

Turn Interviews into Articles

by Beulah Wood

How does a writer turn a poor interview into a good article? 'Caleb,' a 25-year old man, gave his information in a disorderly way, but in the end it became an interesting article. Here the author shows her interview notes, the story she wrote, and her analysis of how she shaped the material.

Notes from the Interview

"I'm not lonely, though I had to leave family when I became a Christian. I believe the Bible where it says 'When you are lonely, do not be afraid.' I pray before and after sleep. I feel comfort. Yesterday I witnessed in the hotel. Many people were there. They heard my prayer. Many knew me, asking the manager, 'Do you receive a Christian in your hotel?' Etc.

My former Muslim teacher sat at table. When lunch came I prayed, though I was very afraid. He asked, 'Is this the way Christians call on Christ? It is similar to what Muslims do.' The teacher said, 'Caleb's prayer is good.' He said, 'Please when you pray to Christ, remember me. I have some problems.' Abu's son was sick and got well. I believe Christ answers.

This makes me joyful. This is my lifestyle now. Sometimes I witness. Sometimes people beat me. I come back to my room and pray to Jesus for help, and to the Holy Spirit."

The Published Article

From the notes above, the author crafted an article titled "People in the Hotel Knew Him." This is what it said:

"Shall I pray to Jesus in front of my former teacher at the mosque?" Caleb asked himself fearfully one day recently.

Since his family put him out, twenty-five-year-old Caleb lives alone and regularly eats at a restaurant in his predominantly Muslim neighborhood. This time the teacher sat at the table with him, and they talked til the lunch came. Now Caleb looked anxiously round. Many other people in the hotel knew him.

"Yes, I always pray before I eat food. I'll do the same as usual," he quickly told himself.

He spoke quietly, though the teacher and others could hear. He thanked Jesus for looking after him and for the food. Then he looked up, afraid people would react. What would happen now?

"Do you receive a Christian in your hotel?" somebody asked

the manager loudly. "What kind of people do you welcome here?"

The words taunted, but Caleb kept sitting there. Then came a pleasant surprise. The teacher said, "Caleb's prayer is good." Next he turned to Caleb, "Is this the way Christians pray? I do not find it so different."

Delighted, Caleb told the teacher more about Jesus till the teacher made a surprising request. "When you pray to Jesus, could you pray for me too? I have a health problem. You know Abu is a Christian. When his son was ill, he prayed and the boy got better. Jesus can answer prayer."

"Yes, I will pray for you," Caleb replied, secretly amazed. To himself he thought excitedly, "This is exactly what I love to do—tell people about Jesus."

"Sometimes people listen. Sometimes they beat me," he reports. "Whatever they do, I can go back to my room and pray to Jesus. While his Holy Spirit helps me, I'm never lonely. I believe the Bible when Jesus says to whoever is lonely, 'Don't be afraid.' I pray before I go to sleep and I pray again when I wake up."

How does a writer transform the interview to an article?

The following steps may be helpful to you next time you have to turn your notes into an interesting story.

1. Change the order of information to chronological order.
2. Start with a hook, and then give some background.
3. Change the reported conversation and reported thoughts into direct speech to make it more alive.
4. Use the conversation and thoughts to move the story along. In fact, put as much as possible in dialogue form.
5. Build tension during the story. This story has fear, anxiety, relief and happiness, although it hardly uses these words. The reader should feel a sense of tension enough to wonder, 'What happened next?'
6. Add what did happen next.
7. Keep an important statement for the finish. The story has illustrated it, now you can give the principle it portrayed as the main thoughts for the reader to take away.❖

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