

Twitter genesis shrouded in mystery

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Jack Dorsey moderates a panel discussion at Wayne State University on September 17, 2013 in Detroit, Michigan

The story of Twitter's creation is a murky tale complete with betrayed

trusts and dueling claims for credit.

Local lore, backed by Jack Dorsey, has it that he proposed the idea to fellow Twitter co-founders at a playground in San Francisco.

But journalist Nick Bilton, author of "Hatching Twitter: A True Story of Money, Power, Friendship and Betrayal," says the history is not quite that simple.

Dorsey was a key member of Twitter's founders, but it was a collective effort, The New York Times journalist argues.

"In fact, Dorsey forced out the man who was arguably Twitter's most influential co-founder before the site took off, only to be quietly pushed out of the company himself later," Bilton wrote.

Dorsey, who turns 37 this month, has spoken in interviews of boyhood fascination with emergency services radio dispatch chatter impressing on him the power of communicating with short bursts of words.

"They were always talking about where they were going, what they were doing, and that is where the idea for Twitter came from," Dorsey said in CBS News interview.

"Suddenly, we had these phones and I could update where I am, what I'm doing and how I feel."

Dorsey was a recent transplant to San Francisco when spotting locally renowned entrepreneur Evan Williams in a cafe prompted him to email a resume that landed him a job at Odeo.

Williams had sold Web diary service Blogger to Google and worked at the Internet titan before launching podcasting platform Odeo with his

friend Noah Glass.

Dorsey earned a reputation as an engineering star at Odeo. In Silicon Valley style, Dorsey mixed social and work life, becoming close with Glass, according to Bilton's book.

After Apple added podcasts to iTunes, knocking the legs from under Odeo, Williams considered shutting down the company and Glass turned to co-workers for ideas regarding a new path for the company, according to Bilton.

Dorsey is credited with coming up with the idea for Twitter when Williams gave workers at Odeo two weeks to work on new projects.

The way Dorsey tells it in interviews, he was in a park playground with fellow programmer Florian Weber and another Odeo peer when he pitched the idea for what is now Twitter.

The platform let people fire off one-to-many text messages limited to no more than 140 characters.

The book tells of a night of drinking in early 2006 winding up with Glass and Dorsey talking in a parked car.

In the eyes of Glass, the story goes, the idea could fly if people connected in conversations instead of merely posting updates about themselves.

In a recent New Yorker magazine story, Dorsey was quoted as recalling the chat and how Glass finally "got it" when it came to seeing his vision.

Glass portrays himself as championing the idea at Odeo, where Williams and others were already at work on a similar idea involving audio

messages.

Meanwhile, online encyclopedia Wikipedia describes Twitter's origin as the result of a day of "brainstorming" by members of the Odeo board.

Glass headed the ensuing project, with Christopher "Biz" Stone working on designs, and Dorsey and Weber focused on computer coding.

Glass's version of the naming story involves him scouring a dictionary until he perched on "Twitter."

In March of 2006, Dorsey fired off the first tweet

A year later, Twitter won the adoration of techno trendsetters at an annual South by Southwest gathering in Texas and began rocketing to global popularity.

According to the New Yorker story, those involved with Twitter agree overall that Dorsey played a key role in its origin.

"When it comes to driving the vision and pushing it through, that's absolutely Jack," Weber is quoted as telling New Yorker.

The book tells of Dorsey capitalizing on a power struggle between Glass and Williams to get Glass ousted and grab more power at Twitter.

The tables later turned on Dorsey, who was pushed out after the public launch only to be later brought back to help run the company.

"As luck would have it, Dorsey was able to weave a story about Twitter that was so convincing that he could put himself back in power just as it was ready to become a mature company," Bilton said in the magazine article.

"And, perhaps luckiest of all, until now only a handful of people knew what really turned Twitter from a vague idea into a multibillion-dollar business."

Dorsey and Williams, whose Twitter handles are @jack and @ev respectively, are on the Twitter board and have done stints as chief executive.

Stone, whose Twitter account is @biz, left the San Francisco-based startup about two years ago.

"Some people have gotten credit, some people haven't," Glass was quoted as saying in a Business Insider story about two years ago.

A self-description atop his @noah Twitter account reads "I started this."

"The reality is, it was a group effort," Glass was quoted as saying by Business Insider.

"I didn't create Twitter on my own. It came out of conversations. I do know that without me, Twitter wouldn't exist. In a huge way."

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