

Book Launch

Tell Me a Story: Sharing Stories to Enrich Your Child's World

by Elaine Reese

Vice-Chancellor's Comments

Of all the things that I have done since becoming Vice-Chancellor, this is the first time that I have ever had the opportunity to launch a book. I am particularly delighted that my first book launch is for an outstanding colleague and very good friend.

Tell me a Story is a beautifully written book that underscores the value of family stories for the creation of strong interpersonal relationships and for navigating the turbulent waters that sometimes characterise family life. It is a book that gives practical advice about the way in which parents can help their children develop a strong sense of self and their place in the world.

What makes this book particularly special is that, although it is written specifically for parents and other family members, the book is based on Elaine's internationally recognised empirical research in the area.

As parents, we are constantly bombarded with advice about what to do and not to do with our children. Often there is little or no basis to help us decide which way to go. But in *Tell me a Story*, Elaine has cleverly used decades of research findings to illustrate her points—she presents the research evidence in such a way that it allows parents and other caregivers to make informed decisions about what to do, why, and most importantly, how to go about sharing stories that will enrich their children's lives.

Throughout the book, Elaine has drawn on narratives between mothers and children that she has collected in the course of her research, as well as on examples from conversation with her own sons. The end result is a book that both intellectual and heart warming.

This book clearly reflects Elaine's own love of stories from around the world. I was enchanted by the wide range of literary references that are sprinkled throughout the book. I think this is a cogent reminder of the main point she is trying to make—sharing stories—all kinds of stories, enriches not only a child's world, but our world as well.

So from my perspective as a parent, and as a psychologist who is also interested in memory development, I would highly recommend this book.

But I would also like to take a brief opportunity to speak from the perspective of a Vice-Chancellor. There are some special reasons why the Vice-Chancellor would recommend it to you as well.

First, *Tell Me a Story* is an outstanding example of the way in which Otago academics use their research to make the world a better place. This book shows the way in which a world-class researcher can translate her intellectual passion into practical good.

Second, *Tell Me a Story* illustrates the lasting value of basic research. As Elaine acknowledges in her book, her research was made possible by multiple grants from the Marsden Fund and from the University of Otago. Often we are called upon to defend the value of fundamental research. This book clearly illustrates that value.

Third, as New Zealand's oldest and finest University, we are fundamentally committed to the values of history—and as I have learned, history is a collection of stories about people, places and events. The University of Otago is home to the Hocken Library, which is one of the largest historical archives in New Zealand—it is a place that is highly committed to the preservation of people's stories. By way of example, I had the great pleasure, on a recent visit to the Hocken, to be introduced to the diary of a 14-year-old boy, Herries Beatie. This diary was written beginning in 1892, and it begins:

“I am a boy who lives in Gore and I am eleven years old. I am going to try and keep a diary and people who keep diaries have to always tell the truth I hear, so I am going to try to keep truthful as far as possible in my diary. This is not the first book that I have written for I have written one before this called “A Reading Book for spare moments”. I gave it to Mother and Father as a birthday present. Their birthdays being on the First and Second of October. I mean if possible to keep this book till I grow big as a remembrance of the days when I was a youth. Unlike the other book this book is not going to contain poetry. Now I think I will tell you about the History of the family.”

Like the diary of Herries Beatie, Elaine Reese's *Tell Me a Story* underscores the importance of family autobiography. Also like the diary of Herries Beatie, I am certain, that the wisdom contained within the pages of *Tell Me a Story* will educate, enlighten and entertain readers for generations to come.

Harlene Hayne
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