

Digital Stories, Part 2

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"Hmm," you say. "I think the last time this guy wrote a program on this theme, it was because he didn't have something else to offer us."



The Broccoli Tree by minty mentos from Flickr.com

Quoting the last time I wrote a program on digital stories, "I'd suggest that we not look at it that way." In fact, there were loads of great comments following that program, with Rotarians of all ages, genders, geographic backgrounds, political perspectives, and opinions on broccoli saying that they'd felt empowered to give making videos a try. And while none of our tracking data would show it, I'd guess that expansive group includes those on either side of the boxers/grippies fence. There would even be those among two very important groups: those

who have earned major kudos and good karma for themselves by finding a program I can share with our wonderful members and guests, and those who have yet to experience that joy. If you are in the second group, I would encourage you to consider how phenomenally cool it is to help a group you know that is working hard to make the world a better place tell its story by e-mailing them this link:

http://nextvista.org/rhmaterial/RECSWUSA-Call_for_Programs.pdf

Still, this program is not about not having programs, and especially not about those folks who have promised to get me a program but have yet to do so. No, this program is about the wonderful possibilities that free technologies provide us Rotarians for telling our stories in all sorts of ways.

So where did we leave off?

Last time, I showed how you people with Windows machines could use a free piece of software from Microsoft (I understand your doubt, but it is indeed free) called Movie Maker to make simple videos with digital pictures, which hopefully you get a bunch of every time your club does a cool project. Or even a lame project, as long as people are smiling when the camera points their way.

"I missed that program! Woe is me! How awful and terrible! I really want to learn to make videos!" It is possible (mathematically possible) that this is your reaction to the last paragraph. If so, fret not. Here is the link to that PDF file which you are welcome to share with others:

http://nextvista.org/rhmaterial/Hurley-Digital_Stories.pdf

Note that there is no charge for all of that amazing learning that would probably cost you copious coin were you to enroll in a video editing course. If, however, you wish to thank me by providing a program for our fine club, I'm okay with that.

"All of that about making a video with pictures is fine, cool, hip, groovy, and downright swell," you say. "However, it doesn't include how to handle audio. I really want to be able to record our members talking about the Crabapalooza Fundraiser along with the pictures. Can you help us with that, Mr. Multimedia Techno Dude?"



North American River Otter by FreeSpirit5 from Flickr.jpg

But of course. I am here to serve.

And seek programs.

Today's focus (you thought I'd never get there) is specifically on audio. Like before, we'll use a free program. It isn't free because I found some questionable site from which to download it. It's actually free. As in, it costs no yen at all.

It's called Audacity, and the person who originally wrote the program is a Very Cool Dude (I assume that because of how cool the program is) named Dominic Mazzoni. "But he could have made huge amounts of moola selling such a popular program!" (For data on its popularity, see the [Wikipedia page](#) about Audacity.)



clarejames.net/programmers_mazzoni2.jpg

According to that story, this Dominic person (pictured on the left, assuming the Google search produced a picture by someone who was telling the truth about the guy wearing the Audacity shirt) now works for Google, which means to me that he (I'm assuming it's a he and not a she named Dominic, though that's possible, even with the generally male appearance of the person in the picture) won the employer sweepstakes in a really big way. Perhaps he just wanted to serve the world by providing a wonderful audio editing program for free. I'm thinking it's kind of like how Rotarians serve the world by helping others (funding good causes, making things happen in their communities, providing the programs person in the club with content, that kind of thing).

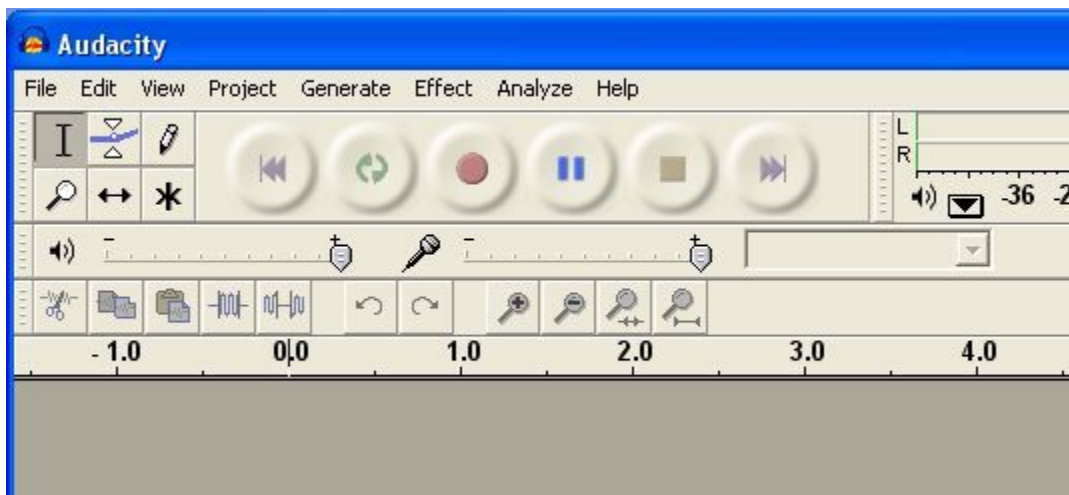
The first thing you need to know is that while Audacity is free, it almost surely isn't already on your computer. You'll need to download it. Don't panic. This is not a nasty, painful thing to do. In fact, you can go to the following link:

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

and just follow the instructions. A couple of clicks, and you're there. Those of you with Macs or Linux machines, click on "Other downloads" and you can find download links for you. For those of you with Windows, just use the "Download Audacity 1.2.6" link. If you're in the Windows 7 camp, click on the note about how you deal with all this.

(Mac people, you already have an application on your machine called Garage Band which will do all of this as well. It's a fabulous program that is so interesting and fun that is classified in some quarters as a Time Black Hole, and if you start playing with it, you'll need to remember to do such things as eat, sleep, talk to people who take time to talk to you, and return to your job on occasion. There are tutorials on how to use Garage Band at [Apple's site](#), if you're curious. Technically, even if you're not curious, the tutorials are there. Get it? Not too funny.)

So here is what the upper left of Audacity's window looks like:



The only difference you'll probably note is that the second round button has a green triangle instead of that weird recycling-ish symbol in this picture. I have no idea why that appeared; it's a screen shot of my program, which truly has the green triangle. It's inexplicable. By me.

Anyway, the [buttons](#) probably look familiar to any of you who remember the [cassette players](#) of the late [1970's](#), when music was really great ([Eagles](#), [Doobie Brothers](#), [Earth Wind & Fire](#), etc.). Starting from the left, the first one is the double purple arrow pointing to the left. That

one means go back to the beginning (or perhaps the last insertion point, you'll figure it out). The next one, the green arrow (not that the picture above conveys that properly), means play. The one with the red circle means record. The two blue lines are to make it pause, and the yellow square means stop. If you think of the first one with the purple arrows as the yin, then perhaps the last button is the yang. You probably won't use it, but feel free to click on it anyway to see what happens. That's how middle school students deal with such mysteries, and that's why they learn technology much more quickly than we do, as we seem to be under the impression we'll break the internet or something.



Three Old-Style Cassette Recorders by rbatina from Flickr.com

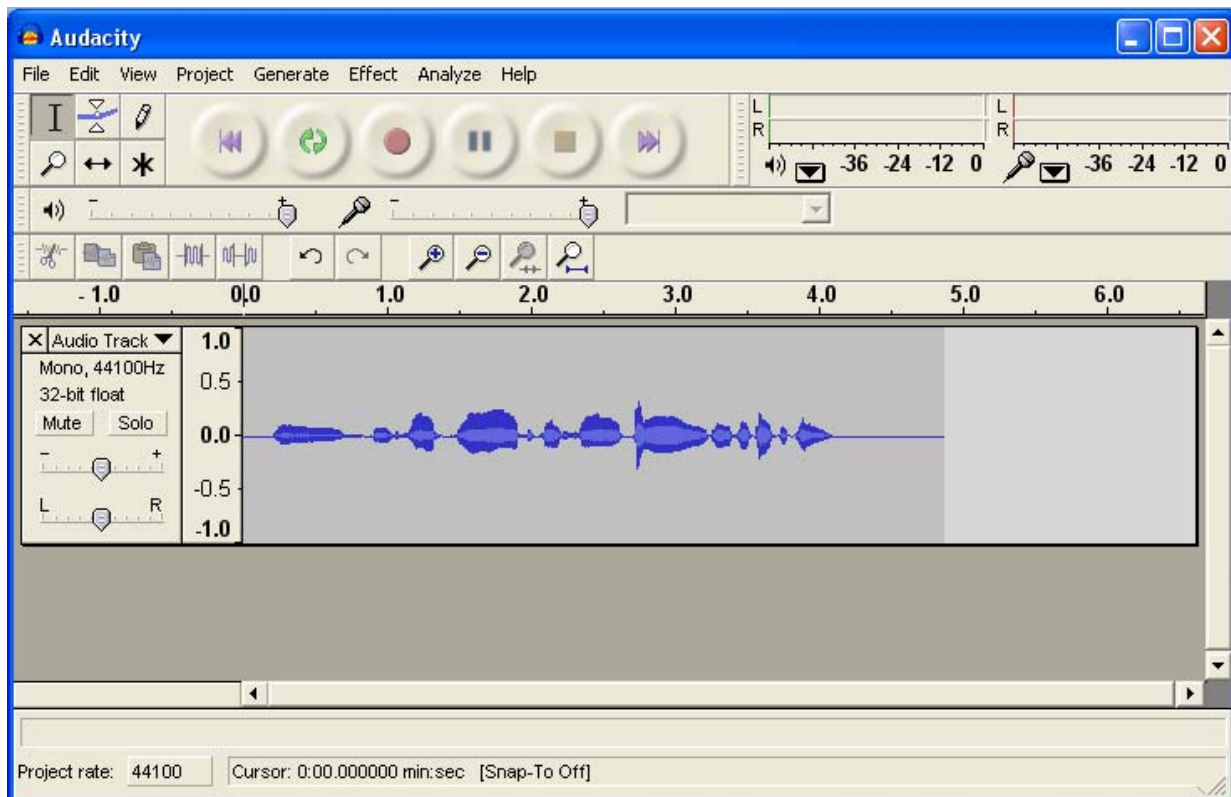
You do remember the cassette players, right? If not, I'm really impressed you're a Rotarian at your age. If you do remember them, then you're at least my age (early 40s - veritable spring chicken, given the average of some clubs) (no offense).

If, by the way, you looked to one side of your desk at a cassette player similar to the ones above, it may be time to upgrade the equipment.

So, if you have a microphone hooked up to your computer, you're ready to give Audacity a try. If you're using a laptop, you probably have a built-in microphone. If you don't, it's not my fault, by the way. If you're not sure, then just follow the directions below and see if anything records when you're speaking, or singing [Copacabana](#), or whatever sounds you're uttering.

The basic rule is to click on the record button, wait a second or two, say what you want to say, then wait a second or two, then click on the stop button. That extra waiting is important, by the way, as it's easy to trim out extra silence, but impossible to add something that was never recorded in the first place. Without redoing the recording, anyway.

Ideally, you'll see some blue wave forms in the area where you recorded, like below.

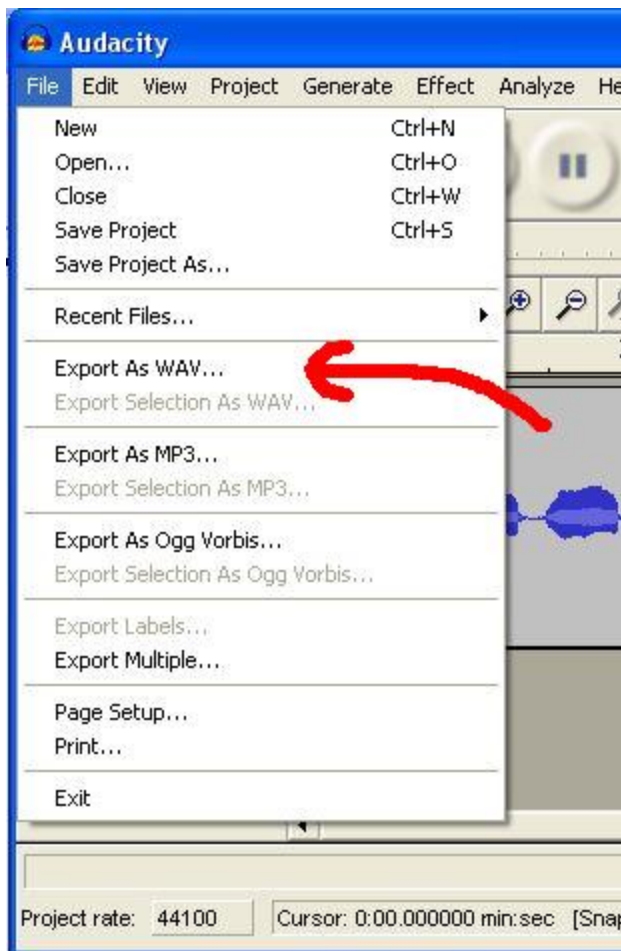


By clicking the green arrow button (there really is one, I swear), you will hopefully hear your voice. If not, check to see if your speakers are muted. If you can hear it but the volume is low, either re-record and speak more loudly, or adjust the gain by moving the little slider under

the "Mute" and "Solo" buttons toward the "+" symbol. Press play again to see if you ended up with something you like.

You're doing great, by the way. "How do you know?" you ask. Truth be told, I have no idea. I'm just trying to toss a little encouragement your way. Encouragement is important. I'd encourage those in my club to encourage me from time to time by providing a program. Just an example, that is.

If you like what you've done, you should now save it. Understand, though, that there are two ways to save. You can save the audio project, which you'd certainly want to do if you were going to come back and make changes later.



To save an audio file that you could send to someone else, though, you'll need to choose one of the "Export" options under the File menu (look left for help here). The basic one for Windows machines is "Export as WAV." You might also notice that it offers the possibility of exporting as an MP3 file. To do that, you will probably also need to download an extra little software doodad. Instructions are [here](#). If you don't know what I'm talking about, just go with the Export as WAV option and you should be fine.

You also have the option of exporting as "Ogg Vorbis". No, I have no idea what that means. I could look it up, but I'd prefer to throw out a creative guess, such as it being some Scandinavian beast that appears out of the darkness to terrorize those who don't help the club programs person find stuff to share.

If the idea of saving the project and exporting the file sounds techno-geeky confusing, think of it this way. If you create a document in Microsoft Word, and it looks great on the screen, you can save the file, but it isn't ready to be physically handed to anybody. You'd need to export it to the printer first. Does that help? I'm hoping so.

Anyway, at this point, we've (hopefully) managed to use a free piece of software to record our voices. That may not sound like a big deal, but it does start us down a rather amazing path. Once you begin learning how to use Audacity, you might also learn to weave in sound effects and music to make something truly fun. I'll include some notes at the end of this presentation on how to do that.

Consider the following as a use of your new-found audio engineering talent. We are mere days away from a big anniversary Rotary thing in Chicago. As a way of celebrating our wonderfully cool organization filled with wildly fun and interesting people, more of whom should send me programs, you guests might take a laptop with Audacity to your club and record people telling stories. This makes for very good history, and allows us younger(ish) folks to learn some of the great tales the veterans have known for years.

You could pull these together into an audio history of the club. You could even import that audio file into Movie Maker and match what

people have to say with pictures, creating a video slideshow that everyone would love and celebrate you for having made. This is a great way to do something nice for the club. There are other ways to do something nice for the club, and you can guess what at least one suggestion from me might be.

For those of you who are, shall we say, a little more chronologically challenged, I'd also suggest that you try this out simply to create some family history. I'd give anything to have a recording of my grandfather telling the stories he used to tell. At some point in the future, it might be incredibly meaningful to your children or grandchildren to be able to click on a file and hear that you love them.

Let's face it - we won't be here forever, and as Rotarians, we're working to leave this world better than we found it. By learning to use a simple program, you might leave something special for your club or your family to enjoy for eternity.

So there you go. You thought this program was just filler while I wait for some of my club members to get off their (see the image to the right) and send me something, and you learned how to immortalize yourself.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lukiffer/125>

Not too bad! Hopefully. 8^ (<- That's me in glasses smiling.)

For those interested in learning more about Audacity, there is a set of thirteen videos on my nonprofit's website on how to use the program. If you were successfully able to install and record your voice, then you may want to start with the third one. Find them here:

http://www.nextvista.org/?s=Jill_Baedke&key=author