

# PERSONAL PROFILES



## PERSONALITY SKETCHES HELP SELL BOOKS

A survey of Kansas State University students shows 45 percent of those not currently purchasing books would do so if they knew the book included a story about them or their friends.

Wow. That's a statistic the Royal Purple staff - and every other yearbook staff in the nation - should take to heart. In this day of iPod, iBook, iMovie, iTunes and iPhone, it's no wonder students are looking for an iStory. The good news - you can give it to them. Like Kansas City STAR magazine and other professional media outlets, yearbook staffs must learn the value of the iStory approach.

"Newspapers write about things and events, but STAR magazine gets into someone's head. A good personality sketch lets people know what the subject thinks and who they are and why they are the way they are," Tim Janicke, editor of STAR magazine said. "A good personality sketch is like an onion. There are layers and layers, and the more layers you peel away, the more you learn about the person."

Janicke isn't alone in his belief that personality profiles offer a dimension to story telling that improves readership. It's human nature to want to understand and connect to others when you identify with their lives.

Bobby Hawthorne, Radical Write author, agrees. "Personality sketches are important," he said. "People may know what someone does but they don't really know who he is. You may know the guy as the football coach but you don't know what excites him, what makes him get up in the morning. A personality sketch captures the person."

National Public Radio's "StoryCorps" has been letting listeners all over the country tell their own story in their own words since 2003. Thousands have taken part in the oral history project that focuses on first-person accounts. The individual stories emerge as a record of the way we live, and how we got here.

The mission of a yearbook is to tell the story of the year through the eyes and stories of those who lived it. Sometimes those stories are long and in depth. Other times staffs add a personal touch with a story-telling caption quoting the subject. The staff of the Chantilly High School Odyssey and adviser Mary Kay Downes perfected the story-telling first-person caption in their book. On nearly every spread of the book, the staff pictured and quoted a student about the topic of the spread. This example from the Involved section of the book adds another perspective to the story. The spread is about the cybernet club and their activities. The quote/picture package from Keith Waddell and Tyler Meiberg let us know that gaming is central to their social life. In knowing that, we understand a little more about them.

Another approach to capturing the iStory is one of the most exciting trends in feature writing today.



CHANTILLY HIGH SCHOOL, CHANTILLY, VA

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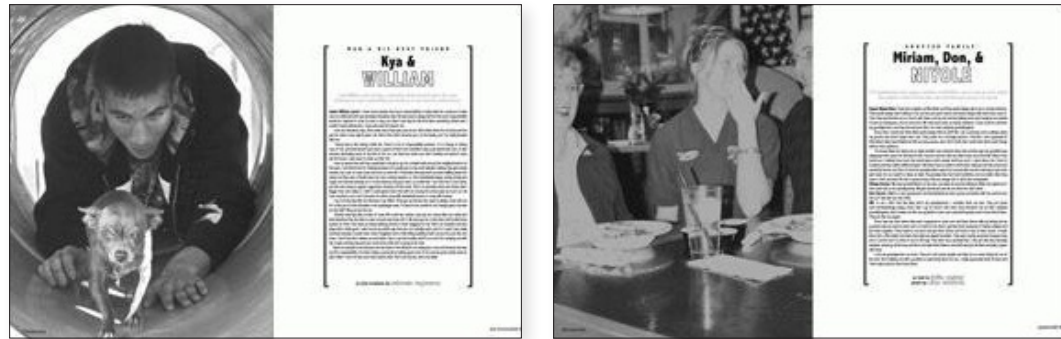


The 300-word story, which is a perfect length for a yearbook, gives the reader insight into one aspect of an individual's life and an extra-dimension to the story of the year. Brady Dennis, of the St. Petersburg Times, developed the 300-word story concept in 2004 and won the coveted Ernie Pyle writing award this year for a series of short stories about people. In those stories Dennis touches emotional buttons of the reader by making at least one aspect of the subject come to life. The secret, and the hardest part of the writing Dennis has said, is finding the focus for the story - love, loss, death, change, overcoming incredible odds...

Hawthorne agrees. "You can't tell everything there is to know about an individual so you have to find the focus and develop it so the reader has an in-depth understanding of one aspect of the person."

Dan Austin and Pete LeBlanc, 2007 Yearbook Advisers of the Year, call it focusing on the piece of the pie. You don't want a collection of random facts about the subject, you want the up close and personal view of one part of the person's life.

### CENTER HIGH SCHOOL, ANTELOPE, CA



Consider the Portraits of Grief series the New York Times ran after Sept. 11, 2001. In 250 words readers felt they knew the victims and the tragedy of their deaths was so much greater because they became more than just a name to the reader. In those stories they saw their neighbors, their children, their spouses and their professional friends. The limited focus made them real to us.

Once the focus has been found, the writer reveals the subject through physical description, what they say, what they do, what others say about them and how others respond to them. Remember the key to visual writing is seeing and hearing and then communicating what you saw and heard to your reader. Use details that show action, reveal character and are specific. Don't say he was an angry man. Show us by writing what you saw - his red face, bulging neck veins, wagging finger. Use picture-painting verbs to move the story forward. Words like slosh, cram, crunch, slam, slumped, pound, gurgle ...

Yearbooks are made up of real events, real people and real stories. Together they tell the story of the year that should echo every reader's voice and become their own iStory.

### NUMBER 27

All-American, Biletnikoff award finalist, All-Conference, punt returner and wide receiver. Senior Jordy Nelson was all of these. Humble, grounded, hardworking, talented, were other words used by coaches, teammates and members of the media to describe him.



It was hard to find one word that defined Nelson. However, considering the type of player he was, two words did it — Number 27. That’s how he saw himself — a player on a team, a part of a whole, a number on the roster.

Nelson’s efforts were never intended to make himself the star. They were put forth for the sole purpose of furthering the cause of the team and doing whatever coaches asked him to do — catch touchdowns, snag passes from the air with one hand, throw touchdowns, return punts and make tackles on special teams.



Following the Wildcats’ Senior Day loss to Missouri, Nelson answered questions about the Cats’ woeful performances as the end of the season came closer.

“Jordy, does that 100-catch mark mean anything to you?” a reporter asked. Without hesitation, Nelson answered, “No.”

Getting Nelson to talk about himself was nearly impossible. The conversations always turned to the job his teammates were doing and crediting success to them.

When asked to look back on his career, Nelson didn’t talk about his career records or his place in the history books or his status as a home-grown Riley County legend.

“It’s crazy,” he said. “It’s something that I don’t think coming here I thought would ever happen. But it’s something that just week after week, things have compiled, and I still need more time to take it all in, but it’s been enjoyable. It’s everything I dreamed it would be.”

Living the dream in Manhattan wasn’t easy for Nelson. However, he said he had no regrets about his decision to take the hard road — walking-on, changing from defensive back to wide receiver, battling back from injury as a junior and suffering through three seasons without a bowl appearance.

“I had opportunities to play at Washburn and Emporia State,” he said. “I didn’t want to go to those other two schools and perform well and wonder what would have happened if I had gone to K-State.”

With the NFL draft in sight, the dream continued for Nelson, who hoped to play professionally. “There’s not much you can do besides working out and performing well when the scouts are looking at you,” he said. “You wait, put your life on hold until the (draft) comes and watch the show and hope your name gets called. If it does, that will be great.”

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