

## Narrative.

Russell Baldwin



Swirling Sunset | [Flickr](#)

I am a Forensic Scientist (FS) with a degree in Biology from the University of California, Irvine. I have worked as a FS for the Orange County Crime Laboratory for almost 29 years. I have completed numerous classes in DNA, Toxicology and Forensic Alcohol analysis (blood and breath). I am a co-author on two DNA population studies. I have trained multiple analysts in the various methods. I have validated two methods and helped write a program that calculates the frequency of partial DNA profiles. I have testified as an expert witness in all four of the listed disciplines.

Now normally I would place the above (abbreviated) biography in a more appropriate spot; however, I am giving it here to establish credibility. An FS is a person who identifies, collects, analyzes and interprets evidence for a court of law. The interpretation of the findings is in the form of a written report. Sometimes a court will rely solely on the report and other times personal testimony is required to enter the information into the record. I have included a link to Forensic Magazine that explains the process in detail of how one qualifies as an expert in a court of law.<sup>1</sup>

Forensic Science uses chemistry, biology and physics in the analysis of casework. These are hard sciences with known parameters gleaned from countless studies. Bench scientists will rarely do original studies, so they rely on advances in the scientific community and a validation process that involves multiple exams with a wide range of expected target substances. They will obtain known standards for comparison and quality control checks to monitor results in multiple analyses. Many labs will write rigorous methods with strict guidelines on how testing can be

accomplished. Currently the vast majority of large public labs must go through a process of accreditation that evaluates all of the steps it takes to go from evidence collected at the scene to a report for the court. Some labs include a testimony evaluation as part of the routine quality control protocol.

All this is to say that when I reach a conclusion as a forensic scientist there is a lot of training, experience, institutional knowledge, and direct examination behind it. My opinion rests on one or more of the hard sciences. I am confident enough in my analysis and expertise that I will testify in a court of law to their results – under oath – facing possible censure or perjury if I willfully mislead the court. In the United States, there is no higher legal bar for determining a true accounting of past events than the forensic analysis of testable physical evidence.

What does forensic analysis have to do with a narrative? My reality is a compilation of all of the experiences, readings, lectures, trainings, classes and other sensory input gleaned from throughout my life. Each bit of information is interpreted, sorted, organized and stored somewhere in my mind. Literal physical structures are formed representing ideas and beliefs that are products of the compilations of memories. Much of these structures have years and years of repetitive reinforcement and are almost subconscious. A compilation of these memory/belief structures in a certain area can tell a story or narrative. In a sense, my mind has been performing multiple iterations of thousands of “tests” and the results are an extremely complex, interwoven “report” of those tests.

Direct experiences and facts fill out many of the narratives in my head. An example is the narrative I hold for the sun. I have direct experience of it shining on me. I watch it rise and set day after day after day. It is higher and around longer in Spring/Summer and the opposite in Fall/Winter. I read information about the sun that is part my story of the sun. I read about the solar system and how the sun is in the center and the earth revolves around it. Observation from my perspective is consistent with this information, so it is part of the story of the sun even though I have little direct observational evidence to support it. Similarly, I have read the sun is an immense ball of energy generated primarily by fusion. The fusion concept has no basis in direct experience and yet I have it as part of the story of the sun.

Concrete and immediate input through the five senses form well characterized structures in my brain. If certain conditions exist, more ephemeral, transitory and esoteric concepts can also form physical constructs. One example of a concept that has no physical form is the idea of a country. A country exists only as a noumenon (a thing that is outside the perception of the senses). There are no actual lines marking our borders, no physical structures. In some stretches of the border, we have walls, but they only mark a small semblance of separation and do nothing to define an actual country. I cannot feel, see, hear or smell the actual thing that is a *country*. Its existence is almost entirely a function of the structure in my mind created by my

exposure to what people say and write to define it, including movies, TV and other electronic media (massaged information).

My entire world-view, including fears, wants, goals, dreams, expectations and habits, are compilations of a very complex web of mental structures built from both direct experience and the massive exposure to massaged information in the various forms of books and electronic media. In short, my world-view is the product of a (very nuanced and complex) narrative. Viewed in this light, my primary responsibility for self-care is to jealously guard and protect my internal narrative that is factual, as best as I can understand them. I am realizing that my Forensic Scientist training affords me a level of evaluation of information that is different than most.

I have settled on a strategy to protect my internal narrative that works very well to maintain my sanity. I highly recommend that you do the same. Here are some of the steps that are critical to a clear view of the world outside of the direct physical evidence. Number 1 is to know the source and have a solid idea of the bias that source has. Every source has a bias to it. I make sure I view it in that perspective. (As I am sitting writing this, a well-known journalist is speaking to a large conference and she just said, "If you don't know the facts, you can't move ahead"). Number 2 is, I read more than one source of information, and it should have a different bias. A very important caveat is that I actively avoid sources that are spouting designed disinformation or propaganda. Finally, (and maybe most importantly) I keep an open mind especially to ideas that directly contradict memories formed early in my life.

Your life is your narrative. Your view of the world projects from your narrative. Base your narrative on as many verifiable facts as possible. Story cleansing is an evolution of awareness. If you are diligent, thorough and committed to clear sight, your world will expand at a fantastic rate. It is painful, awe-inspiring, frightening and extremely satisfying. Drink from the firehose that is the internet, talk to people that you know have opposing views. Question long held assumptions, especially religious, political and philosophical noumenons. These are often stories designed to divide and control. Above all, pay attention to the scientists that are communicating about the degradation of our ecology. There is information describing the need for a fundamental shift in how we see our relationship with the biosphere. This information needs to be woven into our collective narrative as a call to awareness and action.

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Russell Baldwin is a full time Forensic Scientist in southern California. In 2015 he realized the extent of eco-damage that humanity has/is doing to the Earth and has become an activist.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.forensicmag.com/article/2007/01/qualifying-expert-witness-practical-voir-dire>