Humans are born storytellers. We all do it every day. We probably already told ghost stories around the fire tens of thousands of years ago and today we fill whole libraries with tall tales and imagined adventures. And stories have a profound effect on us. A whole body of research suggests that stories have an immense power to persuade us because they tap into the way that we intuitively make sense of the world.

Science, on the other hand, does not come natural to us. It means critically examining our own biases, striving to falsify our own hypotheses and constantly being sceptical of our own conclusions. By that standard even most scientists sometimes fail to live up to the spirit of science.

This creates a dilemma. For instance, several studies have shown that when it comes to vaccines a simple story of a child who dies after a vaccination is more convincing than reams of data showing a vaccine to be safe and beneficial. If science is about going beyond an anecdote, then how do you package it into a persuasive story without losing the essence of it?

As science journalists we have to attempt to tell evidence-based stories, to illustrate scientific consensus through appropriate narratives. And we also have to try and tell the story of science itself, of the men and women doing science, the controversies that divide people and the goals (not always lofty) that motivate them.
In this talk I want to explain how I as a science journalist think of stories, how I use them to talk about science and why I think of storytelling essentially as a dual-use technology.