



The Bird Feeder Story

Why We Don't Chase Memories — We Help Them Arrive

When I first began developing One Memory at a Time©, I thought the challenge was finding the right questions to ask. If we wanted to help someone remember their past, surely we simply needed better questions. Over time, however, I began to understand that there was another way. **Storytelling.**

Imagine a bird feeder outside your window. If you want a blue jay to visit, you don't go outside and chase one around the yard. You don't call after it, corner it or demand that it land. The harder you chase, the more likely it is to fly away.

Instead, you put out a bird feeder. You fill it with seeds and place it somewhere safe and inviting. Then you go about your day. You create the conditions and allow the bird to decide whether it wants to come.

Perhaps nothing happens for a while. Then a bird lands. Maybe another follows. Sometimes the feeder becomes busy with birds you hadn't expected to see at all.

Memory can work much the same way.

A direct question such as, “*What was your first job?*” may produce an answer. But it may also produce, “I don't remember.” Suddenly, the person can feel as though they are being tested and are expected to come up with the correct response.

One Memory at a Time© takes a gentler approach. Instead of chasing the memory, we put out the bird feeder. Our Guided Stories create the setting. The details within them become the seeds: an old school desk, the smell of bread baking, a first pay envelope, a Christmas morning, a song on the radio, a neighbourhood store, a bicycle, a family supper or the sound of someone's voice.

We read. We pause. We listen. And we allow the storyteller's mind to decide which seed, if any, it wants to pick up.

Sometimes nothing arrives. That's perfectly fine. There is no test to pass and no memory that must be produced. Sometimes what arrives is tiny: *"My mother had an apron like that."* That may be all.

Or perhaps that one little recollection leads somewhere else. The apron brings back the kitchen. The kitchen brings back Sunday dinner. Sunday dinner brings back a brother who always arrived late. Suddenly there is laughter and a story that no one set out to find.

The memory found its own way home.

That is why, when a memory begins to emerge, we don't hurry back to our questions or worry about finishing the page. The memory is now more important than the page. We listen. We follow. **The storyteller leads.**

This is also why silence doesn't necessarily mean that nothing is happening. Sometimes the bird hasn't landed yet. Sometimes a person is searching through places in their mind they haven't visited for many years. We give them time.

The purpose of the bird feeder isn't to control which bird arrives. And the purpose of One Memory at a Time isn't to control which memory arrives. **Our job is simply to create the conditions.**

That idea became one of the simplest ways I know to explain **The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology**©. I wish I had had this wisdom when I wrote my memoir about my life in sales.

We don't chase the birds. We put out the feeder. We don't ask for memories. We help them arrive.

And when one does arrive—even if it is only one small memory—that is enough.

Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.

