Why You Should Know Some Stories By Heart

"Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why." – Samwise Gamgee, The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers

I'm one of those people who love re-watching favorite movies and re-reading favorite stories. Just this weekend I re-watched *Saving Private Ryan* as well as (on a whim) *Pocahantas* and *Mulan**.

I come back to favorite stories in times of change or turmoil (which is pretty much always, if you're a human). When my entire team was laid off in 2015, I watched the hell out of the *Lord of the Rings* scenes. They were better than any self-help book for teaching me how to be brave, how to fail, and how to keep going during that time.

Maybe I'm just weird, but stories are how I put my own troubles in context. I have to see how other humans have (or could have) faced the same kinds of stresses and challenges and dilemmas. When I see Jon Snow, Aragorn, Harry Potter, Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Pevensie Children or any of my favorite characters, I get to imagine and set intentions for how I will act in similar danger. And I am reminded of the kind of person I want to be, so I straighten up my act a little.

If stories can help us through hard times like this, maybe they aren't just good for entertainment. **Good stories are tools.** And they are tools that can be as essential as anything tangible. So if we're really going to be a good Boy Scout and stay prepared for the challenges of life, we need to be able to call stories to mind when they're needed.

The earliest people did this. Their oral traditions were passed on, repeated around campfires, and learned by heart in some cases. Today we have media which make it easy to re-visit stories. What hasn't changed is our need to keep these stories close to us.

What are the stories you can tell by heart? They are the ones you'll likely live closest to.

Watch and rewatch, read and reread those stories that you know you want to imitate. Do it until you can remember some lines that mean something to you, or until you have at least one character you identify with – that you can carry with you as an ideal. This is really when stories start to not just entertain you, but to work with you.

"We have not even to risk the adventure alone for the heroes of all

time have gone before us." – Joseph Campbell

*Despite the content difference, both *Saving Private Ryan* and *Pocahantas/Mulan* are great movies with big questions at play.