSG. Seth Kahan creates the GoldnFleece listserv.

December 2001 Seth Kahan and Rob Creekmore lead OSG session on “Tapping the Archetypal Power of Stories in Organizations” at Van Ness (all further OSG sessions are convened there).

### A. Smithsonian Associates: April 2001

The first Smithsonian storytelling event took place on a Friday evening and Saturday in April 2001. It was called, “Storytelling: Passport to Success in the 21st Century”. The speakers were:

- Larry Prusak
- John Seely Brown
- Katalina Groh
- Steve Denning

A transcript of the presentations is available at: <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/>

The following discussion took place in Friday evening, April 2001 at the Smithsonian Associates' Symposium on organizational storytelling – a forerunner and catalyst for the creation of the Golden Fleece Group. You can find the transcript of the film being discussed at:  
<http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/Katalina1-enrolling.html>

#### **ON POSSIBILITY AND THRIVING**

**Therapist (male):** My first response is to be very thankful. Twenty-nine years ago last week, I had an experience that I call “thriving”. And for the last twenty-six years, I’ve been working on a book of possibility, or “thrival”. And this is such a boost, and such a clear pathway for all the things that go with thriving. The word “possibility” isn’t over. And I am very moved and grateful to have had this experience.

#### **THE MASTER STORYTELLER DOES EXACTLY WHAT A CONDUCTOR DOES**

**Professional storyteller (female):** I should know this, as I’m a professional storyteller. I do it for entertainment, for education, for making a difference, one at a time. And that video was absolutely wonderful. Because I go into this with both feet cold. And the master storytellers do exactly what the conductor does. Once you make that connection with the audience, one-on-one, be it adults or children, it’s just an absolutely marvelous experience. And so, I’m just validating your video. I’m like the cellist. Or the singer. You know, I think I’ve finally got it.

#### **IN THE PANDEMONIUM, SUDDENLY THERE WAS SILENCE**

**Participant (female):** I was struck by listening to the music and the idea of how important the music is. It reminded me of just a couple of weeks ago when I was in New York and I was rushing around and I was on my way to the lower East Side and I had to make a transfer in the subway and I went down one level. And there was just pandemonium. The train was late. It had been diverted. I don’t know what it was. Huge commotion. And then I heard some music and I glanced over to a place on the platform where there was a guy who had set up some kind of musical instrument that I hadn’t seen before. It was like an oriental thing that he played with two sticks, and he started to play. And after about two minutes, maybe less, the entire platform was silent. There wasn’t a sound. Except the music. They’d made a circle around him and then suddenly I heard the train. And the train came and I got on the train. And I took that music with me.

#### **KIDS WITH SHINING EYES**

**Teacher (female):** I am one of these academic people who teach in university and my field is children’s adolescent literature. And one of the topics that I am teaching right now is literacy through storytelling. And we are working with a number of school districts sending out graduate students. We’re doing research on this, and we’re trying to do in-services with teachers to show them how to get excitement into their classes. And we had a wonderful experience last spring. We invited eight hundred kids to come in. I’m at Texas A&M university and we use the Bush library there and we’ve put tents all over the place and we’ve got kids from all over the state coming in the most exciting one was when my undergraduates prepared the stories and they were telling them to some kids who were learning disabled and these kids had shining eyes and they said it was the first time that they had gotten excited about a story. You’ve got no idea what that did to my undergraduates. Because now they know they can go out and they can be really profound and excellent teachers. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

#### **INSPIRING SHINING EYES**

**Participant (male):** Hi. I know what it feels like, not only to have shining eyes, but to create shining eyes. And for people who have not told stories yet, it feels just as good to give the shining eyes as to have them.

#### **THE WAY HE MOVES HIS BODY**

**Participant (male):** I like the music in this video. But what I like even more are the motions that the guy did. I think it’s an integral part of the whole experience here, the way he moves his body, the way he enters into the spirit of the music, just by his motions. It reminded me that there are many forms of

storytelling. Storytelling in writing is very different from storytelling as narration. And I think that the most striking thing to me is the body motions.

#### **IF ONLY I HAD SEEN THIS A YEAR AND A HALF AGO**

**CEO (male):** Yes, as I was watching this marvelous movie, this film, I was thinking that I am very sorry that I saw it now and not about a year and a half ago. I have been with a consulting company here in the District of Columbia for eighteen years. The first seventeen years, I was in various positions and then the last year, I have been the CEO. And my first seventeen years were fine, I enjoyed them. The last year was hell. (Laughter) It was certainly the least satisfying year in my career at that company and seeing this movie, I certainly don't understand all of what I should, but I think that when I was the CEO, I looked at myself as being a problem solver. I was the number one problem solver for the company. And that's not a particularly satisfying or interesting way to spend one's time. So I wish I had seen this a little bit earlier and maybe I would have done a better job as the CEO. I thank the creator, Katalina, for the movie. It really was marvelous. (Applause)

#### **THE AUDIENCE BECOMES PART OF THE PERFORMANCE**

Participant (male): As I watched this movie, I recalled that I had tried to learn a little bit about flamenco music. It evolved as a form of music where you have a singer, a dancer, a musician, and some music. But it was also in terms of a very small audience. The audience became part of the performance. And that's exactly what the film is showing here, the audience involvement. Maybe the closest musicians that I've seen do that is the rockabilly singers, if you've ever heard them.

#### **THE METAPHOR OF MY LIFE: MUSIC**

Participant (female): This is really exciting for me and it reminds me of a time about fifteen years ago. I belonged to a group in an organization – actually the World Bank – it met every Friday morning and it had various things happen. But at some point, everybody that belonged to the group had to tell their story. And I was very apprehensive as it came to be my turn. And I thought about everyone else who had been telling their story and then something really hit me and that was that everyone who'd told their story had some kind of unconscious metaphor behind their story. Maybe it was a production chart. Maybe it was a game that they were winning. Something like that. Then that got me thinking. What could be my metaphor? And I really wondered if I had one too. And I noticed this is the way that this film began, with this discussion of metaphors. And I came to the idea that really the only thing that fit my life was music. And this metaphor was really exciting. It had a transforming effect on my life and what I did after that. So this was wonderfully resonating for me.

#### **LEAD FROM WHERE YOU STAND**

Employee (male): I've worked for a number of different organizations and companies and I guess that when I first started to watch this movie, I thought how much I would like to have a CEO like Ben Zander, with that kind of inspiration. But then as I watched this a little bit longer, the quote "Lead from where you stand" really came through. And that you don't need to wait for a CEO to watch this kind of movie. You can really be inspired and take the lead yourself.

#### **IF THE VOLUNTEER'S EYES DON'T SHINE, THEY DON'T STICK AROUND**

**Non-profit employee (female):** For the past thirty seven years, I have been an employee of a large non-profit. I've retired recently, just this last week, and I have started what's going to be a career, a second career as a volunteer. And I sure many of you have done volunteer work for different organizations. And you know, if the volunteer's eyes don't shine, they don't stay around very long. So this is really exciting. And I'm looking forward to taking these ideas back to my organization and to what's coming tomorrow.

#### **BASS PLAYERS ARE NEVER UP FRONT**

**Musician (male):** I'm a musician part-time, and I can definitely say I wish I had worked with Ben Zander's all the time. But like most leaders, I'm not quite up to that caliber. I think that it's really great to see that

example. As far as the idea of leading from where you stand, I am a bass player and the bass players are never up front. And usually most people don't know what the role is. But you can always feel a good bass player. You can always feel a weak bass player. And I think it just goes to show that you can lead from whatever position you're in.

#### **THE FILM IS FUNDAMENTALLY MISLEADING**

**Participant (male):** I find the film fundamentally misleading. It really reflected a message in which the medium dominated over what the message was. The medium very clearly showed a leader who was hyper-kinetic. I doubt that one in fifty people in this room would aspire to be a hyper-kinetic leader. The film was made because this was very filmable. What would have been far more constructive would have been somebody demonstrating those principles in a not-particularly filmable way, in a more sedate, organized business environment, in which people behaving the way you and I behave in a normal day. And because the kinetics so dominated the picture, it was really hard to pull out what the significance of those messages would be in what I would call a calmer, and more normal context. So I found the film fundamentally misleading. (Laughter)

**Participant (male):** My reaction to that is that I think your approach is somewhat logical, as opposed to a story-like approach.

**First participant:** It's a curse, I know. (Laughter)

#### **WHEN PEOPLE SPEAK FROM THE HEART**

**Participant (female):** I find that when people speak genuinely and sincerely and from the heart, no matter how they express it, it's going to show in their eyes. I think you can see that in the film.

#### **DOING IT ON ONE BUTTOCK**

**Office worker (female):** I think that I am going to go back to the office and in whichever situation I am in, and I'm going to try to do it on one buttock. (Laughter)

#### **I'M NOT A READER BUT I CARRY BOOKS AROUND WITH ME**

**Writing teacher (male):** I found it exciting to see the film because I was just carrying around and in part reading the book, *The Art of Possibility*, by the Zanders, and I certainly recommend that to everyone because it is an amazing wonderful book that identifies the ideas that we just looked at. But I also want to say that that idea of, kind of, carrying around books is something that I do. I am not by nature necessarily a reader. So people say, "So, what are you carrying around now?" (Laughter) I am actually carrying around now John Seely Brown's book. But I also wanted to say that several years ago, I was in a situation where I was in a class that was called, "Finding your life's work" and it was a ten week course. And at the end of nine weeks of the class, what I discovered was that my life work really was teaching possibility. That's what I came up with.

And then I thought, "Oh, of all the nerve, what the heck does that mean?" So at the same time, I had been working as a government contractor. I had worked for three of them and now I was with a fourth one. It was sort of a dead-end road. And I was offered the opportunity to work for another dead-end road. And I said to myself, "No, that doesn't fit." So I took that opportunity to step out, and begin teaching possibility. And I'm happy to say that in the past five years as a teacher, as a writing teacher, someone who teaches people how to find their way through information, when they are blockheads like me, people who don't necessarily read, but people who try to find their way through information. It's been a delight and an exciting adventure and it's been a wonderful story. And I just want to thank all of you guys for this opportunity as well.

#### **CALM, SEDATE AND POISED SINCE 1959, AND TIRED OF IT**

**Participant (female):** Well, with all respect to the gentleman who felt the film was misleading, I've been calm and sedate and poised since 1959. (Laughter) And I'm tired of it. The film looks good to me. (Applause)

## B. The first Golden Fleece meeting July 2001

### LIFE AFTER DEATH OF A DREAM: SHARON COX

Sharon: Five years ago, a dream had enough shape to it that I knew it was a dream, instead of just fragments or ideas or hopes. And the kernel of the idea was creating and attracting people who were strongly committed to supporting businesses to be responsible. Responsible is such a big word. I mean, to be responsive to the people in the organization and the work that they were doing or the service that was being provided, so that it would serve the world in some way as well as truly serve the people within the organization. So it just happened that the company that took me to Seattle – I was doing socially responsible investing, working with investors who had pulled together their ethical structures and to say, “You know, it can go beyond just this part of my life, it can also include investing. So those were the sort of people I was hanging out with and talking with and teaching about what social responsibility was.

So when that company decided that they couldn’t hold on to the Seattle office and it closed, I was on the street, if you will. I thought, “Well, could I take this idea that I was so much ‘in’, that belief, in that possibility what truly responsible businesses could do, what a powerful force this could be for all of us. So what would happen if that were taken to the community level? So that instead of working for the companies and portfolios, what would happen if you mirrored that in the community. Suppose there were two drycleaners there, and you knew that one was a responsible business and the other wasn’t, would you go there even if it cost fifty cents more for your cleaning?”

So it was that whole kind of thing. So that idea just grew in this effortless, beautiful way. It was like a force just taking me along with it. And the name came to me one morning and I woke up and it was the Responsible Business Development Institute. And I told several people and they said, “No, it’s too long.” Or “It’s not cute”. I got some pushback on the name. It was too long. It wasn’t suitable for marketing. Yada, yada, yada. And should I move off that. Or whatever. And I said, “O.k. maybe.” And I looked at every word and I looked the etymology and it was all there. Every time I looked at each of the words, I thought: no, no, no. It was truly authentic. It was the Responsible Business Development Institute. That’s the name of the dream.

Fast forward a year and a half and that was the death of the dream. For a long time, I was so ashamed to even talk about it. Then I flipped to the other side and became arrogant about it. If you have a failed business, it’s another notch in your belt, right? I had a failed business, wow! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! So that’s what I went to. And I didn’t realize it till today.

But I missed it until this afternoon, the hurt of what that meant. I really flip fast. I’m good at that. When I’m down, and I go up, way, way up the other side. So that was the beginning. What I realized was, what’s next? I think I’m still looking for working partners. So the idea of the Responsible Business Development Institute was there, but it was really, I wanted a something, that was like a magnet, that could really draw the people, that I could play with intellectually and with the authentic people and relate to with my heart and indeed that was what attracted those people to that idea. But a great concept does not a business make. I always thought it was the institute itself. But it’s finding working partners. That’s what I’m looking for. It’s finding working partners.

### ISABEL: AN AMERICAN STORY: MADELYN BLAIR

Madelyn: Isabel was sixteen when she said goodbye to her mother. Her older sister was supposed to go on the trip. But she didn’t want to go. And Isabel said, “I’ll go.”

So she took the hand of her cousin and they left the town that she had grown up in. When they got to the ship, Isabel didn’t understand that her passage included food. So she would not eat any food. As a result, she didn’t get seasick, and so she was given the children to feed, the infants, and when they didn’t finish a bottle, she would drink the milk.

And that's how she survived in the first few days. Finally, some one caught on and said, "Isabel, it's o.k. You can eat." And so she came to America, because she wanted something better for herself and her family.

*She married someone also from her home country, and at the age of 93, when she died, she was survived by 8 children, 21 grandchildren, 40 some great grandchildren, and I don't know how many great grand children. There were also 6 doctorates, a superintendent of schools, a principal, innumerable teachers, several business people, a religious, a chief economist, and some artists.*

The other day when I was riding home from work after one of my client commitments and at the end of the day, I'm tired and so I was listening to country music because it has lots of energy and there was this song by Jennifer Andrews, called, "Who I am". And there's a line in the song that says, "I am Rosemarie's grand-daughter."

And as I listened to that, I found myself singing, "I am Isabel's grand-daughter."

And I was suddenly overwhelmed by the passion of my regard for her.

#### **THE BASKET: PATTI DIGH**

Some years ago, I went to a small Quaker college in North Carolina, with about 1600 students. I was away from home for the first time. At home, everyone knew what I was doing all the time, because everybody knew my father since he was the town barber.

My first year at college, I fell in love for the very first time with the most magical man – Richard was president of the student council, he was the favorite disk jockey at the college radio station, he was a brilliant artist, making holograms. He was a truly wonderful person.

When I came home from college at the end of the first year, I told my parents stories about this wonderful man. And so my parents became equally excited about him, as I told them story after story about him. And they said why don't you get him to send you a photograph so that we can see what he looks like and we can invite him to the house when you both get back to school in the fall. And so I wrote to him – he lived in Philadelphia – and he sent me a photo. The moment I laid the photograph on the dining room table, everything changed - because Richard was black.

And I was trying to figure out in my little head how could this be, how one little act could so change their excitement about this whole process, about me, and about my relationship with them. They disowned me and said, "You know, if this continues, we're not going to pay for your college any more."

So I ended up quitting school and getting a job. I was a vegetarian, still am, but the only job I could find was working at Wendy's as the chief burger maker, because I had a photographic memory for the orders that were being placed.

In the middle of all this, my father died at age 53. And as I was going to the funeral, my mother told me, "You killed your father."

Richard and I were together for six years, and then we started to grow apart. I was concerned that I might be ending the relationship because of my parents and the ways that people responded to us. But I finally decided that we were going in different directions and so we separated. This was a very difficult experience but I decided that it was the right thing to do.

Then after all these years, a few months ago, Richard contacted me to explain that he was undergoing an operation to become a woman. All these years, he had kept a basket with some mementos of our relationship, and after 22 years, he felt strong enough to open it. Inside, among other things, he found a lock of my hair and a pair of diamond earrings that I used to wear. And Richard – now Amanda – is wearing those earrings herself now.

## **THE TOUCHSTONE: LISA KIMBALL**

Lisa: So, once upon a time, I was working with an organization that will remain nameless, but some of you may have been involved with this organization or an organization like it. And I was going to facilitate an off-site meeting and so I did the traditional preparations and I interviewed everyone and asked what was on their minds. And 100% of the things that come up in those kinds of interviews came up. It was all about what the other people didn't understand and that the nature of the organization was such that it was impossible to talk about x or y or z because that's just not allowed here. Where if I were to say what I thought about this project or that project, I could be sent to the office in Siberia or whatever. And I had decided that I would use an open space design for this meeting which was going to require people to speaking more openly. I knew I needed something to open the group up. So I told them a story about my family. We were a very progressive family and always that first to take advantage of new things coming along, particularly because my mother was a working mother. And one of the things she adopted was a dish called noodles almandine. It was basically one of those dinner-in-a-box things. It was one of those things where you just add water. That was on the rotation that we had about once a week for a very long time in our family.

And one night for some reason, and I don't remember why, maybe it was the family truth night, I said, someone - I think it was my grandmother who lived with us at the time - asked why we were having noodles almandine and admitted that she really didn't like it. And I said, well, "I don't really like noodles almandine very much." My father said, "I HATE Noodles Almandine"

And my mother said, "I don't really like noodles almandine at all; I thought you guys liked it." We'd been literally having it once a week for more than a year but nobody had wanted to be the one to say they didn't like it because that might hurt my mother's feelings or cause an argument or something.

And so I told this story in this group and that kind of opened up a space where then other people in the group started telling stories about things that they hadn't sared talk about. It became a touchstone story, where all someone needed to say was "noodles almandine" and it came to mean, "We've all been thinking this all this time, but nobody's ever dared say it out loud ... for example, never asked, "why we have these stupid staff meetings that everyone agrees are a waste of time."

Throughout the rest of this offsite, it turned out very successfully. For the group, noodles almandine became the code word to mean, "Let's tell the truth."

## **C. Golden Fleece Stories of November 2001**

At the November 2001 meeting, a session on appreciative inquiry yielded the following stories.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF STORYTELLING 2004**

I have the fantastic opportunity to interview the leaders of the innovation storytelling of Washington DC. I'm very excited about interviewing these leaders because it's about an international symposium on storytelling. The symposium is attracting people from segments of every aspect of life, "cradle to grave" as we put it, both before and after, from educational institutions to organization, from corporate to whatever, you name it. And these people are coming from all over the world to attend this international symposium, because of what we have done. We have got ongoing R&D. We've got ongoing practice and this was an incredible organizational feat, done by a very small group of dedicated committed passionate people.

And what is so fascinating about it is that everyone who participated in the organization of this organization actually did this in their own organizations, and then they took this to other organizations. And in fact, this group was so successful that they have been asked to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission to create storytelling among warring factions all over the world to help bring about world change.

And the way we were able to do this was that people were very open and trusting and they used storytelling within the group themselves, to empower and strengthen themselves.



As a result, it got to be a very strong collaborative environment and network, and through networking, then there would be these various opportunities, because they would look at people's strengths and weaknesses. And when an opportunity came up, they looked to see who in the group would work best and most collaboratively with those potential clients. And they were using online training and integrative learning of storytelling with the modern instructional techniques.

And one of the challenges that they are beginning to have, is that they are starting to have discussions as to whether storytelling is something that should be credentialed, should be academic. Or is that philosophically opposed to the experiential and incorporative nature of storytelling? And then of course the power of stories: they can be used for good or for evil. How do we make sure that the people who are involved in our group at least would be using story to help transform the world to a positive future, while recognizing that the definition of a positive future could be completely different, depending on where you are coming from. So this group has accomplished a tremendous amount, and it's through the power of storytelling that they were able to accomplish all this within this relatively short period of time.

### **THE ICENINE ARTISTS' COLONY**

Seth: Everyone in our group is going to tell a piece of the story. There's a Kurt Vonnegut book called *Cat's Cradle* in which there's this chemical substance called IceNine and the whole story is about the scientist who's trying to keep the IceNine in the test-tube because as soon as it comes out, it reacts with the air around it, and changes the molecular structure of the entire universe.<sup>1</sup> So we want to be the IceNine artists' colony.

Steve: This artists' colony is working on multiple levels and different facets, not just the mind, but also the heart, and visual, and sound, and dance. And it's open. And it's accessible.

Rob: So, one day, the CEO of the largest Japanese corporate conglomerate, you know, the conglomerates that run everything, he's the most powerful man in Japan, he's the Bill Gates of Japan, and he happens upon one of our meetings. And at first, he's just completely taken aback by what he sees going on. "This is very, very strange," he says. For example, he sees a lot of people around but he can't figure out who's in charge. It seems like it's a little chaotic, but people are very excited and there's this incredible exchange of energy and there are even children running around, and the place feels special. There's this sense of place about this community too. It isn't just a sterile room in an office building but it's out in nature, and people seem to live around there. And first he's just totally shell-shocked.

Sharon: Then the people in the artists' colony start to walk him through and give him a tour, not unlike the story of B.F. Skinner's *Walden 2*<sup>2</sup>, and as the group walks him through, they talk about how they wanted to make this a place where it's an artists' colony, where your art is your life, and the work that you do takes up so much of your time that it is your art. And so all of us are doing all of the diverse things that we do, but coming to this as a place to share the spark. We get sparks from one another from the things that we do together. But not just us. Also we get sparks from other groups like us, that are linked with us. It's an open source model like a network. There are other groups and we get sparks from them and we catalyze each other.

Seth: And that's the story. We're pushing our boundaries, but that's our story. Dance, poetry, martial arts, improvisational theater, experiential learning, teams, a genuine holistic Renaissance.

David: Do we all live together on this colony?

Sharon: That's one option.

Seth: Yeah baby.

### **GOOD SHIP, "THE GOLDEN FLEECE"**

Sharon: You might remember that about six months ago, maybe two years, that the best-selling book, *In Search of The Golden Fleece: Storytelling for Organizational Transformation in an Imperiled World*, hit the best-seller list. It just caught the imagination of people around the world, and the authors were the

members of this little group, which began just a couple of years ago in Washington D.C. and it was with their vibrancy and their commitment to the search for the Golden Fleece.

Michael reminded us of the story of Jason and the Argonauts. Jason is going out. He knows that his world is imperiled, corrupt and whatever else, and he's out on a search for what can be brought back as a healing, as wisdom, and whatever else, back to his imperiled world. So this somehow captured the imagination of the entire planet. This group had discovered compelling ways to release the best of our stories within the group and within their organizations. And that was the first part of the book. And then subsequent chapters were stories from those who read the first part, and contributed chapters of their own. So this was a book unlike any other book, because it was written organically in several stages. The first one was an unfinished one, and then it became this full book. And it excited so many people that something special was created, much like an artists' colony, but the way that this group envisioned it, it would be on a ship.

*And that's what we're reporting on today because the ship has just docked in the marina. It's called The Golden Fleece. And it's embarking on a first journey, the people who were in the original group plus many people who had participated in the book. And others too, who were just curious, who had some yearning to be a part of this experience. And they're going to take off. And there will be this contained experience and the artists' colony will be invited to be part of this – provided that they behave themselves. But by being on this wonderful ship, there is the whole journey aspect. There's the water. There's the self-containment knowing that we must depend on one another, for our well-being, for the relationship, and it's here where we can really reach for and reach toward our deepest knowing and share that.*

Then in three weeks, that group gets off. Another group gets on. Now these people are seeded with these wonderful ideas and experiences. So they go out and basically they go out and talk with the world. So this is this traveling experience. So that's our ship. And it's sailing all around the world.

Alicia: Another piece to the boat was that it was both a real thing and also a mythic thing. And the story of traveling by boat, The Golden Fleece, is a mythological interpretation of the group's journey together. And the boat is the sacred vessel that we create in our meetings and at our gatherings. And the water is the emotional realm and the flow of light. And so, in this sacred vessel, we are bobbing along, on that flow of life, of opening, of space, for more and more people to experience the ferment of that, and the flow.

## 2002

January 2002 Michael Salla leads OSG session on "The Hero's Journey Applied to the History of American Foreign Policy."

February 2002 Seth Kahan leads OSG session on "Activating Human Potential in Communities of Practice."

March 2002 Denise Lee leads OSG session on the "Knowledge Sharing Initiative Using Storytelling at NASA."

April 2002 Alicia Korten leads OSG session on "Creating a Culture of Conscious Storytelling in Organizations." Steve Denning and Seth Kahan lead another Smithsonian workshop on organizational storytelling. Many of the major organizational storytelling leaders present at the "Action Enabled Learning: The Power of Narrative" conference in New York.

May 2002 Steve Denning leads OSG session on "Seven Highest Value Forms of Organizational Storytelling."

June 2002 Dave Snowden leads OSG session on his work with narrative in organizations using complexity theory.

July 2002 Paul Costello leads OSG session on “The Irish Story” with his young Irish interns from the Young Leaders program that Paul leads.

August 2002 Joan Girardi leads OSG session on “Exploring the Use of Story in Knowledge Sharing” using simulations. Later in the month, Seth Kahan previews his NASA workshop on Work Life Balance.

September 2002 First StoryCon conference convenes in Palm Springs, CA.

October 2002 Paul Costello and Rob Creekmore intended to lead a session on “Using the Living Stories Process to Discover Our Stories of the Present” but there were insufficient numbers so there was an open-ended dialogue instead. Rob Creekmore, Steve Denning, and Seth Kahan make organizational storytelling presentations at the National Storytelling Festival. The following day they convene an open exploratory session among people interested in organizational storytelling. Around this time Denning, Kahan, Madelyn Blair, and others begin sharing the Golden Fleece story at various conferences and events around the world.

November 2002 Steve Denning and Seth Kahan led an OSG discussion on the sprouting of new groups in Atlanta, Albany, San Diego, and Boston, as well as the possibility of an entire weekend of events around a third annual organizational storytelling event at the Smithsonian.

December 2002 Alicia Korten, Lynne Feingold, and Sharon Cox led a performance of Alicia’s poem “The Voyage of the Golden Fleece” at Van Ness. Paul Costello convened the first of a monthly series of workshops entitled: “Becoming Storywise: An Introduction to Narrative Practice” in Bethesda, MD.

## Smithsonian Associates: April 2002

The Smithsonian Associates event in 2002 was a one-day workshop on storytelling hosted by Seth Kahan and Steve Denning.

### ENDLESS JOURNEY<sup>2</sup>

This was the final story told at the Smithsonian Associates workshop in April 2002. It was told by Birute Regine about the work of Linda Rusch at the Hunterdon Medical Center in New Jersey.

*A woman from England was admitted to Three West several times after being diagnosed with a terminal disease. She had no family in America and often seemed to take comfort in being admitted to the unit, whose nurses had become like family members to her. On the last admission, it was evident that she would soon die. Carol and other nurses were sitting on her bed, marveling at her courage and faith as she told them she was going on another endless journey. They asked how they could make things better for her.*

*She had two requests. Although her family was in England, she didn’t want them to come see her; she did, however, want to talk to them on the phone. The nurses helped her do that.*

*The second request was that she didn’t want to die alone. She told Carol she wanted to be held. Carol thought about how silly she would look if someone saw her, but nevertheless, she lifted the covers and lay next to her in bed and held her for a long time. The English women fell asleep shaking because even though she was courageous, she was also afraid. Call bells went off, and Carol recognized that one of them was hers. As she began to climb out of the bed, a nurse coworker appeared at the door. She came close and whispered, “Move over, I’ll take your place. I love her too.”*

*That began a period of two days when their dying friend was never left alone. Nurses stayed over time to hold her, others came in early. At the end of two days, when she had completed her calls to her family, they could feel her spirit leaving them. They had fulfilled their promise; she was never alone. She passed on to her “endless journey” held by each and everyone one of them.*

## 2003

January 2003 Seth Kahan led a New Year's Ritual during the OSG session.

February 2003 Seth Kahan led an OSG session on "Storytelling and Our Work in the World"

March 2003 Noa Baum led a workshop which was a "trial run" of a workshop that she is planning to give to lawyers on the subject of listening.

April 2003 Greg Kramer and Rob Creekmore led an OSG session on "Storytelling and Mindfulness."

A transcript of the Smithsonian event with Noa Baum, Madelyn Blair, Paul Costello, Rod Creekmore, Lynne Feingold, Alicia Korten and Steve Denning is available at: <http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/>

## 2004

### SMITHSONIAN ASSOCIATES: TWO DAY SYMPOSIUM

#### HOW STORYTELLING CHANGES ORGANIZATIONS

Why are the Harvard Business Review, Wall Street Journal and CIO Magazine now talking about storytelling as a tool for leadership and management in organizations in the 21st Century? In this two-day symposium, you will learn from some of the world's leading practitioners both what is happening in the emerging field of organizational storytelling and how you can use storytelling in your organization to spark change, to build community, to transmit values, to share knowledge, and more.

Day 1:

#### FRIDAY APRIL 16, 2004: HOW ARE ORGANIZATIONS USING STORYTELLING?

- STEVE DENNING, the author of *The Springboard* (2000) and *Squirrel Inc.* (2004) gave an overview of the highest value uses of narratives in organizations today and showed why storytelling is emerging as an essential leadership skill to cope with, and get business results in, the turbulent world of the 21st century.
- LARRY PRUSAK, co-author of "Working Knowledge" (1998) and "What's The Big Idea?" (2003) and former Executive Director of IBM's Institute for Knowledge Management, gave the results of his research on how new ideas were introduced into fifty different large organizations and describe the central role played by stories.
- MARK MORRIS, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer of The Brand Consultancy, showed how narratives play a central role in the way that major corporations position themselves in the marketplace and use narratives as the foundation for their reputation and brand.
- MELINDA BICKERSTAFF, Vice-President of Knowledge Management at Bristol Myers Squibb, described how specific narrative techniques were used to bring to life, and operationalize, the knowledge-sharing strategy at this major pharmaceutical company over the last few years.

#### DAY 2: SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2004: 9 AM TO 5 PM.

#### "HOW YOU CAN USE STORYTELLING IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

- MADELYN BLAIR, CEO of Pelerei Inc, and SETH KAHAN, the noted organizational community specialist, demonstrated the latest tools for capitalizing on the social potential of a gathering and provide takeaway-templates so that participants can apply these same techniques in their own work.
- DAN DECKER noted screenwriting coach, author of "Anatomy of a Screenplay" and the founder/director of The Screenwriters Group, drew from his extensive experience with crafting

stories for Hollywood to show what makes a story work for an audience and how storytelling skills can be used for problem solving in the corporate environment.

- STEVEN BARNES, the life-story coach and leading author of many science fiction novels, including "Lion's Blood" and "Zulu Tooth", introduced his methodology for understanding the essence of a story and show how participants can construct their own life-story.
- DOUG LIPMAN, well-known storyteller and author of *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play* (1999), showed how to perform your story so as to maximize the impact.

## 2005

### Smithsonian 2005:

#### STORYTELLING BEYOND THE ORGANIZATION: MARKETING, BRANDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Friday, April 22, 2005.

Why are company brands worth billions of dollars? How does an organization authentically communicate its brand? How can individuals authentically communicate who they are? What is the role of digital storytelling in marketing and branding? How can narratives build and strengthen genuine partnerships?

Learn from leading practitioners how organizations use narratives to establish authentic brand value, position a brand effectively, create demand for their products and services, and achieve competitive advantage.

- In the morning, Steve Denning, former knowledge-management program director at the World Bank and author of *A Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, described the role of storytelling in branding, public relations, marketing, and partnerships.
- Carol Pearson, president, Center for Archetypal Studies and Applications, and co-author of *The Hero and the Outlaw*, showed how to strengthen a brand by grounding it in the ancient archetypal characters of myth and legend, such as Odysseus or Aphrodite.
- After lunch, Marie-Laure Ryan, editor, *Narrative Across Media*, examined the strengths and weaknesses of face-to-face storytelling versus digital storytelling, and told how to exploit the strengths of different media. Annette Simmons, president, Group Process Consulting, and author of *The Story Factor*, will share lessons from her years in advertising and demonstrate how to use humor in stories to achieve organizational objectives.
- Throughout the day, Madelyn Blair, CEO, Pelerei Inc., and Michael Margolis, President, Thirsty-Fish Marketing and Storytelling, demonstrated useful tools for capitalizing on the social potential of a gathering, and provide templates that participants can use in their own

## 2006

The [Storytelling Weekend](#) was held on April 21-22, 2006. Everyone we talked to agreed that it delivered on its promise to be "the world's premier organizational storytelling event". The depth and breadth of the intellectual content was truly impressive and the atmosphere magical. Highlights included:

A welcome to participants from around the world ([MP3 - 4 megs](#))

[Steve Denning](#) explains "the OS moment" ([MOV - 1 meg](#))

[Steve Denning's](#) slides ([PowerPoint - 5 megs](#))

[Madelyn Blair](#) discusses "the UN story" ([MP3 - 4 megs](#))

[Madelyn Blair's](#) slides ([PDF - 1 meg](#))

[Jim Stuart](#) on creating the space for a story ([MOV - 2 megs](#))

[Jim Stuart](#) is hit by a bunch of asteroids ([MOV - 2 megs](#))  
[Jim Stuart](#) discovers his springboard story ([MOV - 3 megs](#))  
[Jim Stuart](#): the impact of the story on the storyteller: ([MOV - 2megs](#))  
[Jim Stuart](#) explains how story begins in yearning ([MOV - 1 meg](#))  
[Jim Stuart](#) talks about creating the space for the story to emerge ([MOV - 2megs](#))  
[Gerry Lantz](#) slides on "stories that work" ([PDF - 1 meg](#))  
[Ashraf Ramzy](#) tells his own story ([MOV - 2 megs](#))  
[Ashraf Ramzy](#) tells the story of "the perfect storm" ([MP3 - 5 megs](#))  
[Ashraf Ramzy](#)'s slides ([PDF - 2 megs](#))  
[Svend-Erik Engh](#) reveals his secret ([MP3 - 2 megs](#))  
Atieno Fisher's slides: using simulations to help learning ([PowerPoint: 98kb](#))  
[Glory Ressler](#)'s handouts ([Word - 4 megs](#))  
[Terrence Gargiulo](#) slides: using story to improve communication ([PDF - 750kb](#))  
[Terrence Gargiulo](#)'s article "Power of Stories" ([PDF - 160 kb](#))  
[Feedback](#) from the participants

The **December** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was held on December 5, 2006 and was facilitated by Kelly Cresap. It was a combination holiday party and LaughingMuse program focused on sharing laughter and interacting and telling stories in which humor came to the rescue.

The **November** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was held on November 7, 2006. , 7:00 to 9:00 in the party room, Quebec House North. The co-authors will discuss the new book, "Wake Me When The Data Is Over: How Organizations Use Storytelling to Drive Results." To find out more about the book, click [here](#).

The **October** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was held on October 3, 2006, 7:00 to 9:00 at Quebec House North. The speaker was **Susan Bales**, long time Senior Executive and entrepreneur within the Department of Navy. Susan explored the issues of business and organizational needs and how story can help to address them.

The **September** meeting of Golden Fleece took place on **Tuesday September 12, 2006**, Denise Lee introduced **Robert S. Frey** of [RSIS](#), talking about using storytelling in successful proposal strategies to government, private sector, and international contracts.

The **August** Golden Fleece meeting was held on Tuesday, August 1st, 2006. Kit Turen facilitated the Living Stories process to share some of our personal experiences and wisdom.

The **July** Golden Fleece meeting took place on July 11, 2006 . Paul Costello hosted a lively meeting with the young leaders of the Washington-Ireland program.

The **June** 2006 Golden Fleece meeting was facilitated by [Seth Kahan](#) and the topic was "The Social Construction of the Storytelling Community". Among the multifaceted aspects of the meeting, there was a set of postings by participants about the Golden Fleece community. The postings from the meeting can be viewed [here](#). To find out more about social constructionism and framing, click [here](#)

The **May** meeting was held on Tuesday May 2, 2006: it discussed **how to grow a storytelling business**. A 25-minute audio recording of [Steve Denning](#)'s opening presentation and the initial discussion is available [here](#) (MOV-10megs). A background paper is available [here](#).

## 2007

Our **Annual Storytelling Weekend** was held on May 4-5, 2007.

### Smithsonian Associates

- Larry Prusak, co-author of "Working Knowledge" presented an overview of the role of conversations in organizations. He also discussed the role of conversations as a tool for

developing new ideas and building social capital, and review the role of physical structures and the signals and symbols that enable and encourage organizational conversations.

- Steve Denning, author "The Leader's Guide to Storytelling" talked about the relationship between conversation and storytelling, and show how conversations can help resolve conflicts and inspire people to change. He discussed how we might shift from the current context of abstract adversarial arguments to a world of lively, open-minded, spirited exchange of narratives.
- Ken and Mary Gergen, authors/co-authors of many books, including "The Saturated Self", engaged the audience in a conversation that illuminates the way in which conversation and storytelling create individual and group identities in the organization, and the consequences of this process for the success and failure of the organization.
- Nancy Dixon, author of "Dialogue at Work", will discuss how conversations that shape us - the intentional use of peer-to-peer conversation as a tool for professional development; how organizations are structuring opportunities for peer-to-peer conversations and what professionals are gaining from them.
- Throughout the day, Madelyn Blair facilitated and orchestrated the conversation.

## GF meetings 2007

The **February** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was held on **February 6, 2007**, Steve Denning shared some thinking from his forthcoming book, *The Secret Language of Leadership*, and facilitated a workshop on the theme: *Can storytelling be used to deal with any leadership challenge?* The thesis of Steve's forthcoming book is: yes, it can be so used, whether the change we are trying to effect as leaders is in the workplace, in politics, in parenting, in teaching, in personal relationships, in coping with old age, whatever, provided that we articulate our goal in an appropriate manner.

The **March** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was held on March 6, 2006. It was facilitated by **Katherine Grace Morris**, PhD., FSIA. She explore the idea that opening the door to your office is like opening the cover of a book: inside you'll find a story. Have you ever wondered what story your office was telling to those who visit you there? Like your clients? Your boss? Is the story your office tells undermining you? Have you ever wondered what stories client offices have been telling you about them? How can you hone your ability to 'read' those stories?

The **April** meeting of the Golden Fleece group was on Tuesday April 10, 2007 from 7 pm to 9pm. Steve Denning facilitated as session on the subject of: "**What's your narrative intelligence?**"

The meeting of the Golden Fleece group on **Tuesday June 5, 2007** was hosted by **Paul Costello** and **Madelyn Blair** on the subject of: "**The ethics of narrative**"

The meeting of the Golden Fleece Group on **Tuesday July 10, 2007** was the annual get-together with the interns of the Washington Ireland Program.

The October meeting of the Golden Fleece Group was held on **Tuesday October 2, 2007** and was hosted by Atieno Fisher.

The November meeting of the Golden Fleece group was the Smithsonian session led by Noa Baum and Kelly Cressap on **Saturday November 17, 2007** session tapped into the power of story to foster new insight, growth, and connection. Award-winning storytellers **Noa Baum** and **Kelly Cresap** guided the group in exploring the life-enhancing story components of archetype and myth. .

The December 2007 meeting of the group was held on December 4, 2007 at Quebec House Party Room. Our program was called a Buzz. Steve Denning (whose latest book--*The Secret Language of Leadership*--was just released, and Madelyn Blair were the "Buzzers."

## 2008

THE ANNUAL STORYTELLING WEEKEND took place on **May 8-10, 2008**,

### Smithsonian 2008

The theme was **storytelling and innovation**. It had many participants from all around the world. Audience responses at the end of the day included:

*"Inspired!" "Intelligent!" "Energized!" "Enthusiasm!" "Renewed!" "Stimulating!" "Solutions!"  
"Community!" "Intrigue!" "Technique!" "Stimulating to learn!" "Percolating!" "Full up!" "Overwhelming!"  
"Blast off!" "Playful!"*

#### THURSDAY MAY 8, 2008

- Basics of organizational storytelling: [part 1: Svend-Erik Engh](#) (audio - 6 megs)
- Basics of organizational storytelling: [part 2: Steve Denning](#) (audio - 5 megs)

#### FRIDAY MAY 9, 2008

- Madelyn Blair: [Introduction to Innovation and Storytelling](#) (audio 2 megs)
- Dorothy Leonard (audio to come)
- [Dorothy Leonard: A conversation](#)
- Linda Coffman's slides: [Digital Storytelling at P&G](#)
- [Linda Coffman: A conversation](#)
- Clauda L'Amoreaux: [Second Life and Storytelling](#) (audio - 9 megs)
- [Claudia L'Amoreaux: A conversation](#)
- Steve Denning's slides: [Hot Spots: How Innovation happens in groups \(through storytelling\)](#) (9 megs)
- Steve Denning: audio: [Hot Spots: How innovation happens in groups \(through storytelling\)](#) (5 megs)
- Steve Denning: audio: [Hot Spots: Q and A](#) (1 meg)
- Summary of the day: [audience comments](#) (160kb)
- Svend-Erik Engh: [The Raven](#) (600 kb)

## 2009

### Smithsonian 2009

ALL-DAY SEMINAR

Leadership and Storytelling: How story helps generate high-performance teams and vibrant communities

Fri., April 17, 2009

Storytelling is a powerful and underutilized professional business tool that can inspire and motivate people to believe in your goal, own it, join together with others and viral market it at a grassroots level for you.

- **Peter Guber**, chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment Group, Co-Host of AMC's "Shootout" and professor at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, was meant to show how to employ the power of the oral narrative to catalyze high performance teams, foster deeper collaboration, overcome resistance and impassion others. Unfortunately he was sick and could not attend.



- **Tom Stewart**, Chief Marketing & Knowledge Officer at Booz & Company and former editor of Harvard Business Review, discussed how the continual testing that leaders face becomes the story of the leader's career, and the measure of his or her success.
- **Steve Denning**, author of *The Secret Language of Leadership*, showed how story helped create and sustain a high-performance team at the World Bank and pinpoint other drivers and accelerators of high-performance groups.
- **Madelyn Blair**, CEO of Pelerei Inc., an organizational storytelling consulting firm, showed how story exchange brings equilibrium and coherence to groups by releasing obligations, creating moments of gratitude, and build the sustainability of the group.
- **Seth Kahan** shared his framework for creating high-participation events that generate enthusiastic engagement and committed buy-in for transformation.
- **Loren Niemi**, storyteller, community organizer and public policy advocate, showed how successive groups of grass roots fellows have claimed their story and engaged the State Legislature to reshape policy to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020. Susan O'Halloran, diversity and communications expert, will reveal how teams and organizations that aspire to bold, life-giving and creativity-inspiring contributions are, at the center, story listening and storytelling cultures.
- **Richard Stone**, storyanalytics master at i.d.e.a.s., an arts and technology company, showed how story can engage people with new and big ideas and help them arrive at a new story for a company, product, brand, or process, leading them to go out and do exciting things.
- **Noa Baum**, storyteller and diversity facilitator, drew on her experience with the Israeli-Palestinian issue to show how strategic storytelling and story listening can make use of the paradoxes inherent in complex, diverse groups, to turn them into high performance teams.
- **John Sadowsky**, executive coach, showed how a CEO found that his effectiveness as a speaker and presenter improved dramatically when he threw away his notes, statistics, data and PowerPoint slides and learned to tell his personal stories of identity.

## 2010

### Smithsonian 2010

Organizational Storytelling—A Tool for Transforming the Workplace

Fri., April 16, 2010

Storytelling is a powerful and underutilized professional business tool that can be used to help achieve a myriad of organizational objectives, from generating new ideas to fostering strong work teams to sharing knowledge and transmitting values. In this seminar led by experts in the field of organizational storytelling, participants explore how narrative techniques can be used to ignite innovation and change in the workplace for the benefit of the organization, the people doing the work, and the clients and customers whom they serve.

- **Matthew E. May**, chief strategist for MBox Design, former advisor at Toyota, and author of *In Pursuit of Elegance* (2009) and *The Elegant Solution* (2006), examined the stories used to inspire continuous innovation at Toyota, an organization that implements more than one million ideas per year.
- **Mary Poppendieck**, retired 3M manager and co-author of *Implementing Lean Software Development* (2006) and *Leading Lean Software Development* (2009), discussed the characteristics of successful leaders and explains how stories can create a context where employees are motivated to perform their best and work as a team.

- **Steve Denning**, former head of knowledge management at the World Bank and author of *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling* (2005) and *The Secret Language of Leadership* (2007), talked about how some companies are re-inventing the workplace using storytelling to inspire continuous innovation, productivity, job satisfaction, and client delight. He also discussed the role of storytelling as part of the seven basic principles of continuous innovation.
- **Elizabeth Woodward**, a software transformation consultant with IBM and co-author of *The Practical Guide to Distributed Scrum* (2010), discussed how teams can create the change they envision by focusing on prioritization of needs in the form of user stories, continuous feedback from stakeholders, and consistent delivery of high-quality, valuable short-term wins.
- **Seth Kahan**, an independent consultant with a specialty in change management, and author of *Getting Change Right* (2010), showed how leaders transform organizations from the inside out by getting people on board for bold new ideas.
- **Madelyn Blair**, CEO of Pelerei, Inc., an organizational consulting firm, explained the concept and principles of radical learning and how it can be used to develop strategies for maintaining focus and achieving results.

Svend-Erik Engh conducted a seminar *The Basics of Organizational Storytelling* on Thursday evening.

On Saturday, the “You, Me and We: Connecting Through Story” Conference was held at George Mason University, Washington DC.

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<sup>1</sup> Note on B.F. Skinner’s *Walden 2*: This is a story about a community where a scientist visits a community and eventually decides to leave his job and join the community. It reflects Skinner’s views as a behaviorist who believes that different individuals are interested in different things and also learn at different paces. Thus, children need to be in an environment where they can master their interests at their own pace, with a lot of personal attention yielding to more and more independence with age. Skinner then illustrates what such education would be like, with small laboratories being set for children to experience many things and thus learn by seeing the meaningfulness of what they are taught. In short, Skinner tries to recreate the workings of natural selection with behavioral engineering methods. The argument is that human beings have stopped experimenting with what works and what does not work. Our civilization has settled down in its own ways, and now tries to fix its problems from the inside, blinded by the false belief that civilization was the best thing ever made. Skinner argues that there are better ways to live, and that to find them we need to experiment with different things and find what works for everyone of us.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.plexusinstitute.com/story-show.cfm?id=14>