

EPISODE 045

How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

[00:00:00] Hi, this is Melanie from Stories in Songs - Writing the Lyrics.

Today, I wanna take the chance and introduce myself to you. Especially, I wanna tell you the story about the time in my life when I was completely lost, on my own, literally at the end of the world, and how one song gave me the strength to carry on... and what all of that taught me about what makes lyrics powerful.

So it's all about my journey, so to say, and why I'm so passionate about the power of lyrics. Because this is the most incredible thing ever.

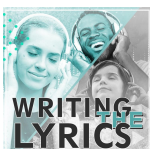
So here's how everything started.

TEASER

My Aotearoa All-Is-Lost Moment

[00:01:15] Some of the **backstory**, if you don't know, so when I was 18 years old and had just finished school, just got my driver's license, I went from my small hometown in Germany ... – well, it's actually a tiny village – to New Zealand. All by myself, for one year working and traveling. Basically, just freedom, taking a timeout to figure out what the heck I wanted to do with my life... cuz you know, when you're 18, you either have to learn a profession or go to university. I didn't know what to become.

My only passion had been crushed to pieces as my music teacher told me, I'd never be able to work in the music industry because I can neither sing nor have any rhythm..., so what else is out there? That's what I had to figure out.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

So, yeah, at the airport in South Korea on my way to New Zealand, I had met this other German girl who headed for New Zealand too. And we became friends right away. We worked together. We traveled together. We fed over 300 calves that suffered from diarrhea. We scrubbed ovens, washed plastic pots in the rain, we stayed sane when a whole city around us smoked pot. We picked strawberries and thinned apple trees, and we even traveled to Middle Earth...

Then, during the Christmas holidays, her father came to visit. And he treated me as if I was nothing. I was no one to pay attention to. I was happy for my friend to have part of her family with her, but I always thought, that if this was my mom or dad, they would have embraced my friend with open arms. Remember, I was 18, and didn't know much about the world. I had never before been treated that way by an adult. I mean, I missed my family too, after all, it was Christmas, ... and I was nothing around that time.

So over the days until the last day of December, my resentment grew and I got angry. And I kept my distance from them.

I just wanted to protect myself, I guess, from feeling that way.

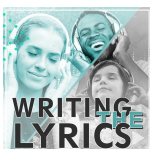
And then right before New Year, we crossed from Wellington to the South Island by ferry.

So, all those months prior, we've been traveling around the North Island. I knew my way around there. And now, we had the plan to travel the South Island together. But on that ferry, my friend broke up with me. She told me her father thought I'm not a good influence for her – she just threw overboard everything we had and everything we had gone through and overcome. So, from one moment to the next, I had absolutely nobody. And I knew when I was getting off the ship, I had no one, not even a place to stay, nothing.

I just looked at the crashing waves below. I had never felt that lost and lonely. But here's what happened. Two months prior to this, My Chemical Romance had released their song 'Welcome to the Black Parade'. It was in New Zealand that I heard of MCR for the first time. And I bought their album right the next day, riding my bike from the apple orchard where I was staying to the nearest town, Taradale.

And I tell you, when I was standing and crying all alone on that ferry while everyone around me looked forward to the next chapter of their trip, I just held on to my portable cd player. After all, you only hear the music when your heart begins to break. And I listened to Welcome to the Black Parade. And through their words and the narrative they told me, I found the strength to carry on.

Here's an extract of that amazing song and the lines that empowered me and still do to this day.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics

storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

Gerard Way sings:

*Do or die, you'll never make me
 Because the world will never take my heart
 Go and try, you'll never break me
 We want it all, we wanna play this part
 I won't explain or say I'm sorry
 I'm unashamed, I'm gonna show my scars
 Give a cheer for all the broken
 Listen here, because it's who we are
 Just a man, I'm not a hero
 Just a boy, who had to sing this song
 Just a man, I'm not a hero
 I don't care
 We'll carry on*

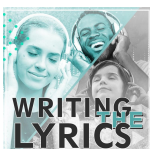
That song – Welcome to the Black Parade – helped me take the next step, face the challenges ahead, and boy... Everything turned out for the better. I found new friends, a ride, and even met my husband over there... everything would not have been possible if I hadn't carried on.

The Start of My Storytelling Journey

[00:06:06] So, that was the moment I knew I **wanted** to pursue writing stories. Because they made such a big impact on me. But I was living the story in my head. I had always been a writer of long-form stories. So of course, I thought let's just write again.

That's what I wanted to do because I felt the need to express myself. I needed to not find my own voice but find myself. Figure out who I am and what my place in life was. I've always been on that **quest** since school ended. I was always looking for that one thing that would make me feel whole and fulfilled. And secretly, I found happiness in my stories... just be whoever I wanted to be, go wherever I wanted to go... I was just looking for a place to escape to. To have something I could always count on. Something that no one could take away from me...

But back then, I believed that if I do what I love as a job, I would lose my passion for it. So instead of becoming a published writer, what did I do? Well, I did what most people my age did: study business administration and trust that I'd work in some office one day, make some money, and as a hobby, I could write for myself.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

But as the years passed, and I worked in an Advertising Agency, and had my first kid, ... well, suddenly time was more precious. And I had this story I was working on... and looking at my baby daughter, I wanted to leave something for her.

I **needed** to share my stories so that, one day, if she ever needed to escape from life, she could turn to my stories and somehow, be with her mom through the words I had written.

Somehow to make her feel as strong as I did when My Chemical Romance helped me with their song: Welcome To The Black Parade, as it was at a turning point in my life.

And that's when I decided to learn everything about the craft of storytelling because I wanted to make that story I was working on the best thing ever.

I loved everything I learned, but I kept hitting this **wall**. There was only so much I could learn by myself. And at the same time, I enjoyed the process of editing so much that I thought this was what my dream profession would be: a story editor.

So, and since I'm German, you always need to have some kind of proof you know what you're talking about. For me, that was becoming a Certified Story Grid Editor, that was my **new amazing opportunity** because The Story Grid methodology was by far the most incredible collection of tools and it just made so much sense to me. It was looking at storytelling at a whole new level – from micro to macro, and I just wanted to belong to that tribe. I didn't want to be any editor, but a Story Grid editor.

But it cost a lot of money. But I paid my last dime for it because I knew I needed to do this.

And then I flew from Germany to Nashville, and took part in the seminar.

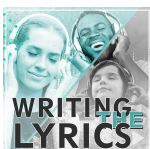
I became a Story Grid Certified Editor.

Facing the Hard Truth

[00:09:11] Now the story should end here, right?

Everything worked out as **planned**, but the truth is, ... the more I kept working with novelists, the more I doubted that I had what it takes to be an editor.

I just wasn't as passionate about books as they were.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

I never quite had the memory for long-form stories.

Books, Movies, TV-Series... I always tend to forget the storyline ... so that wasn't helpful when coming up with examples to help writers develop their global story or write a particular scene.

I had nothing on the top of my mind...

I certainly felt like a failure as an editor...

What was even worse was that getting a book from draft to finished manuscript... that took so much time. As well as the editing, again and again. And looking at how long it took... suddenly the thought of leaving some great stories for my daughter to read just became impossible.

And I certainly never turned to fiction novels when I was feeling run over, or sad, or lonely.

It was always songs.

I was on the wrong path.

You know... you can go in one direction, but if you want to hit the sunset, and you're going east,... you never get to where you wanna go.

I had to change direction.

Being a fiction novel editor, that was not me.

This was not the place I belonged.

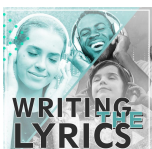
I mean, I'm a story nerd 100%.

I love diving into the craft of storytelling and exploring all the ways to analyze or improve a story... but I just didn't enjoy it that much in books.

I enjoyed it a little more in the short time I analyzed comic books, or when I joined the Story Grid Showrunners Podcast in which we analyzed TV Series.

But still... that still wasn't me.

So I started questioning myself.



Maybe having become a Story Grid editor wasn't such a good idea after all?

So I looked at my notes from the Story Grid editor certification – just like a last sentinel thing. You know ... kinda saying goodbye... because I just didn't know how I fit in.

Hitting Enlightenment

[00:11:32] I skipped over the daily tasks... and every day we analyzed scenes – from a book, a movie, and even a song. And that's when I knew.

Suddenly, everything just made sense to me and I knew my path. It was shining so brightly in front of me as if it had always been there. But I had ignored it all those years because I thought I could never work in music... because I believed I had to be able to sing or be able to clap my hands to the rhythm. But that was wrong.

When it comes to songs, especially lyrics, I can still remember the lines of the songs I listened to in my childhood or teenage years – from boybands to Eminem, haha, to punk rock.

I'm not good with remembering long-form stories, no, but I can certainly remember lyrics quickly and keep them locked in my memory. And besides, working in the music industry, that's what I wanted to do since I was 12 years old.

I had just ignored my calling for so long.

But you know: I'm not angry with my music teacher.

I think I had to go on this journey... otherwise I might have never found the way how I can contribute the best.

So I firmly believe it when Tony Robbins says: Life doesn't happen to you but for you.

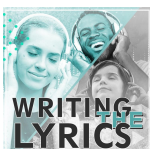
So yeah, I can't sing or hear the music as a musician does, but for me it's all about the lyrics.

But the question remained:

Do music artists truly benefit from having a story editor who helps them write their lyrics?

Do lyrics really make a difference in how successful or impactful a song can be?

That's what I had to figure out.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

So I did some case studies. I took the entire discography of two bands that couldn't be more different: Westlife - the band that only sings love songs, and Placebo, which have lyrics at a much higher level.

And I analyzed every song lyric of every song that was published on a studio album.

I did that by filling out a large spreadsheet where I had listed all the relevant lyrical criteria that I found in the greatest songs of all time.

This way, I was able to calculate the power of each song lyric, of the entire album, or even the entire discography.

That means, the more a lyric fulfilled the criteria, the higher the power of the lyrics was for that song.

And when I had gone through all the song lyrics, I looked at the data.

And guess what?

In both cases, the album that used the power of the lyrics the most was also their most successful one. The album that was very weak in using the lyrics' power was their least successful one.

Could this be a coincidence?

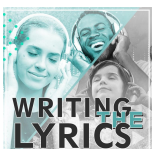
Maybe.

But for me, it was proof enough that I decided to dedicate everything I've got to helping music artists write powerful lyrics by also taking into account the craft of storytelling.

Because the more I explore how you can apply the craft of storytelling to writing lyrics, the more I believe that this is the most powerful way to write lyrics that are able to make an impact on people's lives.

And I gotta add one more thing... I've recently done another Case study. This time, I looked at all the 13 studio albums of Green Day. And I proved it once again that the power of the lyrics influences the success of an album.

That's pretty cool, right?



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

A Dream Come True

[00:15:34] And because of that, I have found my calling. I am now able to tell a songwriter exactly what works in their lyrics, what does not, and how to improve it. I have become the editor I was meant to be. And what once was a big dream of mine has become a real opportunity which is so cool.

And the other side, ...

... like by having gone down that path of never giving up even when I doubted myself the most... well, maybe My Chemical Romance's word of "Carry on" are engraved in my subconscious by now ... but now I don't have to work a 9-5 day job and keep my passion to myself anymore.

I live it.

And I think that's an incredible gift that I can give to my daughter, and daughter number 2. They see that life is about finding your place and finding what you were meant to do and then you can do it with all your heart and feel happy and fulfilled and be empowered by knowing what you do is truly meaningful.

And geeking out about the power of lyrics every day, helping singer/songwriters and music artists write amazing song lyrics that help people – who like me face hard turning point moments in their life – well, that's a contribution I couldn't be more proud to make.

It completely freed me up. I'm like, I have a chance to stay at home every day and play with my kids. I'm not stressing out, trying to pick them up on time, or staying late at work and finishing some project that no one really appreciates.

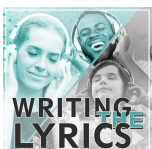
Like it just, it just works.

But more importantly, I so much appreciate the impact we can make now.

In fact, it's a mission I'm seeing people's lives change. I'm seeing other people who had messages. They couldn't get them out because they didn't know how much potential song lyrics actually have or how to craft powerful lyrics.

But now they do.

And it's amazing.



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045

We're now like the power is back in their hands and that's what fires me up ... as being able to give you the tools and the strategy to craft powerful lyrics.

Lyrics that have the power to make a meaningful impact on someone.

And to deliver what matters to you in a way that it matters to others as well.

So, um, so that's kinda my story.

So if you haven't heard it before, I wanted to take the time and share that with you guys.

So I hope that helps you and I hope you see why I'm so passionate about the power of lyrics.

And with that sentiment, if you have any friends who are like, do lyrics really matter, share this with them. Make a screenshot of this episode with your phone and tag them so they can understand and hear this story too.

Thank you for listening.

So long and goodnight.

Melanie

Show Notes

- Welcome to the Black Parade lyrics © Blow The Doors Off The Jersey Shore Music Inc



EPISODE 043: How I Discovered the Power of Lyrics
storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-045