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National Oral-History-of-America Project Kicks Off at Grand Central Terminal

MacArthur Fellow Dave Isay of Sound Portraits Productions Starts a National Movement to Help Americans Tell Their Stories

NEW YORK, Sep. 29, 2003—For more than ten years, Dave Isay, an award-winning radio-documentary producer and MacArthur "Genius" Fellow, has shared intimate, entertaining and powerful portraits of ordinary people—simply by asking questions that spark a story.

On October 23, Isay will turn the microphone to the masses with the launch of StoryCorps, a national initiative to instruct and inspire ordinary Americans to record meaningful oral histories with family members and friends. The project will kick-off with the opening of the first StoryBooth in Grand Central Terminal in New York City. StoryCorps will go national in 2005.

StoryCorps is a creation of New York City-based Sound Portraits Productions (SPP), a non-profit public radio documentary production company. StoryCorps is the spiritual heir to the documentary projects created under the W.P.A. more than half a century ago, which remains today—despite only lasting for four years—the most important social documentary archive ever created.

"StoryCorps is a manifestation of the 10-year mission of Sound Portraits Productions to tell the stories of ordinary Americans with dignity, celebrating the power and poetry in their words," Isay said. "We believe that StoryCorps will engage communities, teach participants to become better listeners, foster intergenerational communication, and help Americans appreciate the strength in the stories of everyday people they find all around them."

"StoryCorps is a wonderful project. It's history in the richest sense of the word. It is bottom-up history, history that will make people feel like they count," said Studs Terkel, the oral historian and writer best known for his seminal book *Working*. "Today so many ordinary people feel like nobodies, but when they speak of their lives, they realize they count! They become alive! Never has a project been more timely or necessary!"

StoryCorps will create soundproof booths across the country where Americans can bring older relatives—or other loved ones—to conduct broadcast-quality oral history interviews with the guidance of a trained facilitator. At the booth, the facilitator will help create a question list, and handle all of the technical aspects of the recording. At the end of the forty-minute session, the participants will walk away with a CD of their interview. With their permission, a second copy will become part of the archive housed at the Library of Congress.

The archive at the Library of Congress will enable families for generations to come to have access to their stories in a high-quality digital format.

The flagship StoryBooth will open in Vanderbilt Hall in Grand Central Terminal in conjunction with the terminal's 90th Anniversary. The outside of the StoryBooth will include "listening stations" where people will be able to listen to StoryCorps stories, and a "Question Generator" an interactive computer program where passersby can create and print out personalized lists of questions for people they might to interview.

The primary purpose of StoryCorps is to create a meaningful personal experience for participants, but the project will also have a public component. In New York City, StoryCorps has partnered with

WNYC, New York public radio, which will broadcast the best material recorded in the New York City StoryBooths. Selected segments may also air nationally on NPR's *All Things Considered* and be compiled onto "Best of StoryCorps" CDs.

"As the largest public radio station in New York City, WNYC serves hundreds of communities in the city, creating a very diverse, multi-textured audience of listeners," Laura Walker, president of WNYC said. "The idea of starting an oral history of American here in New York City is a natural to us, and we're delighted to be able to partner with StoryCorps in telling the stories of the everyday people of this great city."

storycorps.net will serve as both a repository of StoryCorps stories and an online resource center to help individuals edit and upload stories as well as continue to tell additional stories. storycorps.net will include such resources as a reservation and payment system for the StoryBooth, step-by-step technical instructions on how to edit, sample recorded interviews, a 'question helper' utility, and troubleshooting guide.

StoryCorps is made possible with the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation, and a special thanks to WNYC, StoryCorps' official New York public radio partner.

Sound Portraits Productions, a non-profit company based in New York City, is one of the country's most acclaimed documentary production houses. Under the direction of MacArthur Fellow Dave Isay, its mission is to tell the stories of ordinary Americans. Sound Portraits has accomplished this goal primarily through the creation of dozens of award-winning radio programs broadcast on NPR's *All Things Considered*. Whether on the radio, in print, or on the Web, Sound Portraits is committed to producing innovative works of lasting educational, cultural, and artistic value. To hear Sound Portraits past radio programs, visit soundportraits.org.

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