

“I can think of no better way to make a point stay in a person’s mind than through a good story.

“Try to *describe* joy, fear, embarrassment, sadness, triumph or humor and it’s unlikely that you’ll move me.

“But instead, tell me about *that* day...

“When you first held your godson...

When you sat unable to move as you watched  
a truck heading straight at your car...

When you exuberantly mistook a female  
friend’s weight gain for pregnancy...

When you said goodbye to your grandfather,  
knowing it would be the last time...

When you wowed an audience with an ad-lib...

Or when you slipped in a barn and landed,  
way overdressed, in cow poop...

“Tell me about *that* day instead...and I’ll never forget you.

“That’s what stories can do.

“And if I *learn* something from the story to boot  
...the lesson is with me for life!”

— Milo Shapiro

(*who’s done all of those things*)

# **The Worst Days Make The Best Stories**

**(and other life lessons)**



**By Milo Shapiro**

**[www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com)**

*With illustrations by  
R. A. Conrad and Jorge Pacheco*

*Cover by Jorge Pacheco*

## *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to **Grandpa Harold**, the subject of several of the stories in this book and my motivational speeches, but who, more importantly, taught me to:

- value the people I meet
  - take great pleasure in making others laugh
- and
- always appreciate the joy of a really good story



Miss you every day, old man.  
Hope I'm making you proud!

The Worst Days Make The BEST Stories (and Other Life Lessons)

Second Edition, January 2013

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All cartooning in this book is the property of Milo Shapiro, as contracted from R.A. Conrad and Jorge Pacheco.

# Contents

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>
0	<b>Introduction</b>	9
0½	<b>Prologue</b> (with a story)	13
1	Take a second look at what you're doing: <b>"Jack's Wedding"</b>	19
2	Find the problem before training how to fix it: <b>"Blueprint Errors"</b>	25
3	Make sure your message is understood: <b>"Grandpa At The Diner"</b>	31
4	Quit while you're ahead: <b>"Grandma Goes To Dinner At Pumpernick's"</b>	35
5	Quit while you're maybe not exactly ahead <b>"Rivers Run"</b>	41
6	Know that you can quit when you're behind, too: <b>"Janie and the Dress"</b>	45
7	You never know who is paying attention when you think you're on your own: <b>"Cannibals Should Cook Quietly"</b>	51
8	Make sure you know what need you will meet: <b>"Grandpa Goes To The Cabaret"</b>	55
9	Find the silver lining: <b>"The Bottle Cap"</b>	63
10	More people on a project does not always speed it up: <b>"Digging A Hole"</b>	67

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>
11	Look for the obvious answer first: <b>“The Principal Enters”</b>	71
12	Outlook affects perception: <b>“Getting Into Hot Water”</b>	77
13	Presentation counts: <b>”Kathy’s Writing Contest”</b>	85
14	Interpreting facts without input can hurt us: <b>“I Don’t Belong Here”</b>	89
15	Everybody thinks they’re an expert: <b>“Starting Grandpa’s Car”</b>	95
16	After a blunder, put people at ease: <b>“The Collected Waiter”</b>	99
17	Know when to bend the rules: <b>“For The Lack Of A Copier”</b>	103
18	Once you commit to doing something, make the most of it: <b>“The Entertainment Center”</b>	107
19	Search for creative solutions: <b>“The Medicaid Fraud”</b>	111
20	Know your audience: <b>“Why Rabbis Are Rarely Stand Up Comics”</b>	115
21	Recognize differences In communication styles: <b>“Why Isn’t She Getting My Emails?”</b>	121
22	The lasting impact of words: <b>“The Unwise Administrator”</b>	125

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page</u>
23	Share in the excitement of others: <b>“The Poker Tournament”</b>	129
24	Conciseness Is valuable: <b>“Dear Non-Friend:”</b>	133
25	Make human connections in the world: <b>“The Hotel Copier”</b>	139
26	Even within guidelines — be creative: <b>“A Creative Solution at the DMV”</b>	143
27	Know other cultures: <b>“Thanksgiving Vacation”</b>	147
28	If you take a stand, be ready to take the consequences: <b>”The Bumper Sticker”</b>	151
29	Acknowledge the people in your life: <b>“A Letter to Grandpa”</b>	159
30	<b>Acknowledgements and Epilogue</b>	165

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## Introduction

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Did you almost skip this section? I know I probably would have. That's because introductions usually don't have much value to them and the meat of the material is further in, so I often just want to get to it. But good for you for reading this one! Sometimes, there's stuff worth saying that just doesn't fit right in the middle of the book, you know? And this way, you get a sense of who I am. Same goes for the prologue. There's a lesson there, too. I wouldn't have included it otherwise.

So where was I? Oh, right. The introduction.

About a year ago, I spent a day shopping with my close friend Robert before we met up with our mutual friend Jordan for dinner. Jordan asked, "So what was your day like?"

Robert said, "Nothing special. Just kept each other company running some errands and shopping."

I added, "Well, there was kind of a funny moment with the cashier at the Pic 'n' Save. We were standing behind this really eccentric woman who was wearing a wide pink hat and a dress that was longer than her body. She was buying about 20 cans of cat food. While we were in line..." and the story went on from there about the cashier's interaction with the woman and with us afterward. Jordan laughed as the details of the story unfolded. Robert, meanwhile, just watched me telling the story, not saying a word.

Later on, Robert said to me, "You know, I was really surprised to hear you tell that story about the checkout line at



*Milo Shapiro*

Pic'n'Save. It didn't strike me as being a story worth telling. It was really kind of a nothing moment to me."

"Oh," I responded, feeling a little awkward that I'd bored him. "I thought it was kind of a funny, interesting story."

"But that's what was so amazing about watching you tell the story. As you told it, it *was* interesting. And funny, too. Even though I already knew what had happened, I was totally caught up in your *telling* of the event. It was much more interesting than it had been *living* through it. Your description of her outfit and the cashier's faces and the awkwardness of the bag boy painted such a great picture that I was drawn into hearing all the details again. And now I *will* remember a moment that I would have surely forgotten otherwise."

"I guess that's why I use stories as a large part of my keynote speaking," I laughed, a little relieved that he'd actually been paying me a compliment. "I think we remember stories and the things we learn from them more than we do facts and instructions. I've seen other motivational speakers try to make an impact by spouting platitudes like 'You've got to stop and smell the roses' or 'You need to be adaptable to change'. I know those things are true, but I'm more easily inspired by a touching or funny story that makes the point."

"The thing that really caught my attention when you told Jordan the story, though," Robert continued, "was that you closed the story with something you learned from it."

I must have given him a confused look because I honestly couldn't remember how I'd wrapped up the story; I was telling it off the cuff. He continued:

"You ended by saying, 'I guess the cashier learned that it would have been simpler just to apologize and move on than to keep defending her actions.'"

## *The Worst Days Make The BEST Stories*

Once Robert repeated my words, it came back to me that I had indeed said that. As I continue in my career as a keynote speaker, it's become second nature to look for what lesson can be learned from any story — if only as an excuse to be able to use the story in a speech!

It has also become natural to keep track of great stories and jot them down in a notebook in case I ever have an occasion to include them in a speech. Eventually, though, a good observer and storyteller ends up with so many great tales that most will never make it into any speech.

That's when someone says to you, "When are you going to put those stories into a book?"

Oh! A book. And here it is. This collection has been described by the first few to read it as:

- "The One Minute Manager for every day people"
- "A cross between Erma Bombeck and Chicken Soup for The Soul"
- "Bathroom reading that kept me on the toilet longer than I wanted to be there"

I don't know what it'll be for you. But if you enjoy hearing a good story, I think you're in for a treat. I've spent countless hours appreciating the talents of storytellers like Garrison Keillor, Spaulding Gray, George Burns, and Whoopi Goldberg (if you haven't seen her amazing 1985 one woman show, rent it!).

While I may not have their credits, I do know there's some fun and sometimes touching stories ahead for you.

At one point, I organized this whole book into categories, like lessons about people, lessons about business, lessons about family, and so on. In the end, so many of the stories fit into

*Milo Shapiro*

more than one category that I just decided to let it be a fun jumble of life lessons. Besides, your favorite story could have ended up being in a category that you thought didn't apply to you.

The book certainly contains a few embarrassing moments, the kind that you are horrified by in the moment but are almost glad happened later, just for the legend that the story becomes. The first part of the title "The Worst Days Make The Best Stories" comes from that notion. But many of these stories also involve triumphs, surprises, and sweet moments where no one had to be embarrassed for it to make a good tale.

Hearing a good story is like getting a gift that stays with you forever. It warms the heart and — best of all — you can keep giving it away without ever using it up. How cool is that?

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## Prologue (With A Story)

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### “Just Jump To The First Rock”

*Most of the stories in this book will have a little intro like this one to set up the lesson of the story to follow.*

*In the case of the prologue, though, I'll let the lesson take care of itself and preface this story with the other title I considered: “Who is this guy and why would I want to read a book by him?”*

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I pretty much knew by seventh grade what college I'd be going to.

That's probably not typical. Maybe most kids that age aren't thinking about college at all. But I was raised in a Jewish family. It's different. Don't ask me why. I just know it is.

Growing up on Long Island, I'd heard pretty much daily since Kindergarten that everything I

[To continue enjoying the middle of this book, please purchase the full version. The ending pages are here as well.]

# About the Author

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Milo Shapiro grew up in the suburban town on Long Island, NY. He attended college at the State University of New York at Albany in upstate NY.

His Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science led to fifteen years in the world of Information Technology, from which he learned many of the lessons of the business world that he applied to his next career.

During the years he was a programmer and project manager, he studied the art of improvisation in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Edmonton, and Calgary, developing a deep love for both the art and for how valuable its lessons are in day to day life.

In 2000, he left this career to start his own company called "IMPROVentures". IMPROVentures' goal is to share with the world some of the ways we can improve our business and personal skills through the fun and lessons of improvisation.

One need not be any sort of comedian to benefit from learning to play with spontaneity and creativity in this way. The next few pages describe a few of the programs Milo has developed.

Milo currently lives in beautiful San Diego, California and wishes every single day that he had bought a home when he arrived in 1989 that would be almost paid off by now.

IMPROVentures continues to grow and morph, but at the time of this publishing, Milo's ventures include:

- teambuilding event built around improv games
- motivational speeches where the whole audience plays along for about half the time
- entertainment keynotes and programs with other improvisers
- coaching in public speaking for hundreds of people who have wanted to be more prepared, polished, and powerful in front of groups
- a podcast interview show called "Full Speech Ahead!" (which can be found on his website) on all different aspects of communication (from communicating with teens to better dating to getting along better at work)

For more on Milo's programs, getting on his newsletter mailing list, and to learn how to bring him to your event, visit his website:

The logo features a stylized, dark grey bird-like shape with its wings spread, positioned above the text. The text "www.IMPROventures.com" is in a bold, sans-serif font, with "IMPRO" in all caps and "ventures.com" in lowercase. The bird shape is integrated with the letter "V" in "ventures".  
[www.IMPROventures.com](http://www.IMPROventures.com)

More on some of these programs in the pages that follow.

# TEAMprovising™



IMPROVentures first offering was the **teambuilding course TEAMprovising™**, teaching organizations to improve communication skills and teamwork through the fun and lessons of improvisation.

Improv teaches us about listening skills, building on each others' ideas, non-verbal communication and more. The lessons apply to **sales and client support** just as much as they do within teams.

While playing these “games”, attendees have been known to make statements like, “This is what happens in our staff meetings!” or “My client does this to me!”

Milo has shared this “teambuilding-plus” work with organizations as varied as Southwest Airlines, the U.S. Marines, The U.S. Navy, Qualcomm, and San Diego Gas & Electric.



# Motivational Speaking



In 2001, Milo's connections to the National Speaker Association led to his development of a new second branch of IMPROVentures focused on **keynote speaking** for conferences and events.

His solo keynote, **"You Gotta Fail...To Succeed!"** is a motivational speech about moving past the fear of failure to excel.

When we resist expanding our borders because of fear, we deny ourselves *and* the organizations we serve the brilliance that is in each one of us.

What makes the program so memorable is that he gets the whole audience playing a few basic improv games in pairs from their seats. In a way, it's like a mini-teambuilding event within the keynote, but the games he chooses here are designed to make points about risk-taking while allowing everyone to remain in the safety of the audience space.

Letters of reference recommending this program can be found at [www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com), including praise from Minolta, Southwest Airlines, Hilton Hotels, California Highway Patrol, and Wellpoint/BlueCross insurance.

# Business-y Entertainment



In response to requests for **entertainment with a business message**, Milo collaborated to create a keynote duo called The IMPROVprofessionals who perform a two-person “keynote”.

The duo performs ten improv games, each of which is designed to prove a business points on a topic relating to this audience. This edu-tainment show has tackled such topics as management and teamwork, sales, customer service, communication, event planning, and fundraising.

The response to this program has been wonderful, with managers saying “We’ll remember these lessons because it was so much fun learning them.”

Testimonials from Pfizer, Cox Communications, Kodak, Sempra Energy, and many more can be found on his site: [www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com).

# Public Dynamics



A third branch of IMPROventures called “**Public Dynamics**” was created by request of some of Milo’s clients in other areas. He now offers **classes and coaching in public speaking**, having helped salespeople, CEOs, presidents, managers, authors, and many others who want to appear more prepared, polished, and powerful when they speak.

He is the author of “**Public Speaking: Get A’s, Not Zzzzzz’s!**” (available on [www.PublicDynamics.com](http://www.PublicDynamics.com)) and has sixty- and ninety-minute keynote programs based upon it, giving attendees valuable, actionable points they can apply to presentations they give.

Milo works one-on-one, with small groups, and in larger settings. Skype coaching has opened doors for Milo working with clients as far away as Tokyo.

One of Milo’s clients went on to break all of his personal sales records on the QVC television sales network with Milo’s coaching on how to work the interview process better and come across more likeable – particularly by telling better stories more effectively instead of focusing on details.



[www.PublicDynamics.com](http://www.PublicDynamics.com)

# About the Illustrators

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The cover and many of the cartoons in this book are the work of **Jorge Pacheco** ([www.pachecotoons.com](http://www.pachecotoons.com)):



Due to some unforeseeable conflicts in his life (now long since passed), Jorge was unable to finish the book at that time. He generously offered to let me use the work he had done if I could find someone to finish the book. This is why the style of cartoons vary within the book.

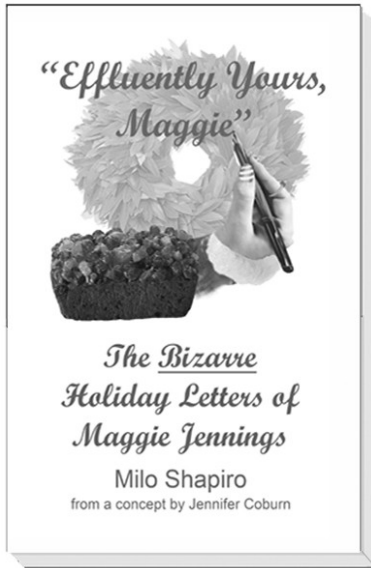
After going through a few other people who just didn't work out, the universe moved the clever graphic artist **R.A. Conrad** ([www.miloshapiro.com/books/r-a-conrad.htm](http://www.miloshapiro.com/books/r-a-conrad.htm)) two doors down from where I live. He was a pleasure to work with, doing more than half of the cartoons needed for completion and being very creative in coming up with images that complemented the story without giving away the endings:



I would recommend either of them without hesitation!

# ALSO BY MILO SHAPIRO

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In 1996, Author Milo Shapiro got a personalized holiday letter from a woman he couldn't remember. That would have been bad enough, but the letter was nothing more than this lady bragging endlessly about how great her family was! If he DID know her, he also knew he couldn't stand her!

So imagine the laughter when Milo discovered that the letter was a practical joke played on him by his friend, Jennifer

Coburn. Milo decided to get even by having this ego-driven Maggie character write to Jennifer every Christmas for the next 14 years, becoming more icky and bizarre over time. This book is the compilation of those letters, a new shared each year on Christmas night with the same group.

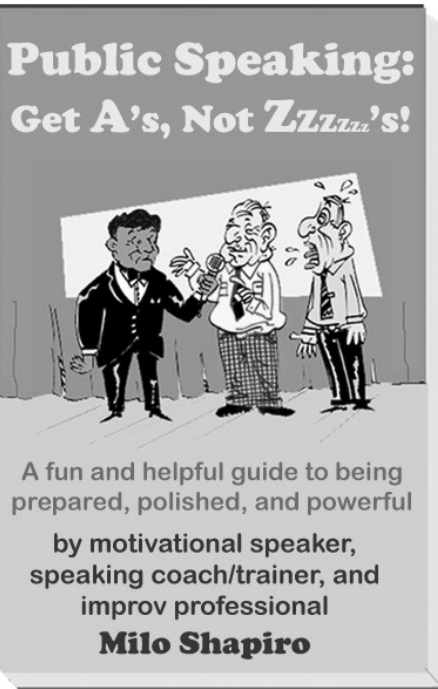
Maggie has no idea that she offends people left and right as she intends to do good, but truthfully only serves her own self-focused grandeur. Her growing misuse of the English language is only further evidence of her disconnection with reality.

You'll hate her and love her, but mostly you will laugh at her and the family forced to endure all that is Maggie Jennings.

More at: [www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com)

# ALSO BY MILO SHAPIRO

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Would you sooner eat a Brillo pad than speak in public? You're hardly alone!

Or would you love to be more skillful, but all the books on this topic look drier than a shot glass of bread crumbs?

**"Public Speaking: Get A's, Not Zzzzzz's!"**

teaches, through fun Top 10 lists, how to survive and thrive at the mike.

*"Finally, an end to the dry books on the important topic of 'presentation skills'! Milo Shapiro uses his wit and wonderful storytelling abilities to make this book a pleasure to read.*

*"His fun 'top-ten' format is brimming with ideas that are helpful and easy to implement..."*

*- Lenora Billings-Harris,  
Past-President of the National Speakers Assoc.*

More on these books and  
Milo's teambuilding & keynote programs at:  
[www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com)