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Storytelling that helps and heals

*"Sometimes reality is too complex.
Stories give it form."* – Jean-Luc Godard

Who doesn't love a campfire? Certainly it is the time of year we think of hibernation around a fire. It turns out that this love of fire is hard-wired in us – going back to our ancient ancestors. A fireside chat, especially a million years ago, mattered more than we know – fire quite literally sparked creativity.

In his book "Origins of Creativity," Edward O. Wilson, a two-time Pulitzer-prize-winning evolutionary biologist and a New Englander, he credits the development of fire with that point in evolutionary time when the cranial capacity nearly doubled in size – the shift from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens*:

"The fire is the life-giver. It warms and feeds the people. It creates a sanctuary of light, around which nocturnal predators circle but dare not enter. Firelight is the Prometheus that shone upon the gods and brought humanity closer to them. ... For our present self-understanding, it is of consuming importance to estimate what ancestral humans said and did in the firelight."

In a recent study of the Ju/'hoansi (!King Bushmen) of the Kalahari Desert, the most famous hunter-gatherers on Earth, anthropologist Polly W. Wiessner uncovered striking contrasts between "daytime talk" and "firelight talk." Daytime talk focused on practical matters – travel, the search for food and water, life-and-death talk about issues related to daily survival. "In the evening the mood relaxes. In the chiaroscuro firelight the talk turns to storytelling, which drifts easily into singing, dancing and religious ceremonies."

Campsites "warmed and lit by controlled fire" were essentially nests that accommodated progressive rearing of offspring, instilling instinctive social behavior and division of labor



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