Talk outline

- Chaotic opening
- One character presents their story
- The other character presents their story
- Discussion ensues where the similarities and differences are recognized.
- The denouement comes when it's obvious there is no person or community who "did it first" and deserves credit, but rather we all deserve some sympathy for having to work in such isolation all along.
- Finale finds the two characters standing on common ground, looking toward a better future and a nice cup of coffee.

Setup

1. Two actors with scripts, each understands they are supposed to be leading the storytelling today.
2. They are developing a script between them to explain everything you need to know about Open Source community management.
3. But each of them believes their interpretation and experience is comprehensive, and the other actor is there to support the main story.
4. When each tells their own story, it is centered on having to invent the wheel and learn from people around them, writing the guide as they went. The gist of each person's story is they have figured out the One True Way and everyone else is not giving them the credit they deserve.
5. During the interaction, as each listens to the other's "better story", the similarities in their stories become obvious to the both of them.
6. The light comes when they realize the truth is everyone is reinventing the wheel and feels alone in doing so, when the truth is we are all figuring out the same things in parallel, inventing in parallel, and all in relative isolation.
7. In the end, the two actors suggest they meet next week for coffee to talk further about how things are for them, compare notes, and be supportive.

Play script

As presentation begins, the two presenters are bustling about a little frantically at the front of the room. Each of them holds a marked up copy of a script. There are a few props available: signs to direct the audience participation, and

Jen: This is just such a mess, Karsten. You know I don't like being unprepared.

Kar: I know, Jen, I don't like it either, and I can't even fall back on self-recrimination for my ADHD and public shaming for my shortcomings, because it really is just the way things are this time. No one is at fault, no real mistakes have been made, and we're here to do the best we can.

Jen: Oh of course, I know that, haven't I said the same to you many times when you were worried about something at a community event?

Kar: Well, yeah, I guess, so it must be something we've already got in the Open Source Way guidebook for community management, it's got everything in it, here let me look that up to confirm...

Jen: Karsten. We're in the middle of a presentation *right now* ... can't that wait? And isn't it getting a little old to keep referring back to that old guidebook? We've really re-envisioned what an Open Source community and its events can look like. Just take a look around you at KubeCon, isn't it amazing? Come on folks, don't you agree?

Karsten brings up Applause slide

Kar: What do you mean, old guidebook? We just updated it to the 2.0 version last year, and the chapter on Governance includes the very evolution from projects such as those in the cloud native ecosystem. So you see, it's really all just derived from what we've all been doing for two and even three decades, and wrote down in the guidebook. Here, it'll only take me a moment to find it...

Jen brings up Boo and Laugh slide

Kar: Hey, what's that about? What'd I say?

Jen: Karsten. Do I really need to unpack what you did?

Karsten thinks very visibly...

Kar: Nooooo ... I suppose you don't. I'm sorry. It was pretty condescending and dismissive of me to treat your hard work in these communities where you've been enabling massive cross-pollination with your community event strategy. And I know the folks who have learned so much ear-to-mouth to have created the quality of user and contributor experience in the cloud native communities. It's really impressive. And it's also a little sad.

Jen: Wait a minute, sad? What is sad about it?

Kar: So Jen, you know for the last three years while we wrote and have been publicizng the new version, I've been having hundreds of discussions around these topics. And I've been attending talks by other community managers, who I've come to describe as *community caretakers and stewards*. There is one universal truth I'm finding. Everyone is doing the similar right things, they've even greatly evolved some of the very same practices I've been parrotting for fifteen years, like, "Lower the barriers to participation so users can see themselves becoming contributors,

and then do so." I'm seeing people take that to the next level, with UX work, with data science, with so many great tools at hand. And in each case, when I ask them how they learned to do all this stuff, they almost universally answer, "Trial and error, sort of figured it out myself after talking with a lot of people."

Jen: Oh.

Kar: Yeah, you see why I'm sad? So much missed opportunity to mentor each other, to capture and share knowledge. So many people having to go it alone, while focusing all their energy on enabling other people to be successful, and little time on enabling themselves and those like them to be successful.

Jen: Yes, I know what you are saying, I feel that. But there *are* more reasons than just not knowing about your book for why folks aren't coming to the Old Guard Grognard Grey Beard UNIX Dungeon Masters like yourself to learn at your feet.

Kar: *(Stroking his grey beard …)* Uh, oh, I have a feeling it has something to do with the vision of people flocking to learn at my feet.

Jen: That's right, Karsten, maybe not you personally, because you know, #NotAllMen, but plenty of people from your generation of Open Source contributors start with RTFM and get worse from there. Do you know what happens when someone who is used to running into barriers everywhere because of their color or gender or sexual orientation gets hit with whatever is the modern equivalent of RTFM? Like, "Just make a pull request, it's easy, here are the docs for how!"

Kar: Honestly, not really, My privileges have helped me largely avoid those barriers, even in masking my identities that would have run against such barriers if known.

Jen: I'm glad you understand that, thank you for saying so. So I'm sure you've heard from people how it is to get shut down by an RTFM in an Open Source community, even if you've felt welcome up to that point. And I know you've seen the research results Demetris Cheatham from All In Open Source is getting – where marginalized people are successful, it's most often in *spite* of supposedly-lowered barriers than due to them, or it comes from starting their own actually inclusive communities as a way to feel a sense of belonging.

Kar: Right, right.

Jen: So then ... here we are minutes into this presentation, where are
      we trying to get to?

Kar: You know, Jen, I don't think we're so far from the intended path. I
      wanted to focus on how the old and the new aren't finding a way
      to communicate and are isolated, duplicating efforts, and in need
      of a person in a similar situation to share a coffee or tea with, and
      talk. And it feels like we're finding a way to start communicating
      better between the two of us. So how about if you tell me more
      about the role you play in Open Source communities? What has it
      taught you and how do you conduct things as a result? What
      would you be putting into a how-to guide? I'll keep an open mind
      and see if I can find how that compares to my first experiences in
      Open Source that lead me to my awareness and knowledge. And
      we can see where to go from there.

Jen: *Talks extemporaneously for 10 minutes*

Kar: *Takes notes diligently, may catch himself from interrupting Jen's flow*

Jen: *Finishes and turns to Karsten.*

Kar: Wow. There is so much in there like my own experience, yet so much that is different. And I totally can see how much value there was in figuring things out and receiving mentoring, not everything can be written down. Here's what came to mind:

Kar: *Talks extemporaneously for 5 minutes*

Kar: Then I think I can say in all honesty it's a combination of being human and societal conditioning to keep our senses focused on the chaos of a moment in time, and not being able to also see where we are in the context of history. Meaning we actually have a root cause analysis and way forward, don't you think?

Jen: Yes, I think we do. We are beginning to turn the tide in many ways, the welcomeness and inclusive nature of the Kubernetes community exemplifies that is happening. And we have a long way to go. In fact, one of our big risks on that journey is forgetting why we are doing it. Of leaving people out because we get too busy to share the stories with each other and new people. A

danger of focusing too much on repeatable formulas for *how* to get *things (*the *what)* done. We also need to deeply know and understand the *why*, and to have some shared why with fellow practitioners.

Kar: Jen, I couldn't have said it better myself, which is also the right point. Every year for over two decades I've learned new things about Open Collaboration from people on their first days participating in Open Source. This isn't a fixed knowledge base. There are truths and practices that seem to hold up to the test of time, and others that have gone to the wayside. Take the term RTFM, for example. There was a time when people like myself might have thought that was a kindness to suggest people go through the useful experience of being *productively lost* in code or content. There may even be some honest heart in it, not wanting to just tell people the right answer, but give them a chance to discover the purpose in the answer. But even when that is true, it's also true that hitting people to teach them not to hit people is stupid and doesn't work.

Jen: Right.

Kar: So I think I know what we should do now, but let me ask you and see if we're at the same conclusion. What's next?

Jen: Right. I think, Karsten, we don't need another chapter or version of the Open Source Way right now.

Kar: Right, right.

Jen: I think we all need to reach out to other community stewards, other community caretakers, especially ones from outside of your community, and ask them to have coffee or tea with you. And just talk. Talk about how it is, how it feels, what you need, what you like, what you what to see change, what your vision is for the future. Build some actual community for ourselves, amongst us practitioners, for a change. Just start with that, don't try to bite off and chew a massive community vision. You know from experience, if you bring these kind of people together, the vision will come.

Kar: Fucking right it will. Fully agree with you, Jen. In fact, let's start right now. Want to go grab a cup of coffee, continue this conversation? Anyone else want to join us?

Jen: Yeah, anyone else? Come join us at the Red Hat booth after the Q&A here to talk more about how we can caretake our own community of caretakers.

Kar: Thanks everyone for joining us for this bit of experimental theater, uh, I mean, KubeCon talk.

Jen: Okay, then, bye everyone! Say bye, Karsten.

Kar: Bye Karsten!!

Jen: Thanks everyone. So, any questions?

Karsten brings up Applause slide