How to tell a story: Tall Tales

Let's face it - we all lie. But when you tell a tall tale you can lie with impunity. Your audience expects it, wants it and is looking forward to how boldly you lie. A tall tale is a story with wildly exaggerated elements - the tall man becomes a giant, the small fish becomes a huge one, the harvest is over-run with giant vegetables - and it's usually witty or clever. Some common examples of tall tales include Paul Bunyan stories and shaggy dog stories. You can find some other examples here. But you can make up and tell your own tall tales out of your own life too. Here are a few tips and tricks to consider:

- Have a basic sense of how to tell a story. Please refer to Storytelling 101 if you need a few tips.
- Start with something commonplace. A walk through your town leads you to a local person with some unusual characteristics. Playing a game of football leads to a player who can throw a ball so high you have time to go inside, watch tv, eat dinner and do your homework before you have to catch it.
- Use your imagination. Tall tales require exaggeration. If something was big it becomes enormous. If someone was strong they become the strongest person in the world.
- Don't hesitate to use outlandish examples and comparisons. The fish was bigger than a six-car train. It was so big that the hook we used to catch it was made from a piece of steel my strong uncle ripped out of a nearby building.
- Keep it relatable. Whatever it is that happens, your audience should have had a similar though smaller experience. They should have at least heard of fishing if it's a story about a giant fish that got away. They should have at least seen football on tv if it's about someone with an amazing throwing arm who eventually is asked to throw a space shuttle into the sky.
- Keep it fairly short. If it goes on too long your audience may get tired of being asked to suspend their disbelief.
- Try to end it with the possibility of another story. I don't know where he is now, but last I heard NASA had hired him for some other emergency mission. I keep watching the news to see if he'll turn up.
- And have fun! You should enjoy the story just as much as your audience.

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