

THE STORY BEAST

For Story Artists, Listeners, and Dreamers

FLAVORED FRIGHT





About the Cover Artist Asia Starr

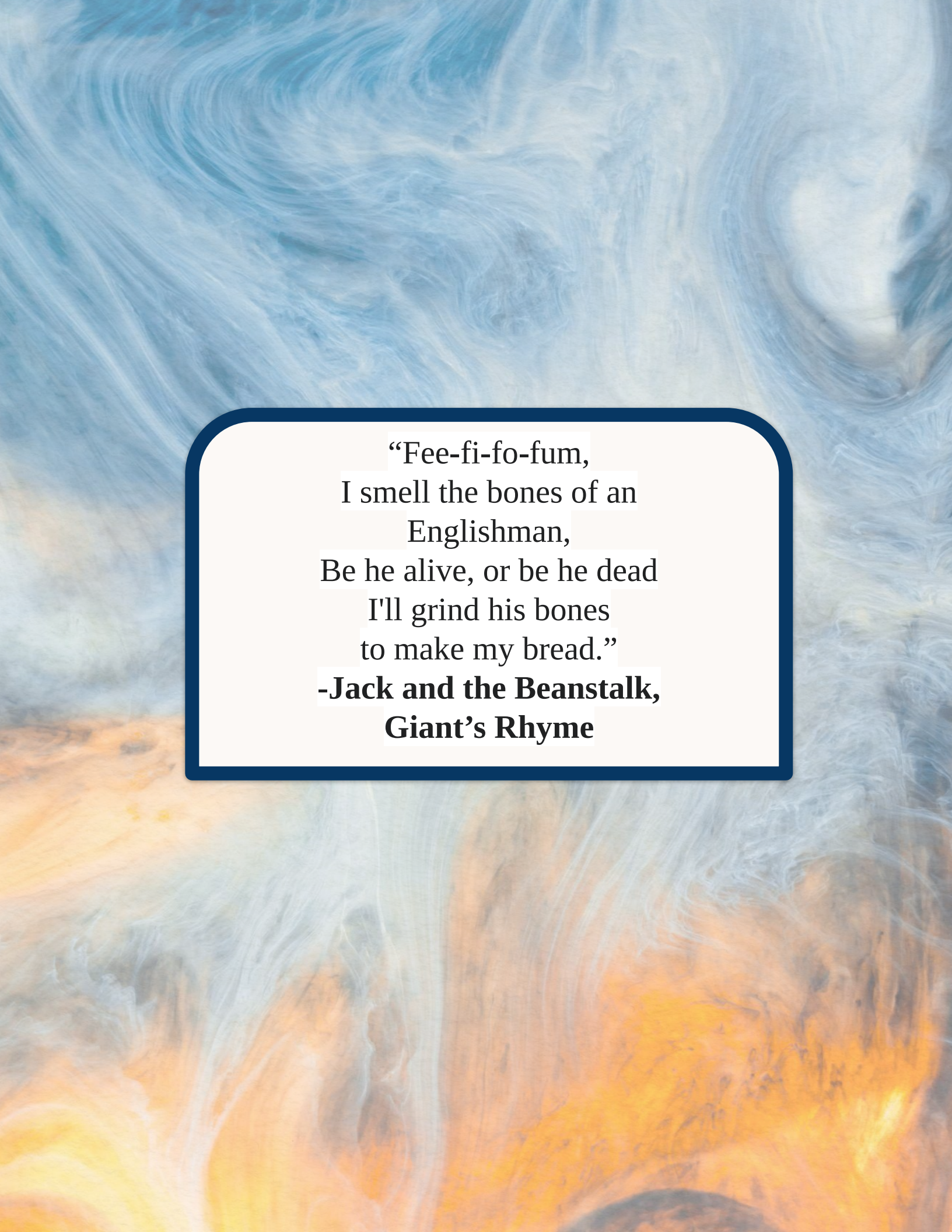
Asia Starr is a Storyteller in the Johnson County Kansas Area, the Head of Design & Layout for [The Story Beast](#) and recipient of the 2023 [J.J. Reneaux Mentor Award](#). Asia specializes in fairytales, folk and humorous stories, with the occasionally Spooky story. You can usually find her telling her stories to an audience of children ranging from preschool to high school. She loves to tell to Adults as well. She hopes to bring that childlike wonder and magic to all that have a chance to stay awhile and listen. mamastarrstorytelling.com/

*Submit your art to
storybeasteditor@gmail.com to be
featured in the next issue.*

The Story Beast 2024 Themes

Winter - Whirling Winds - Due Nov. 15

Spring - Growing Gab - Due Feb.15



“Fee-fi-fo-fum,
I smell the bones of an
Englishman,
Be he alive, or be he dead
I'll grind his bones
to make my bread.”

**-Jack and the Beanstalk,
Giant's Rhyme**



THE STORY BEAST

Flavored Fright

Vol. 3 ♦ Issue 3

Fall 2024



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Fall 2024

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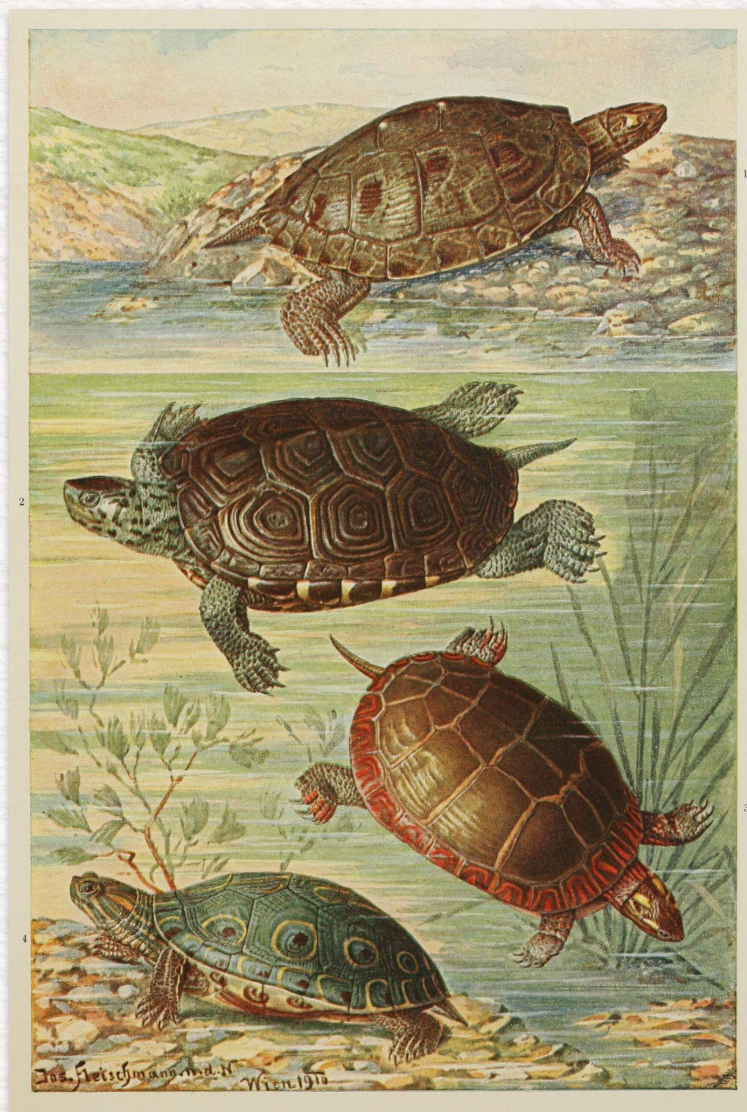
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POST





September 2024 WELCOME

Welcome, Autumn! We have missed your cool, crisp mornings and your glorious colors. Sometimes when we tell stories there are the swirling colors of a costume, the precision of crisp, snappy gestures, or the anguish of heart-felt emotions. At other times, there is the nuanced twist of the head, the subtle shift of weight, or the simmering, unstated tension, which speak volumes.

When we tell a story, we bring all of who we are to the story. Not only do we bring our emotions, energy, and presence, but we also bring our languages, ancestries, and cultures. This is apparent when we share stories across cultures. The stories we tell are windows into who we are, what we value, and what is significant to us. Stories give color, texture, and meaning to our lives. They can provide glimpses into who we truly are and can become bridges between cultures.

Through the sharing of stories, we can become aware of our similarities and can appreciate our differences. Getting to know another culture through its stories (and foods) can eventually lead to understanding. I was taught that once you can laugh at another culture's jokes, you are on the path to understanding.

To help bridge the gap between cultures, simple stories that strike a universal theme might be successful. Folktales work well, especially if you can use large gestures, a different voice, facial expressions, and physicality to help tell the story. Short stories can be helpful, as a story may need to be told twice, if your words need to be translated. Audiences may not have the historical knowledge or shared cultural experience upon which some stories depend. Stories that are greatly enjoyed in one culture may go over the heads of folks from another culture.

As storytellers, we are in a unique position to be able to build bridges between groups with stories. Stories create connection, curiosity, and can lead to tolerance and understanding. It is hard to harm someone whose story you know.

The Story Beast is your quarterly e-Pub forum and is a place of community. Would you like to share your creative works -- poems, stories, artwork, or articles ? Please spread the word and tell your friends about us. Let us know what you think and send your contributed works to storybeasteditor@gmail.com.

The deadline for contributions for the next issue of The Story Beast is November 15 for the December 2024 issue. The Winter issue's theme is Whirling Winds. Thanks for reading – and add some color, texture, and context to someone's life today with a story.

**Thank you very much,
The Spirits of the Beast**

storybeasteditor@gmail.com



Dearest Crone:

When you give a challenge to passers-by on the road, do you have certain techniques that bring about the best results? Like a dramatic pause? Certain eye-popping gestures?

Show-Stopping Studies & Speculations

Dear Show-Stopping Studies & Speculations:

You're lucky I'm willing to talk about my techniques! Some people hide the way they do things so that they can be "the one." You need to figure out what works best for you, especially if you are a crone-in-training. I wouldn't mind having more crones in the world.

When sitting by the side of the road, I think about my goal in whatever challenge I decide to give. It's always more about the challenge than the techniques. If my techniques are noticeable, then the challenge itself becomes diminished in impact and significance.

That said, here are specific ways that I draw attention from those passers-by.

- Turning the head, pulling up my hood, and staring out at seemingly nothing.
- Directly staring until people become uncomfortable to the point of one eye bulging out.
- Creating a loud "Ehhh?" and then acting as if I didn't make any sound.
- Rubbing my hands in some fresh manure from the road and "accidentally" smearing it on whoever had an aura of – let's say – snobbishness.
- Point at random trees and look as if I am about to pick a fight with one or all of them.

And the list goes on and on. Really, I am wanting a strong beginning or impression. How quickly do people judge me before they even know who I am? Do I at least intrigue them in the sense that I am eccentric, mad, strange, wise, or some combination?

While the dramatic pause can also benefit a crone such as myself, it matters on what happens before and after that pause. You never want to pause simply to pause. Perhaps my list of drawing the attention of passers-by appears to lack purpose or direction to you. Bah! What do you know? Have you experienced these actions from me before?

While I draw attention, I am gaining time to get to know the person being tested for kindness or rudeness. I am soaking in their facial expressions and body language in an instant to then feed into what will happen after my big attention-getting moment. Perhaps this thought process is like a peripheral performance of being aware of what you are doing and saying while also acknowledging what is happening around you.

Once I get deeper into my act as crone, I need to know the journey I want to take them on. For example, is it a menial task that someone could either happily complete or get annoyed by? Is it a complex task that tests someone's cleverness? Is it a repetitive task that checks on someone's patience? What is the purpose? What is the purpose of what you do? Whatever that purpose, be true to it. Have all your words, body language, facial expressions, and techniques amplify the intended purpose.

At some point, the journey ends. The testing ends. Everything ends. How will the people I test know that they either passed or failed?

As a crone, I work on my cackle. I have a spectrum of reactions: chortling, guffawing, snickering, smiling my toothy grin, and so on. I admit that my cackle – or whatever reaction chosen at the end – can be what could also be described as “creepy.” So be it. It's the exclamation point of my testing (or performance) if someone deserves a boon or bane. Have I ever wanted to change the way I laugh? When I was a young crone at the age of 434, I wanted to improve my laugh. I felt it lacked authenticity. I had to go into a cave, laugh, and study the echoes to see why I felt “off.” I meditated and sought the root of the problem. I discovered that I lacked commitment. I doubted my laugh. I needed to believe in it.

Oh, and you want the Dewey Decimal for Laughter, yes? Of course you do! At the 808.7, you find Rhetoric of Humor and Satire. There is a book called *Ha! The science of when we laugh and why* by Scott Weems found at 152.43 Dewey Decimal. Why? The 152 Dewey Decimal is the area of Emotions and Senses.

Now for the ending of this message to you. When you want to end with impact, you must be as committed to it. Slow down your pace and enunciate your words. Have every movement count.

Myeah-ha-ha-ha-ha-haaaa!

Yours on the Road - The Crone of All Crones

WANTED



Content for **THE STORY BEAST**

Looking for Story in all its exciting forms: traditional, modern or melded!

- Short Stories
- Articles on Storytelling
- Art
- Story Based Activities
- Poems

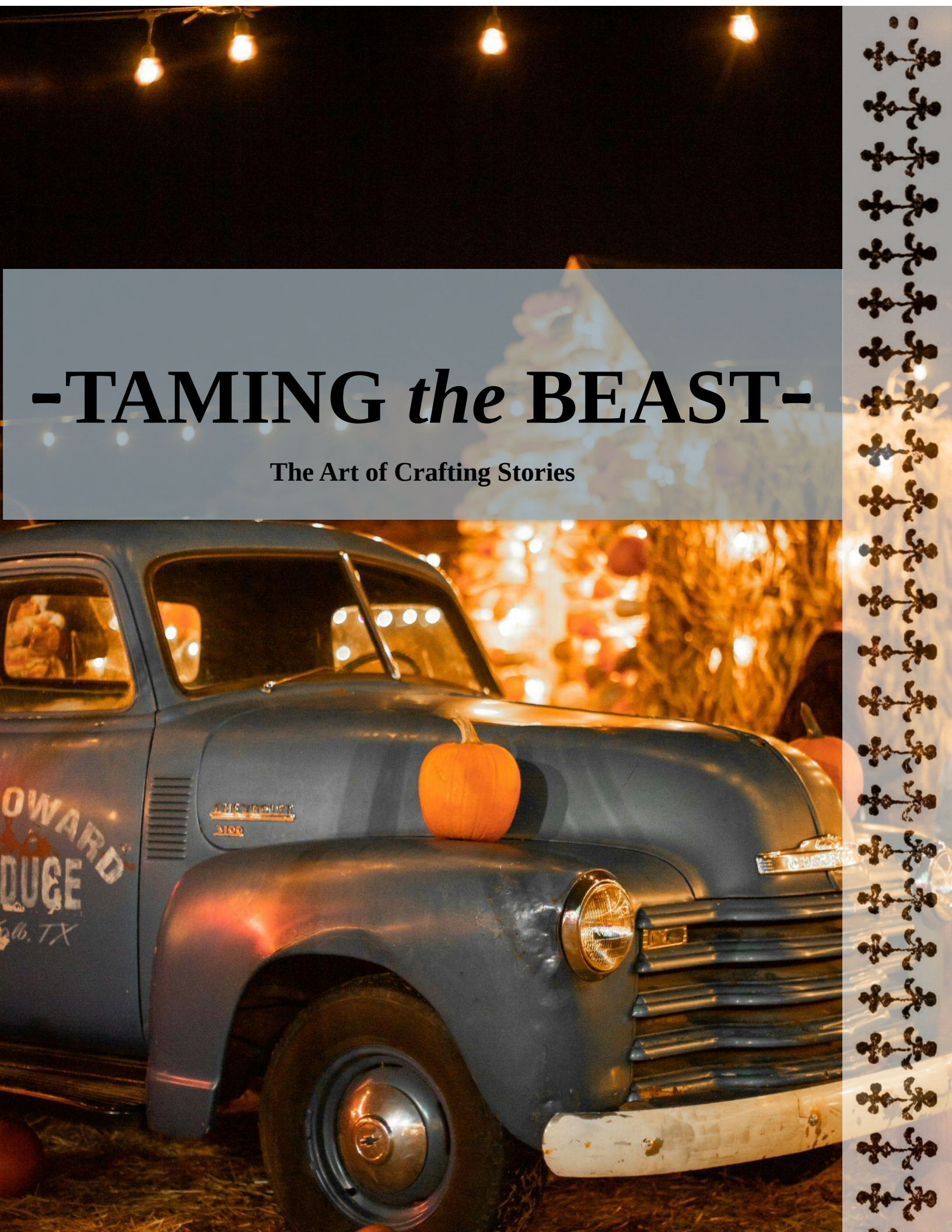
Themes for Upcoming Issues:

Winter - December 2024 - Whirling Winds - Due November 15

Spring - March 2025 - Growing Gab - Due February 15

For Submission Guidelines go to storybeast.org/submissions

Submit to storybeasteditor@gmail.com

A vintage blue Chevrolet truck is the central focus, parked at night. A single orange pumpkin sits on the hood. The truck's side features the text "HOWARD DUCE" and "Galv. TX". The front of the truck shows a "CHEVROLET 3100" badge. In the background, a large, brightly lit Christmas tree is visible, and string lights hang from above.

-TAMING *the* BEAST-

The Art of Crafting Stories

HOWARD
DUCE
Galv. TX

CHEVROLET
3100

Braiding Tales for the Stage: Interviews & Advice

By Joan Leotta

Putting together strands of stories from diverse voices and perspectives and building a telling by mixing tales from folklore with folklore or with those from real life — these are all examples of the braided story, a form which is appearing increasingly often on story stages around the country.

Although I *write* such tales often. Before plunging into preparing some new material for stage performance of a blended tale I decided to consult some folks who have been successfully braiding stories onstage for some time and who also teach the art of braiding stories with a focus on telling.

Jessica Robinson, the founder of Better Said than Done, tells these tales, teaches a class in creating Braided Tales and sponsors stage shows of braided stories. In addition to offering her own “take” on the technique and how it works on stage, Jessica recommended speaking with Eva Abrams and Tim Ereneta who had taken part in stagings of Braided Stories sponsored by Robinson’s group. She also suggested I contact Laura Simms, who has been teaching, telling, and writing braided tales at a high level for many years. Laura gave a broad overview of the how and why of these tales and her remarks are in the sidebar. The most important thing noted by all the people who participated is that there is no *one* way to write or tell a braided tale.

Below are the responses from Jessica Robinson, Eva Abrams, and Tim Ereneta. Laura Simms’ overview is in the sidebar on page:

Q. How do you define a braided tale and when did you start telling braided tales?

Jessica: Most simply, a braided tale is a single story that contains two or more distinct stories interwoven. I was telling braided tales before I realized that’s what I was doing. A few years ago, I was invited to be a featured storyteller in the Florida Festival and part of the requirements was to lead two 90-minute workshops. I pitched an idea for a Braiding Stories workshop. That term had started to be trendy, and I had, by then, realized that I was already telling several braided stories. That workshop was selected so I wrote two new braided stories and structured a program others could use as a help to create their own tales. Since then, I have led that same workshop for the Story Center at the Mid-Continent Public Library as well as for Better Said Than Done. I’ve also performed in Braided Stories shows. I love the creative challenges of braiding. I tell all sorts of braided stories. I’ve combined original fiction with personal stories; original fiction with original fiction; myth and personal; folktale and personal; original fiction with personal with myth; literary with personal.

Eva: The idea of braiding stories just came naturally to me. I can’t point to a specific time when I decided that I would create braided stories. At some point, braiding came to me during the process of working on diverse types of stories.

Tim: Long before I came to oral storytelling, I became aware of techniques of multiple narrators, interweaved stories, and narrative mashups from television, film, comedy, and literature. (all types of braiding). My “debut” as a professional storyteller (about 10 years after I was introduced to storytelling by Rives Collins) was with a mashup of personal narrative and traditional tales, but not in the way most people think. There is no commonly agreed upon definition of “braided story,” and I don’t braid traditional material with personal stories. I did a one hour first person personal narrative show in the character of Prince Charming, where he dished the dirt on Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, and Snow White. In a sense this piece braided together multiple traditional tales, but more like a quilt than a braided rope.

Q. How does a written braided tale differ from one prepared for telling?

Jessica: A written story of any type, not just braided stories, is different than a spoken story in several ways. People can comprehend and retain more detail and information when reading than when listening. With spoken word stories, one can convey a lot with performance technique. With braided stories, since you are often jumping between stories, you have to think how you are going to take the audience with you – whether they are listening or reading.

Q. What are some tips for Performing Braided Tales?

Jessica: Performing braided stories is much like performing dialogue. The physical and verbal cues for each story should be distinctive. That being said, how distinctive depends on the storytellers' capability and style. For example, if you are Antonio Rocha, you may be able to perform each story arc in a physically and verbally distinctive style. Watching someone like Antonio perform a story is like watching a play unfold. But making slight changes in our style of delivery can also be effective in cueing the audience to the shift in storylines. A performer can simply pause between shifts in story arcs, to alert the audience of the shift or lower or raise their voice for one strand; or talk faster or slower for one of the arcs; or physically shift from one side of the stage or screen to another when changing stories, even sitting for one strand, and standing for another. Additionally, language can be used to convey the change in stories. Repetition is effective. When you return to one storyline after spending a bit of time in that other story, you can repeat the last line from the previous section. Or you can reset the stage when you change stories. "We are back in the woods now, standing by the stream." Each time you change stories, the important thing is *to keep the audience with you* – whether it is from a performance cue or through the words you speak.

Eva: I've braided personal and folk tales. I've enjoyed braiding history with personal and literary with personal. Generally, personal stories are not high on my list to tell, however, it is more acceptable to me to braid a personal story with other stories. I am less interested in sharing a stand-alone personal story. The easiest way, I think, to present a braided tale is to have one full story follow another, connected by transitional information. The most difficult, I suppose, is going in and out of each story more frequently. This process requires clear transitions that help the audience follow the individual stories and the melded story. When braiding two or more stories, tellers must braid and craft stories so that they do not lose the audience. We must avoid having listeners wondering about a part of the story or getting stuck on something said two minutes earlier. One of my favorites of the braided tales I perform is *Lunch Time*. This story is about the beginning of the sit-in movement. I braid it with a personal story of my mother's experience working in a restaurant in New Orleans and my experience visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Q. Why would a teller want to use a braided tale rather than simply using one storyline? What are the special advantages of this kind of tale?

Jessica: These days, the braided stories I think are most common are the ones that weave together folktale and personal story, but that is certainly not the only kind of braided story. There are braided tales that combine two or more: folktales; personal stories; fictional stories; myths; literature, and fables. You can combine two of the same type of story or mix and match however you like. In my braiding stories workshop, one of the first questions I address is why tell a braided story. Not every story is served by weaving it into another story. It makes sense to braid a story when the additional story adds a layer to the first, adds meaning. The added meaning could be reflective or contrasting. But each story needs to be enhanced because of the addition of the other story or stories.

Tim: As much as I like to play with structure, I don't like interrupting the flow of a story. I see my primary responsibility is to facilitate the audience's journey into imagination and story, and I find that switching back and forth between "once upon a time" and "one time, this happened to me" is very jarring. So, in general, I'm not a fan of personal narrative and folktale/fairy tale braiding. My recent piece, created for Jessica Robinson's dedicated showcase of braided tales, braided an episode from the Kalevala (the singing contest between Joukahainen and Väinämöinen) with the song/story "Froggy Went a-Courtin'." There's no personal experience in this piece.

Q. Are there occasions when a teller might use more than two arcs?

Jessica: I have heard and also performed braided stories that contained more than two stories. Personally, when I have done it it has been for longer shows, when I had thirty minutes or an hour to perform. But, I have seen it done well in a shorter time by Ingrid Nixon among others. In the case of multiple stories, usually one of them is less fleshed out, almost like a frame.

Q. How do you select which two stories to blend and how do you do it?

Jessica: When I start a braided tale, the first thing I do is choose the stories. Often, I choose one story first and then figure out the other stories after I have a good grasp on the first story. For me, brainstorming what stories to weave together starts with one story. Once I get my lodestone (or primary) story down, I think about the secondary tale. Let's say the first is a personal story. I think about the general plot of the story, the themes, what is the story about and what I am trying to say with the story. Then I think about what story would complement the plot or themes or would nail down the point I am trying to make. If no secondary stories come to mind, I skim through my books on myths or fairytales, play around with drafting an original story, or post on social media "Does anyone know a story where the protagonist is...."

Here are some specific steps I take when writing a braided story:

Choose story A.

Write out the plot points of story A. I usually make a bulleted list and major turning points.

Choose story B.

Write out the plot points of story B.

Decide where to break up story A and story B and where to combine them. This last step is where it gets messy, and I often have false starts. I combine the stories and practice speaking them aloud and then decide if it works as is or if I need to change out the breaks. For me, this part is more about how the story flows, if it feels right. I practice different structures until I get it right. Sometimes, this is where I decide it's not working with these stories and scrap the braided story altogether or replace one of the stories.

Q. So, Tim, are there special challenges with putting together this type of a story blend?

Tim: In the Better Said Than Done showcase of all braided stories, I knew the audiences were expecting a format where main plot lines would be interrupted, repeatedly. I do think setting the audience's expectations is key, so the shift between tales does not take them out of the storytelling imagination. That being said, (and I know there are artists who are skillful enough to guide listeners in the moment anywhere), braiding two traditional tales can be more difficult than traditional + personal, because there are *two distinct plot lines and sets of characters to follow*-- which is why I ended up selecting a song story to braid with an epic tale. The song wasn't so heavy on plot, and melody activates a different part of the brain than story, so in some sense that choice helps the audience with transition.

Q. What audiences do you think are best for braided tales? E.g., adult, seniors, high school students ?

Jessica: I think braided tales work for just about any audience. I do perform often for preschool age kids, but I can't say I've ever told them a braided story, only because the stories I share with kids under eight tend to be shorter. But there's no reason everyone from a mature child through senior citizen couldn't enjoy a braided story.

Q. Can you give us examples of elements of folk/fairy/personal tales that can be made stronger by telling them in a braided tale?

Jessica: There are so many combinations that I couldn't possibly list them all, but the important thing is that one story makes the other story stronger in the combining of stories. A story can be made stronger in a braided tale if the story you have paired it with enhances the first tale by theme, enriches a character, or helps make your point in a different way. For example, a personal story about falling in love paired with one of the many "and they lived happily ever after" fairy tales might leave the audience feeling like this was a truly perfect match, and the couple in the personal story are going to live a long and happy life together. A personal story about falling in love paired with a myth or folktale of a murderous husband or lover would make the audience think that perhaps the love story was not meant to be. A folktale about a child getting lost in the woods might be interpreted as a story about growing pains if paired with a personal story of challenges faced during that painful stage of life, or be interpreted as a story about grief and loss if paired with a personal story about the death of a loved one.

Q. What else would you like to say about telling braided tales, your experience in teaching the writing and telling of same or anything else?

Tim: I took on the challenge of creating a braided story for a recent Better Said than Done Performance because of my interest in story structure. While I could find resonances in themes, images, and motifs across distinct stories, what I found most difficult was any reasonable justification to break the stories up. When I was working on the singing contest piece, there were about five traditional tales I thought I could work with. I could have easily put together a themed set, and that is my typical preference. Braiding was more difficult and as noted, I chose to braid a tale with a song.

Eva: Oral traditional storytelling (including the braided tale) has been an important and valuable part of human life since the beginning — even before language as it has developed in present day. My hope is that more people get to experience this art to appreciate its value and to understand that storytelling is not only for young children. Young and older people can enjoy the benefits of the Art of Storytelling — one major benefit being connecting to our humanity.

Jessica: Braided stories can seem intimidating, but they are really very simple. Writing a braided story is like writing any story. Yes, it's made a little more challenging because you have to juggle multiple characters and story arcs, but anyone who has written more than two stories has already done that. I love the moment in my workshop when it clicks for someone, and they realize they can do it. I have gotten to hear some really fabulous, braided stories that were written during that 15-minute time for students to write. Sometimes all it takes for a braided story to come together is having time to think about the stories we know, and time to play with them.

Thank you, Jessica, Eva, Tim, and Laura!

Laura Simms on Crafting and Telling Braided Tales

“Braiding” for me is the holy grail, how our audience gains access to value their own lives, relate to the ordinary world as interrelated, and can find the deeply personal significance in the old stories. We are stuck a bit with a very colonial approach to the fairy tales that have been collected, written down, edited, made more literal or psychological. The whole process of braiding brings out the *story* of the story and its unique capacity to connect us to ourselves deeply, one another, and the earth.

Throughout the most recent class that I am facilitating, “The Great Story Immersion,” a small group of dedicated storytellers, whether they tell personal or traditional or both kinds of stories, works on a single fairytale together. I choose stories that feel raw, direct. Unusual and not didactic. Throughout there are a lot of exercises where one uncovers very suddenly a personal story. Because we are working with the whole narrative as an interrelated event, the memories that arise without much thought are often amazingly synchronistic and fascinating, expanding the meaning of the story.

It is quite a task to braid stories. One has to be sensitive to the way in which the listener is involved in not only the content, but also in the energy of the unfolding. Then the true (at least so-called true) events add a spice that pries open even more engagement. It feels wonderful to do this, and to share this. It is as if we all discovered the event of storytelling without, for most of us, being in a storied society. So, the braiding becomes a way of enriching the event. I have also done and taught the opposite approach. Start with a personal story and weave in traditional tales, even fragments of stories. Some students take a class of mine like “Great Immersion.” Others work on a single story, or a memoir piece, and we find the inside stories from our lives that illuminate something. Usually, I offer this with at least two to three sessions and have a special package of ten sessions. I love this work. Each person, each story, keeps offering increased realization of how exceptional storytelling is. I no longer feel it has to be valued because it is like theater or writing. Storytelling, (especially braided telling) is an art of its own architecture that feels needed in the world today.

Contact Information for These Tellers

Laura Simms Laura offers classes, such as the one referenced above, and you can also find dates of her own performances on her calendar.

https://www.laurasimms.com/?ss_source=ss_campaigns&ss_campaign_id=668425d321fb273539b8585b&ss_email_id=66982f5cde5dc66223669a49&ss_campaign_name=Laura+Simms+News&ss_campaign_sent_date=2024-07-17T20%3A54%3A06Z

Email: storymentor2010@gmail.com

Jessica Robinson: Jessica also offers classes and in addition to her own performances often solicits tellers for multi-person stages shows on themes, such as braided tales. Contact her through: <https://bettersaidthandone.com>, jessica@bettersaidthandone.com

Tim Ereneta: a specialist in fairy tale telling, Tim can be found at

<https://www.timereneta.info>

and his contact is tim.ereneta@gmail.com

Eva Abram: Eva offers storytelling and public speaking services for events and assemblies.

To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.

SURVIVING

My Art

Plagues & Presentations *By Patricia Coffie*

Rain had been coming down all day Friday. The storytelling was to begin on Friday on the paddlewheel boat “The Lady of the Lake.” It would be a late-night cruise with ghost stories. Then the boat caught fire.

All day in the park where Art Sail with the Storytelling Tent would take place, rain poured down. There was standing water four inches deep in the one-sided tent on Friday.

Even as we waited for another plague — after all we had just seen fire and flood — storytellers coped. That’s what we do.

No one was hurt in the fire but there would be no late-night cruise with ghost stories. The storytelling was moved to the Community Room under the band stage and Jeff Doyle did us proud. The boat was back in operation by Saturday, no one had been hurt, and another site had been made available. I loved the whole experience on Friday.

Now it was Saturday. There was grass visible in the Storytelling Tent. A large wooden platform was moved in for the performers. Folding chairs had been set up. I listened.

My chair kept sinking lower and lower as it settled into the soaked ground under the tent.

If the storytellers stepped too close to the edge of the wooden platform, the platform tipped and threatened to rise up. Startled but strong storytellers adjusting to the platform kept us happy.

In 2015, Jeff Doyle, Janice Del Negro, and Maureen Korte coped and told stories as I enjoyed again the annual Iowa Storytelling Festival in Clear Lake, Iowa.

That Annual Iowa Storytelling Festival was established in 1989 with storytellers Michael Cotter, Donald Davis, and Patricia Coffie. The annual festival continues.



About the Author- Patricia Coffie was born interested and Iowan. She tells personal and family stories filled with love and laughter and sometimes tears from a heart that belongs to the Midwest.

Previously published in Hot Rod Magazine, in Our Iowa, in Storytelling Magazine, and in “Stories from Home” in Waverly Iowa Newspapers.

Facebook: Patricia Coffie

maemaude@mac.com

Battling Cancer *by Lois Keel*

Cancer in 2013 meant a sabbatical that year. Would I stop storytelling? Dunberidiculous! Instead I began work on a project with some very special people in Alzheimer's and Dementia groups. Patient confidentiality prevents my telling the results of this work. The previous summer at the National Storytelling Network conference, I assisted, Liz Nichols in her presentation of the TimeSlips program. There is a great deal of information about this exciting and fun way to invoke communication and creativity among this very special population without relying on memory. For yet another view of its use, you might go to Mary Clark's article for NSN's special interest group, the Healing Story Alliance. Perhaps you will catch some of the excitement I felt in working on this project I called "Elder Stories."

The Good News: while it will always be labeled "in remission," my treatment worked!

Unfortunately the Bad News: Once my Sabbatical (and treatment ended) while I could get paid to train staff at centers, I couldn't get paid to work directly with the patients. <sigh!> I'm back to full-time storytelling but miss this.



About the Author- Lois Sprengnether Keel tells stories from the Great Lakes area or your choice of country or continent, spooky stories, Native American tales, tall tales, specific characters or animals. She is a storyteller found in the Michigan Arts & Humanities Directory since 2004 and in Historical Society of Michigan Directory. She is webmaster for

MichiganStorytelling.com.

Website: lois-sez.com

Blog: StorytellingResearchLois.com

Lunch Launch *By Mark Binder*

It was the last class of the day of elementary school in Newport, RI, and the cafetorium was hot. No AC. No fans.

As set up my sound system, over the PA the principal announced, "Teachers, during the storyteller's assembly, you are welcome to return to your classroom and finish cleaning."

Swell, No teachers.

In the middle of the set, while I described a particularly disgusting slug, there was a commotion halfway back on the left. One child was standing up, others were scuttling away.

The principal, dressed in a pink Jacqueline Onassis suit, marched up the aisle, shook her head, and muttered, "She threw up."

Then the principal strode out. Just me and all the other students. No teachers.

I kept telling stories.

Over the loudspeaker I heard, "Will the janitor please report to the cafeteria for cleanup."

Lunch that day had been pepperoni pizza and grape soda.

CODA:

I did finish, but at this point, decades later, anything else that happened or didn't is speculation. I vaguely recall the janitor coming with paper towels. And I told stories.



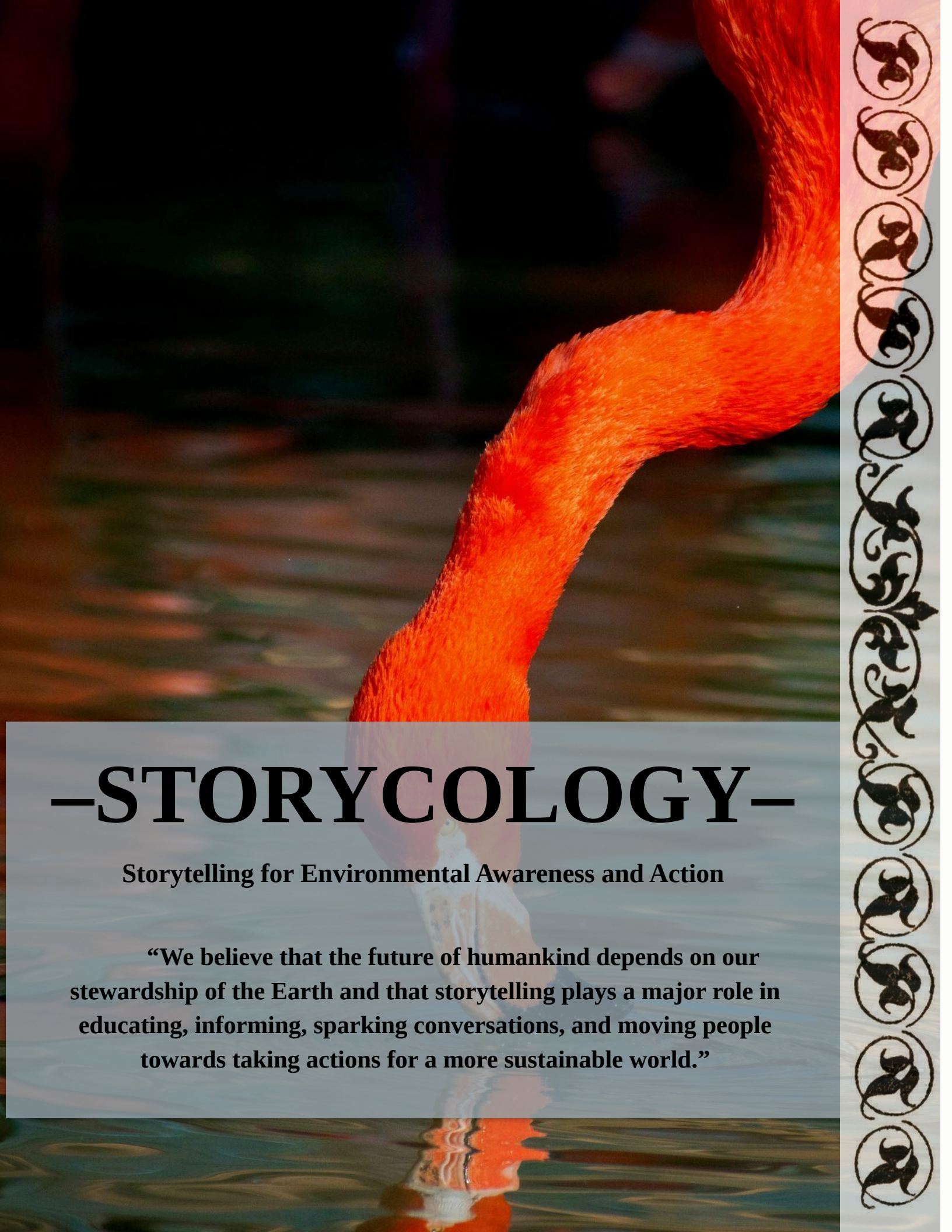
About the Author- Mark Binder is the Audie Award nominated storytelling author of more than two dozen books and audiobooks for children, families and adults. He believes that now, more than ever, "We Need Good Stories."

For the past twenty years, he has toured the world transmitting joy with books, audio and spoken word stories for diverse audiences of all ages.

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*Contributors to be contacted regarding permission
to tell these works*



–STORYCOLOGY–

Storytelling for Environmental Awareness and Action

“We believe that the future of humankind depends on our stewardship of the Earth and that storytelling plays a major role in educating, informing, sparking conversations, and moving people towards taking actions for a more sustainable world.”

Heavenly Planet

By Bowen Lee

This is the most frightening election I've ever witnessed. There may have been other times in the history of that experiment in democracy called the United States of America that have been disturbing, but none with such an edge of malice and threat to fairness and common sense. The people of this country are having to choose wisely, and that is not everyone's forte.

What do politics have to do with the environment, ecology, and storytelling? That is a convoluted tangle. Climate change and environmental issues have become bipartisan. This is purposefully part of the scary mess that some people in power are trying to manipulate American citizens to believe. They say climate change was originally a political lie made up by liberals and now that we know it is real, there's nothing we can do about it. This is what greedy people in power who serve their own self interests are saying about the environmental damage of the planet.

Just look at the first Storycology column I wrote about *The Golden Fish*. That story tells it all. The boat sank because of greed and self-centered tunnel vision.

Storytelling can reveal the basis of our troubled times. It can provide solutions. We storytellers need to share what we know, about how kindness and compassion and unity can not only solve our problems but heal our suffering and pain. Like the characters in stories, we can go through trials and tribulations, and come out the better for it, if we choose wisely.

So how do we vote this November? Think on the old Chinese story,

The Difference Between Heaven and Hell

Not everyone gets what they want. But there was a man who was fortunate enough to get one wish. And the wish he was granted, before he died, while he was still alive, was he wanted to know what the difference was between heaven and hell. Which is important, because when you die, you want to know which place you want to go to.

He was granted this wish. The first place he was taken was to Hell. When he gets to Hell, it's a huge room full of round tables. On the round tables are the most delicious foods imaginable. But all the people sitting around these tables are unhappy. They are miserable. Because these people all have chopsticks that are three feet, or one meter long, and as they try to eat, they can't reach the end of the chopstick to get the food. Nothing they try works. They are angry and sad and they are hungry and so, so miserable.

Well, the man had had enough of Hell, so he said, "Let's check out Heaven."

So he's transported to Heaven, and it looks just like Hell. It's a huge room full of round tables filled with wonderful, scrumptious food. But the people in Heaven are all smiling. They're all happy. They have three feet, or one meter, long chopsticks, too. But the difference is, all of the people are feeding each other.

Now, they say that Heaven and Hell exist here on this planet. Which one would you rather live in?



The kind of country we live in is a choice. In a democracy, the government is supposed to be one that the people who live in it choose. That means you have to vote in November. You get to choose Heaven or Hell. Which means, if you vote for your own good and don't care what might happen to other people, and the environment, by the way, just remember how miserable it will be to try to feed yourself when you will never be able to reach peace and happiness. But if you vote not only for your benefit, but also for the benefit of others, or at least, for the greater good of most of the people in this country, you'll be helping to create a better place for us all to live in. And that means a healthier planet. Perhaps even a heavenly planet.

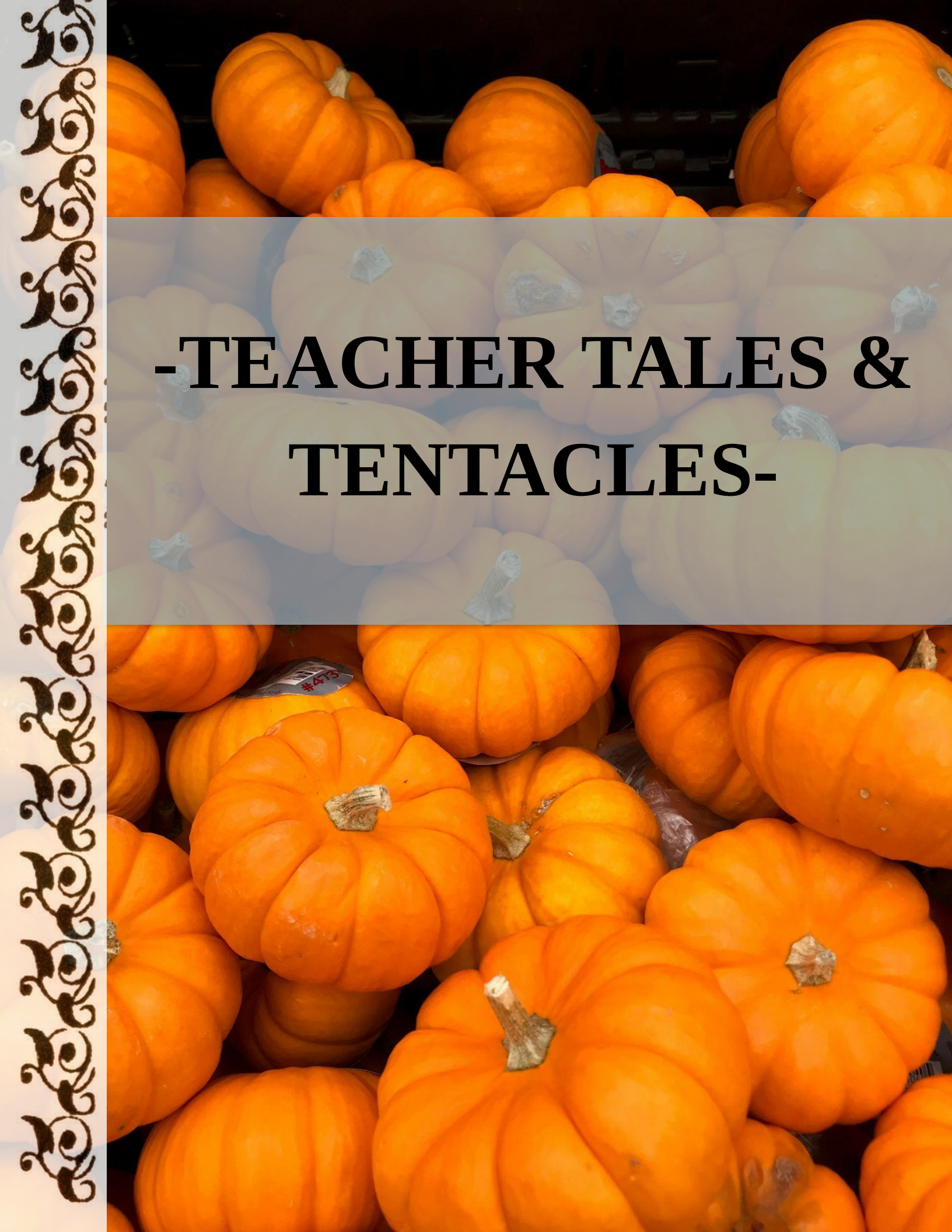
To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.



Storycology Head Editor

Bowen Lee divides her time between cities, forests, and the ocean around Monterey, CA. She has been a teacher, a writer, an illustrator, and now, she tells stories, incorporating storytelling into all aspects of teaching. She conducts workshops on storytelling to teach educational content in national and regional education conferences.

Website: storyrex.com

The image features a background of pumpkins. The top and bottom sections show bright orange pumpkins, while the middle section is a semi-transparent grey rectangle containing the text. A decorative black scrollwork border runs vertically along the left edge of the image.

-TEACHER TALES & TENTACLES-

Delight in Fright

By Jen & Nat Whitman

Do you find combining storytelling and standards frightening? Let's explore how we can find the "delight in fright" using many senses and techniques that both storytellers and teachers will embrace.

Common Core Standards:

The United States is unique among TIMSS countries (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) as there is not an official nationally defined curriculum. Though many states have similar standards, phrases, or words, it feels like there is national agreement when there is not. Thus, we will introduce some standards we have found common. Please check the state standards where you will be teaching or performing. Search by the featured phrase or word.

National Site to Find State Standards: <https://www.ed.gov>

Reading: Literature

Key Ideas and Details:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.2](#)

With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details

Reading: Foundational Skills

Phonics and Word Recognition:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.K.3](#)

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words

A Pocket Full of Pumpkins!

If you are telling stories in school settings, you've probably been asked at some point, "How do you feel about working with the 'littles'?" It's a question that often stops tellers in their tracks, instilling a unique flavor of storytelling fright. The truth is the "wee ones" are not the monster in the closet! In fact, when you are prepared with the right telling tools, they are delightful.

When working with younger children, it's always helpful to have a few finger plays in your pocket that you can pull out at a moment's notice. Familiar rhymes that have been passed along in the folk tradition for generations are filled with opportunities for learning.

In addition to rhythm and rhyme, there are often mathematical and scientific concepts embedded in these old favorites. Let's explore a few ways that you might extend a simple finger play in a Kindergarten setting, making as many academic connections as possible.

The classic *Five Little Pumpkins* is a perfect rhyme for this time of year. We like to switch out the witches for bats for our audiences in school and library settings. Here is the version we currently use:

Five Little Pumpkins

Five little pumpkins, sitting on a gate.

(Right arm makes the gate, Left fingers are “pumpkins.”)

The 1st one said, “Oh MY , it’s getting late!”	<i>(Thumb wiggles.)</i>
The 2nd one said, “There are BATS in the air!”	<i>(Pointer wiggles.)</i>
The 3rd one said, “But WE don’t care!”	<i>(Middle wiggles.)</i>
The 4th one said, “Let’s run and run and RUN !”	<i>(Ring wiggles.)</i>
The 5th one said, “I’m ready for some FUN !”	<i>(Pinky wiggles.)</i>
Then “Oooooooooohhhhhh!” went the wind.	<i>(Hands by mouth, calling out.)</i>
And OUT went the light.	<i>(Clap hands while saying, “OUT!”)</i>
And the five little pumpkins rolled out of sight.	<i>(Roll hands and then hide behind back.)</i>

Finger Play

First, we explore the rhyme with the traditional finger play. We know many fabulous tellers and teachers who love to dive into the world of props and have dedicated finger puppets for every favorite finger play. These are amazing and there is certainly a Pinterest board ready for you somewhere if you’d like to find ideas for crafting your own delightful creations. To be honest, we’ve never been organized enough to manage a set of intricate props, so we stick with our fingers -- we always have them with us!

A note about directionality—it’s not important which hand you use for the pumpkins, but it IS important that your pumpkins are in order, left to right, from the children’s perspective. So, if you’d rather have your right hand be the pumpkins, start with the pinky as the first pumpkin. This is a small detail, but It makes a difference when working with students who are just developing their understanding of directionality in reading – for example, if they are learning to read English or another left-to-right sweeping language.

Once we’ve explored the finger play several times together, it becomes a great transition tool when it is time to gather on the carpet or line up to head out the door. Finger plays make ideal transition timers. The teacher might suggest, “Can everyone join us by the end of the rhyme?”

Role Play

After the children are comfortable with the language of the finger play, we’re ready to act it out. We like to put five chairs in front of the group to give the “pumpkins” a defined space. Initially, we’ll ask for volunteers to be our pumpkins. This is a natural time to make a mathematical connection to ordinal numbers. Once the children are in place, we’ll say, “Wait — who is the first pumpkin? The fourth? Who is third? What If we mix the pumpkins up? Who is first NOW?”

Students then take turns acting out the part of the pumpkins.

We’ve found this particular rhyme is also perfect for exploring the convention of speech bubbles. We put large speech bubbles on sticks with the words of the rhyme clearly printed (see the illustration). Note that the capitalized and bolded words in the rhyme are intentional and we write them the same way on the large speech bubbles. The bolded words are anchor words for our beginning readers.

Consider the many ways these focus words could connect to this Common Core benchmark: **MY, BATS, WE, FUN, RUN.**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.K.3

Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words

For example:

The Y in **MY** makes the long i sound.

The S in **BATS** makes the word plural.

The word **WE** is similar to he and she. (And these are all “heart words” or “sight words” or “snap words,” or whatever your school calls them.)

The words **FUN** and **RUN** rhyme. You might ask the children if they can come up with other -un rhyming words (e.g., sun, bun, etc.).

All of these words can be decoded successfully by students who know the basic letter sounds.

After we’ve explored these words in a variety of playful ways, students are usually able to quickly put the speech bubbles in order. At this point, we’ll often pass out the speech bubbles randomly and see how quickly the five students can organize themselves, first to last. Then, we all chant the narration part of the rhyme as a class and pause for each “pumpkin” to share the line on their speech bubble.

For instance:

Whole Class: *Five little pumpkins, sitting on a gate. The 1st one said...*

First Child/Pumpkin: *Oh MY, it’s getting late!*

This playful group work connects to another important Common Core benchmark:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.2

With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

This benchmark strand is at the core of all of our work in schools as storytellers. For our youngest learners, joyfully chanting familiar rhymes together is an important first step in learning to retell stories independently.

The Five Little Pumpkins rhyme seems simple, but there is a lot of subtext that could be there. The sentences themselves begin to suggest character traits for the pumpkins...

“*Oh MY, it’s getting late!*” sound like the words of an anxious pumpkin.

“*Let’s run and run and RUN!*” sounds like something an enthusiastic pumpkin might say.

“*There are BATS in the air!*” could be read in so many ways. Is the pumpkin excited to see the bats? Or scared of the bats? Or confused by the bats?

We talk with the students about how they can play with language and we challenge them to speak the words a little differently each time we chant the rhyme.

This becomes another fun transition activity. If you have 25 children in class, you can quickly give everyone a turn to be a pumpkin and run through the chant five times while students are gathering on the carpet. Everyone is engaged in the choral chanting and everyone enjoys seeing how their friends decide to interpret the lines of the pumpkins.

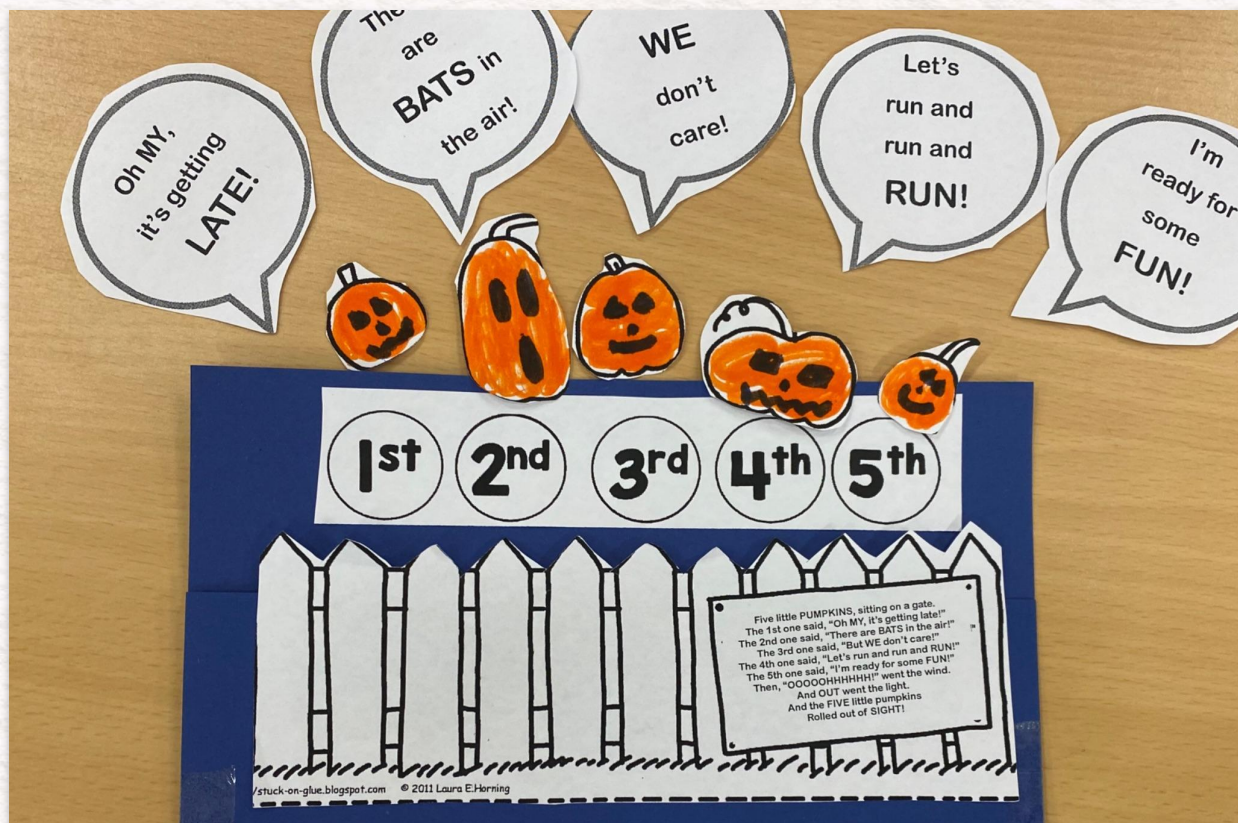
We should note that we never require a student to be a pumpkin. It’s always an invitation and any child is welcome to pass. However, we find that most students are eager to join in the fun. When you scaffold play like this and repeat the language over and over, even the most timid student or a child who is new to speaking English is often willing to take a guided risk in a supportive environment and play with rhyme in front of the group.

Puppet Play

Once we've explored the rhyme as a group with the speech bubbles for a few days, we then create individual puppet pockets for the students to play with independently

Students practice their fine motor skills as they cut out the pumpkins and speech bubbles and then create faces for their pumpkins. There are a lot of pieces. That's okay! We teach the students how to write their initials on the back of each piece. We have students keep them in their reading folders and play with them in class with partners and on their own before we send them home to share with their families.

Each time students pull out the pumpkins, they are matching the speech bubbles to the ordinal numbers. Anchor words help them put the speech bubbles in the correct order. After playing with the puppets, many students are comfortable pointing with one-to-one correspondence to each of the words on the speech bubbles.



Here is the latest iteration of our pocket pumpkins! Like so many teaching tools in the elementary classroom, this is a mashup of resources and clip art that we've cobbled together and adjusted over time. (Copyright for the fence and pumpkins images can be seen in the pic.) Create something that works for you!

Playful Learning

You will notice the emphasis we are placing on the word PLAY here. One simple finger play connects to important learning in reading, writing, math, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, social-emotional learning, and so much more. The folk tradition provides us with a vast resource of rhymes from the past that we can use to help our students joyfully develop academic skills for the future.

So, don't be afraid of the "littles" -- you have a LOT to share with them. Embrace their enthusiasm and use your skills as a storyteller to share a love of language and learning that will last a lifetime.



Teacher Tales & Tentacles Head Editors

Jen and Nat Whitman recently moved back to the United States after 23 years teaching and telling in international schools in Thailand, Germany, and Hong Kong. Jen is an Early Childhood teacher and Nat is an Elementary Librarian. They are passionate about the role of storytelling in the classroom and they teamed with Margaret Read MacDonald to write a "How-To" guide to using stories in the classroom called, **Teaching with Story: Classroom Connections to Storytelling**. Jen and Nat perform in tandem together as The Whitman Tellers. They are currently working on telling stories of congressional compromise across the 50 States!

Website: whitmantellers.com

The image is a vertical collage of food photography. On the left side, there is a decorative border with a repeating black and white floral pattern. The main area of the image is composed of several food photos. At the top, a blue plate holds a dish with green vegetables and white sauce. Below it, a white bowl with an orange rim contains a colorful vegetable medley. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a close-up of a blue plate filled with roasted chicken pieces, garnished with fresh purple basil leaves. A semi-transparent grey rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the text.

-STORY FEAST-

A bounty to share

STORY FEAST

By Karen Chace



The Goblin by William Blake
1816-1820

Scottish Prayer Traditional
*From ghoulies and ghosties
And long-leggedy beasties
And things that go bump in the
night,
Good Lord, deliver us!*

The theme for this issue is Flavored Fright so I have found some delectable and devilish tales to add to your storytelling repertoire.

[10 Creepy Tales from English Folklore](#) - Cutty Driver, Black Annise, and Spring-Heeled Jack are just a few of the specters that await your company. Beware!

[37 Scary Ghost Stories from American Folklore](#)

[Conquering Fear - Ethiopia](#)

[Ghostly Bengali Legends: The Most Famous Bhoot In Local Folklore](#) – Six snippets of folklore to begin your own journey into the unknown.

[Michigan Urban Legends to Tell Around the Campfire | Michigan](#) – Here you will find short synopses of The Singing Sands of Bete Grise, The Torch Lake Monster, True Love's Kiss, and four more tales. There is just enough information to start you on your own spine-tingling journey for more.

[Real Ghost and Fake Ghosts](#) – Ten folktales from Belgium, England, Ireland, Germany, and Sweden.

[Scottish Ghost Stories by Elliott O'Donnell](#)- Published in 1911, this book offers seventeen tales to fright and delight. It is now in the public domain, and you may download it for your own files.

[Specter Bridegrooms](#) – Fourteen deliciously spooky tales from around the globe.

[The Specter in Fjelkinge - Swedish folktale](#)

[Three Ghost Stories – Charles Dickens](#)

CALENDAR STORIES

The third week in September is National Farm Animals Awareness Week. With that in mind I corralled five folktales for you to harvest.

[Cow's Head – Ukrainian](#)

[The Dog and the Pig – India](#)

[The Goose Girl – Grimm](#)

[The Magic Horse – Iran](#)

[The Talking Goat – Africa](#)

Since October is Adopt a Shelter Dog month, below are stories to celebrate the dogs in our lives that are more family than pets.

[Black Dog of Hanging Hills – United States](#)

[The Dog and the Sparrow - Grimm](#)

[The Giant Dog - Inuit](#)

[The Golden Beetle or Why Dog Hates Cat - China](#)

[The Sheep, the Shepherd and the Dog - Fable](#)

[The Story of the Second Old Man and the Two Black Dogs - Arabia](#)

[The Three Dogs - Germany](#)

October 31 is National Caramel Apple Day. Step up and take a delicious bite with these juicy tales.

[The Apple Dumpling Story](#)- The link will take you to a downloadable book in the public domain. This story is the first one in the book.

[The Apples of Hesperides - A Greek Myth](#)

[A Boy and His Donkey](#) - A folktale from the Hispanic Southwest

[The Apple of Contentment - by Howard Pyle](#)

[The Enchanted Apple Tree – Flanders](#)

[Johnny Appleseed – United States](#)

[The Golden Bird - Germany](#)

[The Laughing Apple and the Weeping Apple - Turkey](#)

[The Nine Pea-Hens and the Golden Apples – Serbian](#)

[The Tale of the Three Apples - From the Arabian Nights](#)

[The Twelve Months - Slavic](#)

[The Tale of the Silver Saucer and the Transparent Apple - Russia](#)



Resources Provided By Karen Chace

Karen Chace is an award-winning storyteller, teaching artist, workshop leader, and author. Since 2002, she has taught the art of storytelling to over six hundred students. She is the recipient of the LANES Brother Blue-Ruth Hill Storytelling Award and the National Storytelling Network ORACLE Service and Leadership Award. storybug.net



-JOURNEYS-

**“What marks do you leave in the places you go?
Who sees them?
Don’t you ever wonder?”**



A Special Day at the Beach

By John Shockley

It is pitch dark. That time before the Earth turns and the faint dark blue struggles to beat back the darkness. It's my view from the hospital window.

December 1, 2022, was a beach day in Hawaii. For me it's the time I load a surfboard into our Toyota Prius and get all the beach clothes and equipment in the hatchback trunk. Done it lots of times before we hit the road to Makaha Beach.

Our friend who lives out that way called to say there was some nice "fun waves" hitting a spot in the reef called "First Boil." It's a blow hole in the reef that is a good take-off spot when the surf is moderate. We knew the surf was predicted to rise in the afternoon.

There's a consequential moment when a momentous decision is made. Go to the beach before the surf rises or just go do other things you need to do, like buy tires for the Prius. My wife, Rita, and I went to the beach.

Rita and I stopped off at Richard "Buffalo" Keaulana's house on the way to the beach. We wanted to drop off some avocados for him and his wife, Momi. Momi was gone being treated for a fall after tripping on a garden hose. Buff was sitting in the garage when we came over. His grandsons were working on the Ocean Safety jet skis.

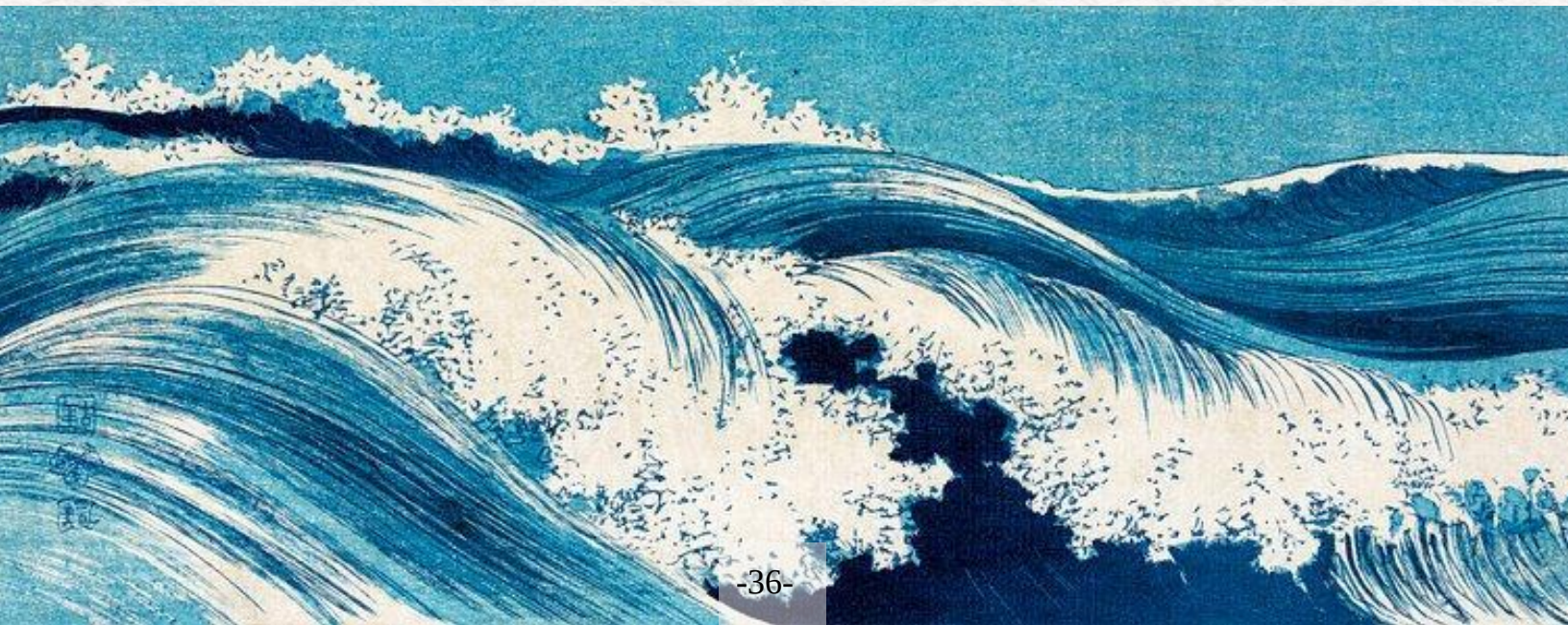
Buff was proud of his old mango tree that was bearing fruit even in winter. The massive old tree with a treehouse shaded much of the large back yard. I picked one of the mangos. You will not find a more cordial and knowledgeable person in West O'ahu than Buffalo Keaulana. Small wonder he's the Godfather of Makaha Beach. First lifeguard to be assigned there.

It was sunny with only a light breeze blowing by the time we passed the two bridges being repaired at the beach. It's a long story about how the bridges should be rebuilt mauka — mountain side — of the beach according to an ignored master plan set up over 20 years ago.

We pulled into the beach parking lot by the restrooms and showers at our spot under the Hao trees. I checked out the surf while Rita talked story with the "Shave-Ice" man, Randy. The surf looked fun.

After spotting the surf I returned across Farrington Highway and decided to suit up and catch a few waves. I have my beach prep routine set that includes putting on my shorts, rash guard, vest, face-grease, and earplugs before waxing my surfboard.

Rita's routine is to cover with sunscreen, get her bathing suit and hat ready for doing her shoreline beach walk while I surf. On the real sunny days, she has her UV umbrella. Once I've paddled my 9-foot longboard outside and set up for surf, I keep watch for her along the sand. She also walks along the rocky shore to the Makaha point house where Beal's Pond is located. That's where she takes her dip to cool off. Beal's Pond was blasted out of the reef decades ago by the Texas owners of the point house before there was any coastal protection.



I was having fun in the five-foot surf. Perfect for an old guy of 75 years. I spotted Rita on the reef headed for Beal's Pond. I did my usual hand wave — imagine the “YMCA” dance tune. She would respond with a big wave back.

My friend Donald Kleinschmidt, a hapa guy like me — Caucasian father and Japanese mother — paddled out. Donald is a great surfer and friend, and a talented carpenter.

When our good friend Harry Akizada passed away, it was Donald who built the memorial table for him at the spot he used to sit watching for the best time to go out to surf. Harry made his own Piapo boards and rode big surf with the best of them. After the table was made, Brian Keaulana and his friends secured the table so it couldn't be stolen.

In the surf on December 1, I had been out for over an hour and I was thinking of getting “that last wave” to come in. I shifted over from the first boil take-off to find a smaller wave to ride in. Donald was sitting further out to sea. On the horizon a huge set of waves darkened the sea surface. Donald took off late on what looked like a 12-foot peak and dropped down for a great “backdoor left” ride.

After Donald flew by in a flash I knew I was in trouble but I didn't think it would be catastrophic. The powerful white-water wall had just broken on me as I hoped to bury my surfboard deep enough to avoid the impact zone but I went right into it! The wave picked me up. My board was ripped away and I was coming down the falls and somehow my legs were split apart.

“Crack!” I heard it and then went under in big pain.

In the instant of tumbling about in the churning white-water, I knew I needed to keep my wits about me. Somehow I dragged myself onto my surfboard, pointed to shore and hung on. The raging tide blew me toward shore but the only thing I was concentrating on was that “sweet spot” at the Makaha Beach cove where the rocky reef ends and the sand begins.

It is right in front of where the lifeguard tower is located. Even in the biggest surf the spot is the safe zone where the whitewater dissipates before the water wells up into a strong rip tide that can take an unsuspecting surfer or swimmer hundreds of yards down the beach.

Each bump on the bouncing white-water made me yelp but I guided the surfboard right up on the sand. I was safe but couldn't walk.

Once on shore, I spotted a couple sunbathing. I asked the guy to go get the lifeguards because I couldn't walk. The lifeguards came running over explaining they were sorry, they couldn't see me because of a large sand berm in front of their tower. NEVER an issue! The big issue was “the now” of buddy-carrying me over to the shower to rinse off the sand.

I found out one of the lifeguards was the son of a surf buddy, retired lifeguard himself, Dennis Gouveia. One of the reasons I surf at Makaha in the winter is the Ohana, family feeling, that is out there. Everyone seems connected!

After the sand was washed in the beach shower, the incident report was written. Then the question: Do you want us to call an ambulance?

My patent answer is “No.” The ambulance would have taken me to the closest medical facility. Waianae Comprehensive Community Medical Center is a good facility but does not have the depth of the Queen's Medical Center system.

Two lifeguards carried me to the Prius Rita had brought to the lifeguard parking space and put me in the back seat. They saw I still had sand on my feet and brought water to wash it off — kindness.

As we were driving back toward home, I started thinking I didn't feel that bad. Rita immediately vetoed going home. “It took two big lifeguards to pile you into the car, what makes you think I can get you out?” We went straight to Queen's West in Waipahu. It took two orderlies to extract me from the car.

When they rolled me into the Emergency section of the hospital I was amazed that I didn't have to wait or fill out any papers. I was given a room and a young Japanese doctor came immediately to look me over.

Dr. Taichi Imamura quickly confirmed his suspicions that I had an “open book” pelvis fracture as well as big internal bleeding from a groin artery break with a “stat” x-ray and CT scan. He put two units of blood in me and off I went to the main Queen's Medical Center in downtown Honolulu.

The ambulance ride from Queen's West to Queen's Honolulu was fast through the 4 p.m. traffic. When the ambulance door opened to the loading dock, I was amazed to see doctors and nurses lined up as if I was going to get some kind of award. It looked like the arrival of a guest to the Downton Abbey mansion.

They raced me into an operating room, no delay for anything. A doctor punched a hole in my right groin and inserted an arthroscopic rod into my artery. No anesthetic — I was awake for the cauterization of the open artery. One of the last things I heard before I faded was: "Well, at least you're not gonna die."

I felt like I was gonna die when the heavy canvas corset was wrapped around my pelvis and cinched tight — in 75 years, I think that acute jolting pain was the worst I've felt. The corset was placed to hold my pelvis together because due to blood thinners in my system, the surgery team needed to wait 48 hours before orthopedic Dr. Patrick Murray bolted my front and screwed my back pelvis together.

Lying like a cement sack in a hospital bed, there's a lot of time to think. The Intensive Care Unit room has a clock that I watched continually for the first four days at Honolulu's Queen's Medical Center. I reviewed repeatedly that instant when the heavy close-out wave hit me on the outside reef at Makaha. There's an exact wrong place to be whenever any strong wave breaks. All you need to be is a few feet away from that spot and you get beat up but not hurt. I wish I was not at that wrong spot.

At the ICU recovery room there isn't much except update sheets for doctors and nurses and the clock on the wall. I watched the hands on the clock through the days and nights. They gave me a button that would shoot Fentanyl which is supposed to give instant pain relief — didn't work for me. They also had me on Oxycodone, which comes on slower but lasts longer.

After the third day on the opioids I was having body-sweats, no taste buds, and I had no bowel movements. I had the RN take me off the two opioids. I was down to Tylenol. Rita asked if I wanted anything to read, but I couldn't concentrate on reading. I would drift off for 15 to 20 minutes of "combat sleep" through the day and night. When I was awake in the dark of night I had a lot of time to think.

I was improving after my pelvis surgery of December 3. The pain of the pelvis was virtually gone by the time that was set for me to be transferred from the Queen's Medical Center to the noted Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific, about a mile from Queen's.

During the long nights and days in the ICU I had a caring and cheerful nurse and doctor staff. The urologist who was watching the rupture of the area near the groin became optimistic about my recovery. Young staff doctors would ask about pain level and other comfort issues. It was time to go by December 7.

The ambulance ride from Queen's to the Rehab of the Pacific hospital was short. I arrived and was wheeled to the elevator and the doors opened on the fourth floor — the top of the building. They took me to room 404-1 that had a great "mauka view" of the Ko'olau Range behind the high-rise buildings and mountain-side homes in the distance.

For a short time, they said I would have to be in another room with a roommate, but quickly changed their mind when they found out I was using a "continuous positive air pressure" (CPAP) machine for sleeping. I have sleep apnea and atrial fibrillation to boot! The Covid era CPAP breathing assist machine rule saved me: private room — with a view!

Each night was uneasy sleep. I was awake while it was pitch dark and each morning I was able to see the quiet miracle of the dawn of a new day breaking. First the black, then the darkest blue giving way to lighter skies and finally the sun reflecting on the morning clouds.

I'm 75. The arithmetic is ponderous. I'm in the middle of what I call "The 70 Club" with lots of dues to pay. Not much time left to be in this world. So many friends and family have already left. Time goes by in a flash.

As the night hours passed I considered all the things an older person ponders: Is there a God? If so, what is the nature of God? What is knowable? What have the great thinkers in history from Athens to Jerusalem to India said? I'm a great summarizer — not a deep scholar. I often ask myself "What do you think?" and the answer to the big questions fade to mush.

Is heaven "Christian"? Is it the Elysian Fields Land of the Forms? Is heaven "Enlightenment" following the Buddha's sacred path? Is it just nothing? Maybe all I can conclude is heaven and hell are on earth. If there is a God, perhaps it is the force that created this earthly existence we get to quickly travel through.

“In the beginning, was The Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God!” Quite a Big Bang. I’ve concluded that God is not Santa Claus. We’re given the rudder and oars to power our own boats through life.

At 75, all I know is that I live in “the now.” Maybe my personal ethics is like Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative: Do unto others....

During the long darkness of the nights I wondered when “my ship” just like my surfboard would land. Nobody lives forever. We can’t play in the waves forever. I thought: Would I ever get the chance to return to the surf? Hell, when would I be able to walk again! I’m not good at praying much anymore. I hope, but I don’t expect Santa to drop any gifts.

I, like all of us, stand on the shore waiting for that time when our ship comes in — much like Khalil’s Prophet — wonder about faith, hope, love, and the possibility of eternity. All washes like sand on the shore of a rising tide.

One of the rehabilitation activities was an art class that a director named Ruben manages. He came to my room and asked if I would think of a theme and then maybe execute it on a painting. I had a couple of days and nights to think about it. Just like doing writing, the mental composition is the hard part. Putting words on paper and editing is the easy part. I thought of a theme: “The Hour that the Ship Comes In.” It is a word-picture song by Bob Dylan performed well by Peter, Paul, & Mary.

One of the attendants at the Rehab Hospital looked at my painting. It was a view of a distant figure holding a torch on a cliff overlooking the ocean where a Hokulea style Hawaiian sailing craft was at sea sailing to a sandy cove. The sky is mostly black with only a hint of the left-over blue of either ebbtide or pre-sunrise.

She asked what it meant. I told her it was whatever she thought of a person hailing a ship. That ship could be the arrival of anything — a new morning, a hoped-for event, or even death.

As the two-week stay at the Rehab Hospital wore on, the staff headed by Dr. Jordan Wang was getting me ready to be able to go home with my wheelchair. The lessons included how to transfer myself from the wheelchair to the toilet, shower, bed, and car. All the staff was upbeat — always. Especially cheery and open with her own life experiences was an RN named Joann — Jo. The world needs more people her.

I almost was going to complain about the hospital food but when the nutrition representative mentioned that they were short-staffed with only three “production workers” preparing all the meals, my complaints melted away.

I’m home now, sitting in a wheelchair waiting until I can walk again. Bones take about six or more weeks to heal. Still more idle time to watch the daily miracle of the breaking dawn. Still time to ask myself: What do you think? Still more time to hold the torch — waiting for my ship to come in.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



About the Author- John Shockley is a freelance writer specializing in short-story fiction, non-fiction, and biographies. He coordinates the Free Access Coalition (FAC), a non-profit organization, whose goal is free public access to beaches, recreational areas, housing, and employment in Hawaii. Shockley graduated from University of Hawaii with a Journalism major. He worked at Anheuser-Busch Inc. for 27 years ending his career at the Los Angeles Brewery as the Plant Manager’s assistant in charge of Brewery Communications. His wife, Rita, supports his work with the FAC.



-FUSIONS-

That which brings us together

A Labor of Love: The Cathryn Fairlee Archive

By Brandon Spars



In 2016, I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon with Cathryn in her home in Cotati, CA. It was a few years before the end of her life, although I was not yet aware that she was suffering from dementia. She was sharp, incisive, and deliberate as she presented me with materials for my onboarding as a new board member of the Storytelling Association of California. She peppered our conversation with wry quips: “Yes, constantly performing at rowdy school assemblies is one of the casualties of making a living as a storyteller,” and “Don’t quit your daytime job anytime soon....”

She gave me a tour of her home pointing out all the masks, shadow puppets, and paintings she had acquired while in Bali. Since I had spent much of my life living in Bali, we chatted about the masks and the puppets, and then, suddenly, there was a shift. As I recounted the myth surrounding one of the puppets, Naga Basuki, she picked at the nail upon which it was hung, swung the puppet down, and handed it to me. “You should have this,” she said. Her eyes moistened; she had softened. I left her home that day with books and masks as well as two typed pages containing two Balinese stories: a folktale about Balinese demons, and a condensed version of the great epic, *The Calonarang*. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, in retrospect I suppose she was already beginning to let go. She was finding new homes for the art, the books, and, most importantly, the stories she had collected over the many years she spent traveling the world and telling stories.

Cathryn Fairlee died on October 13, 2019. Her stories, however, are living on through the dedicated work of Sharon Elwell and others from the Do Tell Story Swap based in Santa Rosa, CA. Before she passed away, Cathryn handed the Do Tell Swap a stack of stories. This included printed emails, magazine clippings, and typed manuscripts. All of the pages included penciled cross-outs and hand-written notes, insights into the stories from the two perspectives she embodied: that of a dedicated scholar, and that of an electric performer.

Cathryn was born November 9, 1947, in Healdsburg, CA, but grew up in Fort Bragg. She did her undergraduate study at San Jose State University, where she earned a BA degree in Asian Art History. During her coursework there, she traveled to Taiwan, where she lived and studied Chinese language intensively between August 1968 and June of 1969. Later, beginning in 1977, she would travel regularly to the People’s Republic of China.

Cathryn became a librarian at the Healdsburg Middle School, where she, like most librarians, read books to students when their classes were brought in for scheduled library time. However, Cathryn began to depart from the regular routine when she started putting the books aside and telling stories from memory, using her voice and her body to bring the stories to life. In 1999, she left the steady job of librarian and ventured into the world of full-time storytelling. Whereas books can take you anywhere in your imagination, Cathryn actually traveled anywhere and everywhere as she performed and collected traditional stories from around the world.



Cathryn Fairlee performing for students

In 2005, Cathryn began work on her master's degree at Sonoma State University, where she wrote her thesis on Chinese storytelling. During her research she made two extensive trips to China in the summer of 2007 and the spring of 2008. At this point, many western scholars had studied Chinese storytelling, but Cathryn was different: she was not only a burgeoning scholar, but also a performer. In the city of Yangzhou, in the province of Jiangsu, Cathryn found the ninth-generation teller of a humorous folktale called Qing Feng Zha ("Clear Wind Sluice"), which is also known as Pi Wu Lazi ("Pi Five the Hot Tempered," which is the name of the main character). This story takes approximately forty hours to tell, and it is usually told at tea houses or storytelling theaters in two-hour segments over the course of a few weeks. It contains bawdy humor, a ghost, a bloody torture scene, an explicit bedroom scene, and the overarching theme of the reformation of a rascal beggar into a well-to-do gentleman. Cathryn's thesis, titled "Nine Generations of the Yangzhou Pinghua Story Qing Fen Zha or Pi Wu Lazi" traces the changes in the political and historical contexts around the nine generations of transmission that brought this story from the Song Dynasty to the present. Since the story is forty hours long, it is not included in the archive.

Cathryn's dedication to the stories she loved extended to the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which they were shaped, told, reshaped, and retold. Cathryn, throughout her storytelling career, was painfully aware of how much of the charm, humor, and poetry of the Chinese stories she learned, knew, and loved in Chinese was lost in translation. But this just made Cathryn all the more careful and aware not only when telling Chinese stories, but all stories from other parts of the world. She took great pains to research the cultural context for each story, and always encouraged other tellers to do the same. Eventually, her repertoire included stories from South, Central, East, and Southeast Asia as well as Africa and Europe.

She and her husband of more than twenty years, Gregg Nelson, shared a love of travel, and while most travelers collected souvenirs, Cathryn collected stories. The stack of stories that the Do Tell Swap inherited was as varied in form, with stories ranging from a paragraph to more than forty pages, as it was in place of origin, with stories captured during her trips to Bali, China, India, Ireland, England, Wales, Turkey, and so many other places.

While suffering from dementia, she continued to tell stories and pass on her knowledge through workshops. She treated the Do Tell Workshop in Santa Rosa to an hour of wisdom on creating characters in stories, and it was then that the seed was planted. She and Do Tell founder, Elaine Stanley, had discussed the trove of stories in Cathryn's possession, and at this workshop, just a few months before the end of her life, the sheaf of typing, handwritten notes, and clippings exchanged hands. A group of swap members gathered around the stack of papers containing centuries of wisdom and decades of careful research and documentation, not to mention constant performance, revision, and adaptation.

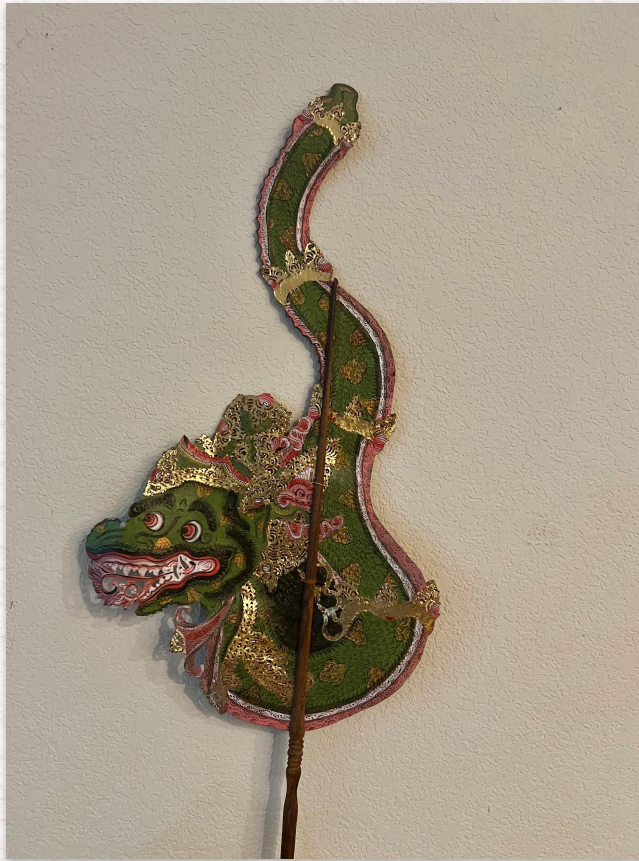
As we stood about the yellowed, curling pages, we were transported in hundreds of different directions to hundreds of different moments in the past several decades. We were standing before a group of Balinese children as they giggled their way through their tale, "The Leyak's Tail," and to a Buddhist temple in Koyasan where a monk recited "Buddha's Tea Cup," and to the home of an aging Norwegian woman, who punctuated every line of "The Seventh Father" with her crooked index finger. The story that was the focus of her master's thesis had been given to Cathryn by the master storyteller because, after nine generations, he had not found anyone to whom to pass it on. Cathryn had been there to receive it and ensure that this story lived. While Cathryn had ridden on camels, three-wheeled bemos, rickshaws, and elephants, not to mention trains, trains, and more trains (she even performed stories on trains in China) so that she could catch these gems before they fell, forgotten beneath the surge of digital media, all we had to do was show up at our swap that evening. It was there that Cathryn heaved the bale of text into our open arms.



Above: Sharon Elwell handles the Cathryn Fairlee Collection currently

Sharon and the members of the Do Tell Swap knew that they had inherited a treasure from Cathryn. They also knew that it wouldn't be worth anything unless it was made accessible. Thus the Cathryn Fairlee Archive Project was begun. It began when Meg Brown, chair of the Do Tell Swap, started scanning the stories whereupon Sharon selflessly agreed to retype all of the stories so that we had a workable, digital version. Proofreading and editing were done by Vicky Ness.

Every month since the beginning of this project, a story has appeared on the Do Tell website (dotellstoryswap.org/Monthly-Swap-Story-Summary.html). It is there that one can get an immediate sense of the range and variety of these stories. The next page has an example of one of these short stories.



Naga Basuki, a sacred Balinese dragon

An Arab Tale: “The Friend of a Friend of a Friend”

One day a friend who was a hunter came to visit Djuba*. “I brought you a rabbit I caught. It will make a fine dinner.” Djuba made a rabbit stew and they had a feast.

The very next day a stranger came to Djuba’s door. “Who are you?” asked Djuba. “I am the neighbor of your friend, the hunter who brought you the rabbit yesterday.” So Djuba invited him in and fixed his dinner. “I have made a stew from the leftovers of the rabbit,” he said, and the stranger ate well.

The next day another stranger knocked on Djuba’s door. “Who are you?” asked Djuba. “I’m a cousin of the neighbor of the friend who brought you the rabbit the day before yesterday,” said the man. “Come in,” said Djuba. He brought the man a pot of hot water. “What’s this?” asked the man. “That,” said Djuba, “is water boiled in the very same pot as the rabbit of my friend who is the neighbor of your cousin.”

*Djuba is a wise fool in many stories

Other stories, like *The Epic of Beowulf*, are more than forty-five pages. The archive is arranged according to the region from which each story comes. However, Sharon is currently endeavoring to make the collection even more accessible and user-friendly by indexing the collection. She has undertaken the second monumental task of cataloging all of the stories according to tale-types and themes: stories with tricksters, giants, magic, princesses, helpful animals, and many, many more categories. This way, a teller can quickly access the material not only by region, but also by theme.

Nearly 250 eclectic and rare tales once collected from around the world and gathered in a suburban California home are soon to be broadcast back around the world to the fingertips of tellers everywhere. Cathryn dutifully and painstakingly preserved these stories by documenting them and telling them defiantly in the face of the flashy, quick fixes of digital media that threaten traditional storytelling everywhere. And then, in a second act of dedication, she handed them off before the onslaught of dementia could wipe them into oblivion.

The archive is not online yet but stay tuned. It is coming soon. Once available, the stories will be open to everyone as long as they credit the Cathryn Fairlee Archive. In the spirit of Cathryn, storytellers are encouraged to find out as much as they can about the stories and their cultural contexts. Finally, tellers are encouraged to tell these stories again and again, and when they do...try to remember to think of Cathryn. Undoubtedly she will be there in spirit.

*Contributor to be contacted regarding
permission to tell this work*



About the Author

As a teacher of both high school humanities and college writing, Brandon has always brought storytelling into his lessons. He has contributed to countless workshops and conferences on the intersection between storytelling, ancient history, and pedagogy. He is the author of four books on storytelling.

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-THE HALL *of the* BARD-



Ginger

By Elizabeth Atkinson Gibson

When I was a little girl, Mama bought me a doll from an offer on a cereal box top. When it arrived, it was a baby doll, a size that would fit inside the palm of an adult hand. She had ginger-colored hair -- so I called her Ginger -- as well as beautiful, dark fringed, clear blue eyes that open and shut, a small rose-colored mouth and a body that was just the right combination of firm and malleable. We became fast friends as soon as I laid eyes on her.

We did everything together. I slung her headfirst down our backyard slide, shortly followed by my own little body shooting down that hot piece of metal after her. We swung together on our swings. She even sat at the table with me for meals, though she was supposed to wait for me in my bedroom. Ginger endured many baths after which I laid her to dry on a stack of mama's magazines. This happened so much that she developed two permanent freckles, one on each bum cheek from the magazine print. Her hairstyle also underwent radical changes, from a smart "page boy" to standing straight up from all the times that I had squeezed water out of it. Still, to me she was beautiful.

We went everywhere together with me always holding on to one of her arms or legs. I had a habit of sucking on one of her plastic legs, possibly a leftover from my binky days, and was not above giving it a little chew now and then. One day, I accidentally bit the thing clean off which was followed by my tragic screams. Mama was so sorry for me, that she went to the closet where she hid things, got down another doll that was intended for me for Christmas and gave it to me on the spot! That doll was larger and hard -- not the perfect combination of firm and soft like my Ginger. I played with that new doll for about 30 minutes before returning to my wounded little friend.



After that, Ginger became my handicapped doll -- brave and world wise! My older sister and I used her to put on “USO” shows from the back of our Plymouth Station Wagon on family trips. Her stage was the backward facing last seat. Ginger silently sang and raucously danced to entertain the “troops” (the other cars behind us). There she was in all her loved-to-pieces, half-eaten glory! We received many “air claps,” thumbs ups, smiles, and laughter because she was that good!

One summer day, our family left for one of our frequent camping trips. Leaving before dawn, we drove many hours before we pulled over at a roadside “greasy spoon” for lunch. As we piled out of the hot car, I immediately engaged in a battle of wills with my mother. She told me to leave Ginger in the car. We were all so tired; we might forget her and leave her behind. I refused - -wherever I went, Ginger went! Finally, too tired to argue further, Mamma relented. We went inside. I slung Ginger onto the vinyl seat next to me in the booth and we all happily ate our lunches.

Later when we were about 100 miles down the road, I was ready to play again! Looking all around me, I could not find Ginger.

I HAD LEFT HER IN THE RESTAURANT!

I cried mightily! Mamma spoke to me with great tenderness, but we had gone too far and could not turn back.

I had lost my little Ginger forever.

Every so often, over the next few years, I would wake up crying in the night, dreaming that my cherished friend was slung in some wastepaper basket somewhere, or far worse, a city dump -- cold and without me. Even more upsetting, I knew that through my own obstinacy to get my way and refusal to listen to wise counsel, I had separated myself forever from the thing I loved the most -- an incredibly painful but POWERFUL lesson for a four-year-old.

*Contributor to be contacted regarding
permission to tell this work*



About the Author- Elizabeth Atkinson Gibson writes and performs her varied repertoire of Southern folklore, ghost stories, and personal narratives with the intent to uplift, entertain, inform and inspire. She has appeared in regional storytelling festivals, local ghost tours, and is currently building a career in voiceover.

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Lady Death

by Jo Radner

An ancient dame for ninety years
had lived upon the planet.
Her birthday came; the doorbell rang;
she beheld a face of granite.
“Why, who are you?” alarmed, she cried.
“My name is Lady Death. And you
will come with me this day.” “Not now!
Impossible! I’ve work to do!”
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We celebrate, for life’s a joy.*

“Help me now,” she said to Death,
and handed her a broom.
“But I am Death! I do not sweep!”
“You do!” Both swept the room.
“Now move the furniture,” she said,
“to make the dancing floor.”
“But I don’t—” “Yes, you do!” she cried,
“and then, answer the door!”
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We celebrate, for life’s a joy.*

“Today’s my birthday – ninety years! –
I mark it with a dance!”
The neighbors knocked; Death opened;
they crept in, afraid to glance.
The feast was spread; Death tasted – “Good!”
All toasted the dame with ale.
Musicians struck a jaunty tune;
Death cringed – to no avail.
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We celebrate, for life’s a joy.*

The aged dame held out her arms.
“I’m Lady Death! I do not party!”
You know how that went. Soon they were
cavorting, twirling, hearty.
At last the dame cried, “I need rest!” –
passed her partner to another –
a young man in the prime of life,
who thought that he might smother.
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We celebrate, for life’s a joy.*

To his surprise, Death cut the rug
with style and verve and pleasure;
soon others tapped his shoulder,
asking him to share the treasure.
Banker, farmer, child and elder,
each one begged a turn;
and Lady Death stepped out with each
before the party could adjourn.
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We celebrate, for life’s a joy.*

A final toast; the guests departed;
Death and dame both swept the room.
“I’m ready; take me now,” said dame,
but Death cried, “It’s too soon!
Can we not celebrate again?”
“I’m tired, my friend, so, no.”
She takes the hand of Lady Death.
“It’s time. We have to go.”
*We banish sorrow, grief destroy;
We dance with Death, for life’s a joy.*

~~~~~

This ballad was inspired by the folktale “The Old Woman and Death,” retold by Rebecca Claire Lemaire, in *Stories of the Heart: Journey into Dying & Living*, Jim Brulé and Rebecca Claire Lemaire (Columbus, OH: Fishtail Publishing, 2024)



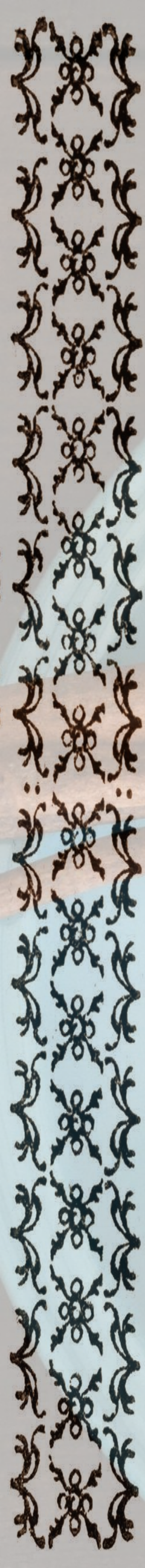
### About the Author

Jo Radner has been studying, teaching, telling, and collecting stories most of her life, and has performed from Maine to Hawaii to Finland. Professor emerita at American University, Jo returned to Maine as a freelance storyteller and oral historian. She is past president of the American Folklore Society and the National Storytelling Network.

**Website:**

[joradner.com](http://joradner.com)





# **-HEALING SPRINGS-**

*gather*



# Understanding & Navigating Assumptions about Disabilities

## (Video Transcript)

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*By Professor John A. Berges (he, his)*

My name is John Berges, and I would like to tell a story about some of my early experiences on my way to becoming a professor. I am currently a professor of Marine and Freshwater Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I am also deeply committed to mentoring minority students and students with disabilities. The sciences can appear confusing and unfriendly to newcomers. For me, high school was when I first became interested in biology, and science in general. And in the beginning, I had my own difficulties understanding and navigating. That's what I want to talk about.

In addition to my interest in the sciences, I've also been very interested in science fiction, or as I prefer to call it, speculative fiction. And that goes back to the days when my Dad and I used to sit and watch the first series of Star Trek on television. Star Trek was created and produced by Gene Roddenberry. He was a fascinating man, a humanist. He was very interested in human relationships, and this resonated with me. Fun piece of trivia: part of the recent Tapdinto-STEM meeting -- where I met Asia from *The Story Beast* and became motivated to tell this story -- was held in Iowa. Star Trek fans will know that Captain James T. Kirk's home state is Iowa!

One thing that always fascinated me in Star Trek was the relationships it depicted, both among the characters isolated on a starship, and also those who developed as those characters encountered aliens and alien civilizations. And it struck me that when humans encountered aliens, one of two things happened: they were depicted as less advanced than us, in which case the aliens seemed to have “disabilities” relative to us; or they were more advanced than us, in which case we appeared to have “disabilities” relative to them. I became pretty conscious of how those differences were talked about and coped with, and this colored my feelings about students with disabilities later in my career.

Another piece of speculative fiction I read that was very influential at this early stage, (and one I really recommend to you), was a book by author Theodore Sturgeon called More Than Human. This book is about four young people who appear to have severe disabilities, but who also have extraordinary and unusual abilities that go unrecognized. It's a fascinating exploration of humanity and disability. It's a little bit dated, but it survives relatively well. When some people ask me why a scientist reads science fiction (a genre that traditionally hasn't gotten a lot of respect), I think of Sturgeon. The story goes that one of his friends asked him: "Ted, you're a good writer; what are you doing writing science fiction? Ninety percent of science fiction is crap!" To which Sturgeon replied, "Ninety percent of *anything* is crap." This has become known as Sturgeon's Law.

Returning to my story: as I grew and developed and started thinking about my future, I ended up taking a variety of subjects in high school and gravitated towards the sciences. But I really didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to do. At some point, I kind of thought my ideal career would be as a crew member of the Starship Enterprise! That's really what I wanted to do. But you know, the space program wasn't very well advanced, so that really wasn't in the cards. So what was I going to do? My solution at that stage was just to avoid making any decisions.



Well, my guidance counselor figured out that I wasn't making decisions and he didn't like that. So, he called me to his office and said, "Berges, I need to know what you're up to so I can help you. What are you planning to do?" And he got pretty disturbed as he realized that I really had no plan. He started trying to make suggestions. One of his suggestions was, "Well, you're very good at math. You're very good at physics. Why don't you think about engineering? You could be an engineer." And my response to that was, "Engineer? But I don't want to drive a train!" Seriously, that was my 17-year-old self. And that reply absolutely floored him.

In my defense, I didn't know any engineers. My parents didn't have any friends who were engineers. Why would I know what an engineer does? But two things: First, I was going to school in Kitchener-Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. Kitchener-Waterloo is home to the University of Waterloo, which is one of the largest engineering schools in Canada. So it's kind of in your face. And there is no reason I shouldn't have known what an engineer does.

Second, remember that I was a Star Trek fan. If you know anything about Star Trek, you know that one of the main characters in Star Trek is Chief *Engineer* Montgomery Scott. And on the Starship Enterprise, Scotty takes care of the ship and does all sorts of interesting technical things. Why I had never connected that with engineering, and realized what an engineer does, I couldn't tell you.

After that meeting with my guidance counselor, I went home in a real daze, thinking, "Gosh, I am so stupid. Why have I never connected these things?" And I guess I did get things together because I did progress in the sciences, and I actually did very well later on with just a couple of stumbles. Frankly, I think if I had realized earlier on what an engineer did, I might have gravitated towards engineering much earlier. And I think marine and freshwater biology would have lost a pretty good scientist!

Maybe, on balance, that's a win. Still, it's a bit of a shame, because I limited my choices. Why did that come about? Well, one reason was that people pretty much ignored me. I seemed competent, and they figured I knew what I was doing. So they never asked me questions. But, on the other hand, I never asked critical questions. And that was a big mistake.

The morals of my story? One: We need to ask questions, even (apparently) dumb questions. I now try to ask a dumb question every day. You've got to be curious, you've got to learn all you can, and you've got to ask questions.

Two: We shouldn't make assumptions about what people are doing or how the world works, because sometimes those assumptions are really awful. Put simply, you don't know what you don't know.

Three: We've really got to give each other grace in listening to each other and in answering "dumb" questions. Because sometimes each of us can be dumb -- and that's a universal human disability.

*To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.*



**About the Author-** John A Berges is a Professor of Biology at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A native of Ontario, Canada, Berges' research focuses on the biochemistry and ecology of marine and freshwater plankton, and has taken him to the UK, Europe and Australia. He mentors students from under-represented minorities, and those with disabilities.

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# The Magician's Trick (Pears)

by Joan Leotta

I brought Aunt Claudia a box of Comice pears to celebrate her 95th birthday. Her favorite. She opened the box.

"Green globes, soft to the touch. Ripe. Like me," she sighed.

"You're not green," I protested.

"But at my age, I am certainly ripe." Her eyes twinkled. "Let me thank you with a story."

She began: "Once there were pears whose juices ran down the chin when you bit into the sweet creamy flesh. Only rich folks could buy them. The farmer who brought them to market refused to give one to a starving beggar, even to sell him a bruised one for a reduced price.

"That same afternoon, a magician bought one for the required silver dime. He devoured the entire pear, except for the seeds. With a flourish, he planted the pear seeds right there! One by one he dropped them into the slim trough of a sidewalk crack."

Auntie took a pear out of the box and bit into its soft green skin. The white inner flesh gleamed and liquid sweetness dripped down her chin. The drops shone like dew on a fine old rose.

"Good!" Auntie proclaimed.

I jumped up with a napkin to blot up the pear's transgressing stream of juice. I laid the napkin on her lap.

"Have a pear with me." She gestured toward the box.

I hesitated. The pears were for her.

She smiled and continued the story between bites.

"The magician waved his hand over the newly planted seeds. Instantly, a fully-grown, fruit-laden tree sprouted up. He offered his pears to all, free of charge. The beggar took the first perfect specimen.

"The merchant was amazed. He also ate one of the magician's pears and found it to be as good as his own.

"When the pears were gone, the crowd dispersed. The magician quickly vanished into the alleys around the market. The merchant turned to pick up his cart to move it to a busier corner.

"His cart was almost empty! He shivered and then realized the pears given out by the magician had been his own. The tongue of his wooden cart had been the tree. The magician's art was in making the pears seem new, the magician's 'trick' had been to share even when the merchant was unwilling."

Auntie placed the pear remains, full of seeds, on the napkin I had given her. I stole a look at my watch. Was it time to leave yet? I did not have much time to give that day. So busy.

She waved her hand over the box of pears and repeated, "Have one."

In that moment, enchanted, I recalled the years of magic she had given me in stories, love, and gifts of favorite things. I sat back in my chair, devoured both the pear and tale and shared a cart full of hours with her.

*Please Note: "The Magician's Trick (Pears)," previously published online by Spelk, in 2015 was selected in 2016, by Centre College's Norton Center for the Arts, to be a part of an exhibition where artists created visual art to accompany stories. This work was one of only eleven chosen from many literary submissions.*

*To be retold in the reteller's own words in educational or professional settings with attribution.*



## About the Author-

Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage. She performs tales featuring food, family, and strong women. Internationally and widely published, she's a 2021, 2022 Pushcart nominee, Best of the Net 2022 nominee, 2022 runner-up, Robert Frost Competition. Her chapbook, *Feathers on Stone*, is from Main Street Rag.

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# **-THAT'S AMAZING!-**

**Behind the scenes of great performers.**



## On Making *The Heron's Journey*

by Adam Booth

*The Heron's Journey* is a performance art piece that uses spoken storytelling, quilting, and paper sculpture to tell an allegory filled with magic, challenges to opposition, and transformation. That's a real mouthful, huh? So what is it really? From the very first sketches I knew this story would be a wonder tale made for very contemporary audiences. I had in mind the generation of youth across central Appalachia with whom I regularly work: a very forward-thinking group of people who are geographically isolated but technologically connected. This group is connected to the land, incredibly accepting, and often moves with chosen pronouns and identity fluidity. I wanted them to have a special story in which they could see themselves.



Credit: Pangtography

I also knew the story needed to be about the death of old identity and replacement with new. This idea is archetypal; I think of so many religious stories. It also resonates in Appalachia: young people struggle to understand who they are in a region bearing deep scars the coal mining industry left a century ago. I kept coming back to building a story about the swan song. But early in the creation process, while walking the Ohio River banks in my hometown, I realized swans didn't factor into my own Appalachian identity. Herons did. This early shift from a swan to a heron as the main character opened gates of creativity, especially when I realized the **heron's** journey was somewhere between **hero's** and **heroine's**, just like my intended audience. Then, when a heron passed over my head on the riverbank, I had a vision of this happening over the audience.

So, as I crafted the story, I worked with other West Virginia artists to develop visual elements. I contacted printmaker Sarah Brown (Questionable Press), whose 3D paper sculptures I had seen in shops showcasing regional art. I told her about my project, and how I wanted herons to fly over the audience, asking if she could create birds even though I wasn't sure how to fly them. A caveat: I wanted them large, but they had to be able to fit into an overhead carry-on bag. Sarah is an exceptional visual thinker and delivered an incredible product that stuns every audience every time. After lots of conversations with my Dad, and then puppeteers Paul Strickland and Erika Kate MacDonald, I landed on a handle system that allows the audience to pass the bird sculptures over their heads and then surround me onstage as a de facto backdrop for a portion of the story.





Credit: Pangtography

The idea of storytelling quilts was also swirling in my head, so I reached out to quilter Amy Pabst to see if she would contribute a quilt to the project I could use in telling the story. Our conversations led to a two-sided quilt, something she'd never heard of and had to devise a method to create. One side is traditional Birds In Flight blocks, a pattern that has freedom connotations. The other side is appliqué of the very final image in the story which isn't revealed until that moment. It turns out that the quilt can be folded in different ways to make bird shapes, which changed the way I developed and tell the narrative. Through the entire creation process, my collaborators' contributions caused me to rethink the story and how I was crafting it.

And third, I spent some time with choreographer Toneta Akers-Toler. Our goal was not to design a dance for the story, but rather to work on physical vocabulary from which I could draw while telling the story. I wanted to be able to look like a bird when I needed to, and I definitely wanted this story's movements to have a unique look. Toneta taught me about body carriage, lines, and balance. West Virginia recognizes storytelling as art, and a grant from the State helped make these collaborations possible.



Knowing that these visual elements might come across as gimmicky, I knew the narrative needed to be strong enough to stand on its own. Because one of my goals was to give the intended community a story that made their identities feel holy, I spent a lot of time studying Torah, specifically Bereshit (Genesis), and how it reveals ideas of creation. I also studied Penelope Farmer's book *Beginnings* for a comparison of world creation stories. I spent a lot of time thinking about how to tell a long story about transformation that could relate to a general audience, which meant a lot of revisions to broaden elements that were initially intended solely for the goal audience. I didn't want to exclude the general audience! The result is a three-part story. First, an original wonder tale that builds courage in the main character, Lake, who never felt comfortable in his own skin and who fights an evil king with his strongest weapon: the word no. Then, a middle section where Lake breaks the king's spell and turns into his true identity: a blue heron. Thinking a heron rookery will yield a home community, the birds reject Lake for not understanding how to live as a heron, and for changing into one instead of being born as one. Finally, a third section where Lake must continue the journey toward full transformation by submerging in a special legendary water, after which a golden tree explains ideas of acceptance, continual growth, and rest.

I am very fortunate that *The Heron's Journey* was selected for the 2024-2025 Mid Atlantic Arts Touring Roster, which has provided support for appearances in that region. And because we designed the show to be one that can travel easily, I hope to share it with communities across the country. The story's themes of journeying, spirituality, transformation, and self-acceptance have touched members of every audience where it has been shared, allowing me to hear a lot of related stories during the after-show period. Such community-building is central to orature, so I hope to share it with many more audiences to come.

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*To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.*



**About the Author-** Adam Booth creates original, forward-thinking story artistry with an awareness of contemporary Appalachia. He is the 2022 West Virginia Folk Artist of the Year, awarded at the Governor's Arts Awards. His professional appearances include premiere arts events across the United States, such as the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage and the National Storytelling Festival.

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# -PUZZLES and GAMES-

"Curiouser and curiouser!"

## A Riddle For You

There is one for every day,  
And one for every night,  
One for every traveled way,  
And one for every flight.

Faithfully your course pursue,  
And, whether you are slow or fast,  
If you keep on, 'tis very true,  
You'll come to it at last.

 SB

Last Issue's Answer: A Hole.



# LOST WORD SOCIETY

by Carmen Agra Deedy

The mornings are a little crisper and summer is preparing to leave us for another year. Soon the trees will be putting on their annual dazzling riots of color and days will get noticeably shorter. It is autumn and perhaps a time to reflect on what we have harvested over the last year and what we plan to plant for the coming year. What stories have you gathered, what words have you sown? What ideas are germinating in your fertile imagination? What stories are rising up and are yearning to be told? What stories need more time (and distance) to mature? What projects are winding down to a conclusion? What new ones will you take on? The possibilities are exciting.

Regarding possibilities, in each issue we will give you an archaic, obsolete, or otherwise “lost” word. We will make up three silly definitions of the word, mostly incorrect, to amuse ourselves and hopefully you, dear reader. Your job is to make up another definition, a haiku, a story, or even a five-person play about the lost word. The challenge, should you decide to accept it, is for you to use your new creation in a story, just for fun. Next month we will publish the true definition of the “lost” word and provide you with another one. Have fun!

For more fun, go to Carmen Agra Deedy’s LOST WORD SOCIETY at <https://www.facebook.com/carmenagradeedy> for new words every weekend.

## YWIS (adv.) Obsolete.

**Pronounced: EE-wis**

- 1) Title given to a village elder known for having superior wisdom.
- 2) An expression of contempt or derision regarding the unlikelihood of someone’s proposal being accepted.
- 3) A siege engine used to launch large numbers of live toads and little, green frogs over castle walls to force the defenders to surrender and give them warts.

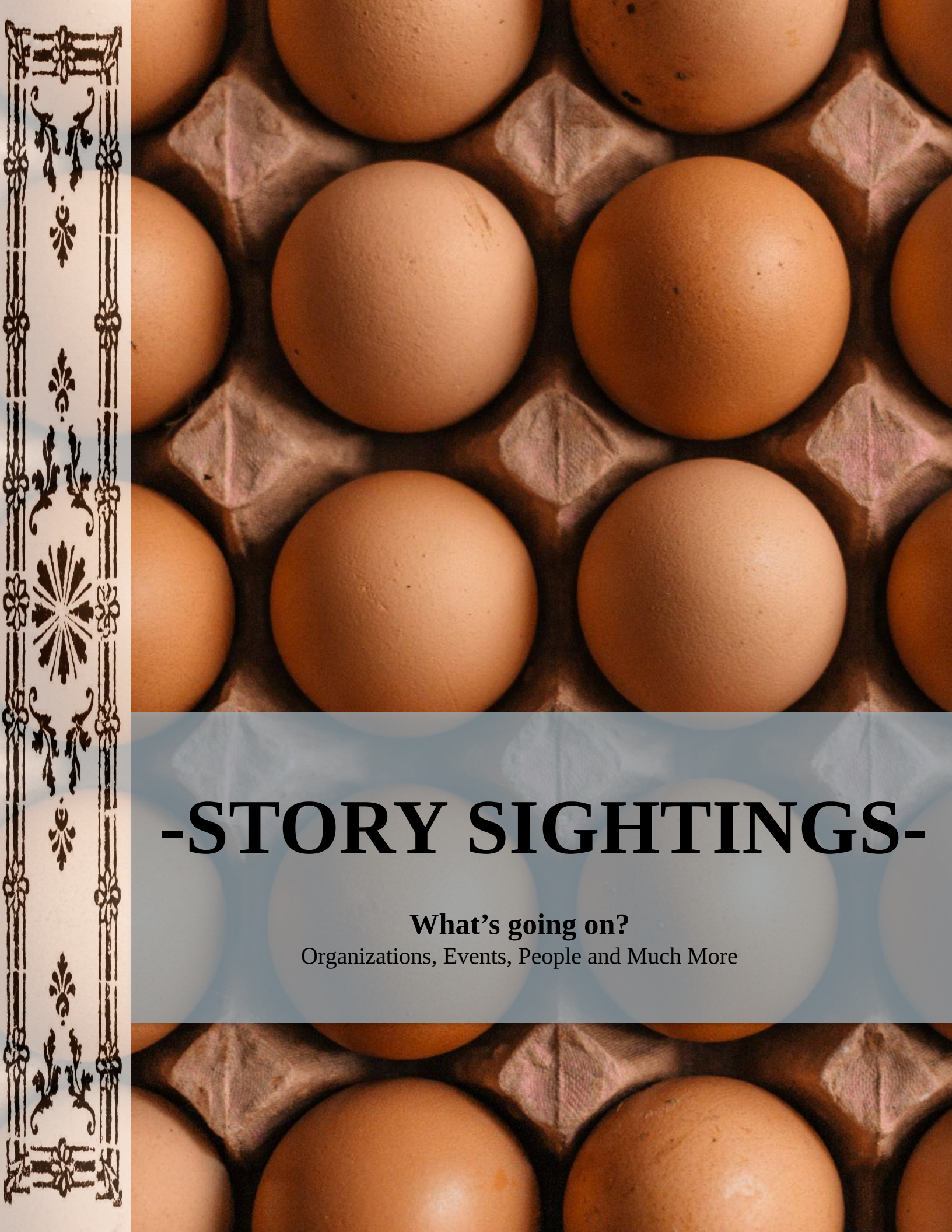
Last Month’s Lost Word:

**SLUBBERDEGULLION (n.) Archaic.** - a lazy or slothful person; the modern term “couch potato” springs to mind. Many of us were slubberdegullions at the height of pandemic isolation, methinks.



For more fun explore:  
**Carmen Agra Deedy’s LOST WORD SOCIETY**  
at [facebook.com/carmenagradeedy](https://www.facebook.com/carmenagradeedy)  
for new words every weekend!



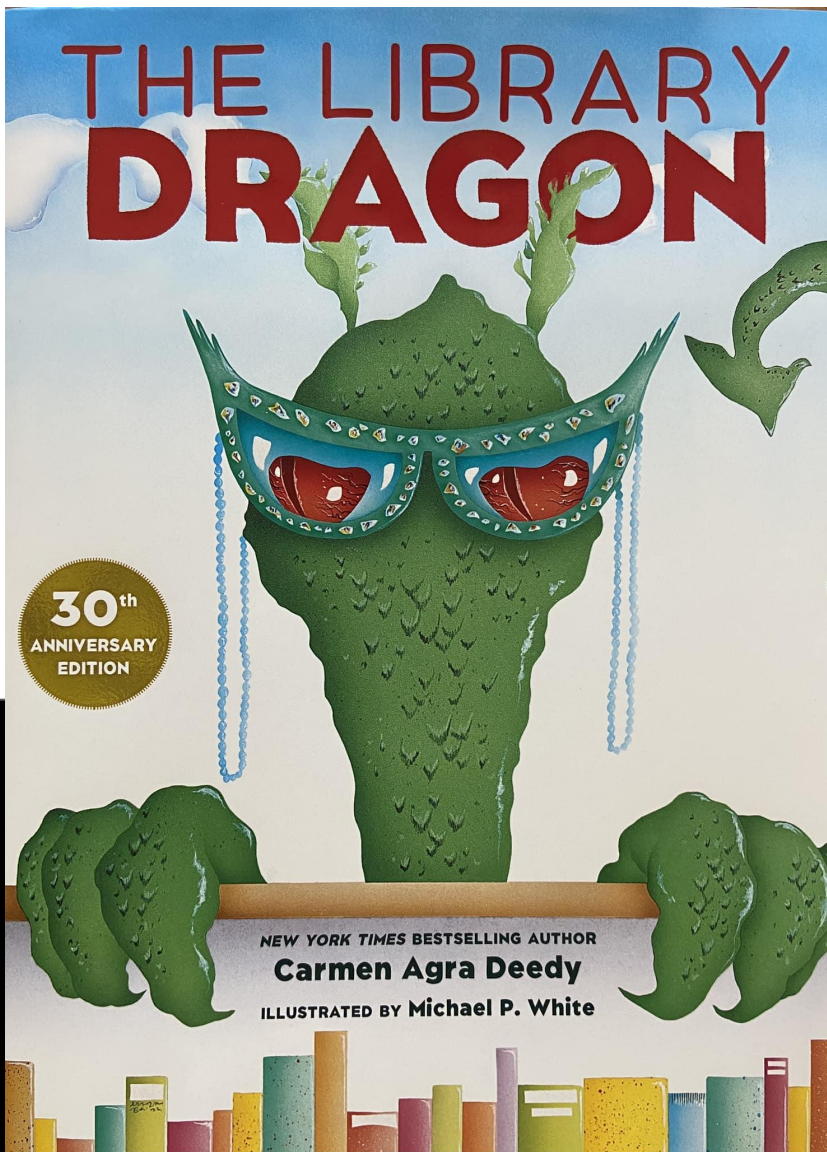


# -STORY SIGHTINGS-

**What's going on?**

Organizations, Events, People and Much More





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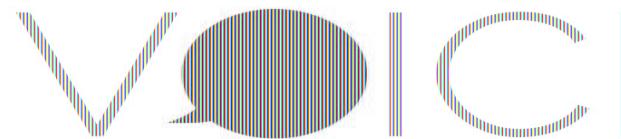
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# Storytelling

## "Brimming with heart, grace, and grit ...

... These stories from the Texas Storytelling Festival shimmer and sparkle like a radiant Texas sunset. Celebrate four decades of captivating storytelling, from true, heartfelt personal narratives resonating with raw honesty, to the rhythmic cadence of cowboy poetry echoing across the vast landscape, to tales taller than the towering Texas Sky and stretching wider than the expansive horizon. Each of these diverse stories reflects the gentle humor and generous spirit which define the Texan soul. *Forty Years of Texas Storytelling* is a celebration of tradition and the enduring legacy that is the Texas Storytelling Festival."

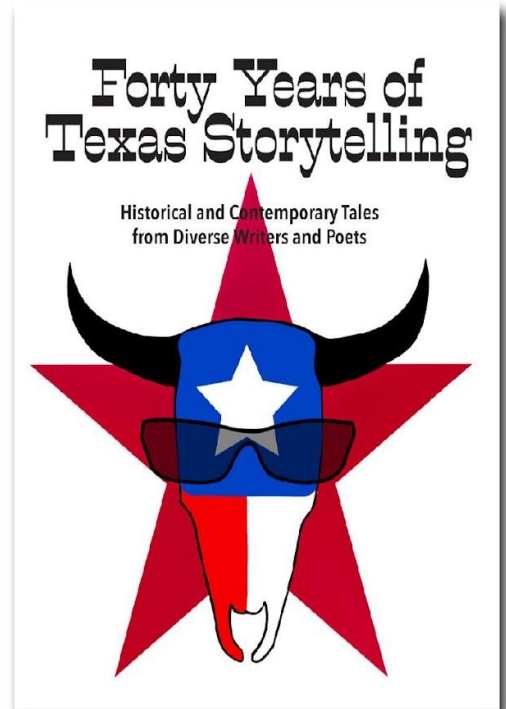
—**Alton Takiyama-Chung**, Storyteller (altonchung.com) and Editor-In-Chief of *The Story Beast*, a quarterly e-Publication dedicated to the art of storytelling (storybeast.org)

"**A gleaming of engaging tales** from the Texas Storytelling Festival that will leave you chuckling and, in some cases, weeping. I loved the chance to peek into the Texan lifestyle via tales of living in ... or moving to ... Texas."

—**Margaret Read MacDonald**, Folklorist, author, storyteller, and former librarian

"**A love of oral storytelling** imbues this celebratory book with the flavors of many cultural traditions that call Texas home. Share these stories with your family, your classroom, and faith community."

—**Kiran Singh Sirah**, past president, International Storytelling Center



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**March 2024**

"**This book is a tour de force—a wonderful snapshot of storytelling in Texas.** I didn't want it to end. The history of the Texas Storytelling Festival is fascinating and beautifully written. And the stories that follow, from a broad range of tellers, styles, and experiences, are each gems in their own right. "The stories range from educational to stirring, from humorous to mysterious. They are personal tales, folk tales, and historical stories, from a variety of different cultures, recognizing the fascinating quilt that is Texas.

"Many of the tellers have won a John Henry Faulk award. I smiled when I saw that, as I knew John Henry and his British-born wife Elizabeth when I first lived in Texas in my early twenties. I know that he would have loved these stories—many written for the ear and not the eyes, so you can almost hear them being told. He would have reveled in their charm, their variety, and poignancy. And so did I. I thoroughly recommend this marvelous book."

—**Geraldine Buckley**, storyteller and author



The **TSA Fortieth Anniversary Book Committee** of Jaye McLaughlin, Hank Roubicek, Peggy Helmick-Richardson, and Chester Weems would like to make a special tribute to Parkhurst Brothers Publishers, for its part in development of *Forty Years of Texas Storytelling*. To them, this was more than a business project.

Ted Parkhurst has been a longtime supporter of the Tejas Storytelling Association. He has provided exhibits, moderated sessions, and given overall support for many years, and not just to Tejas, but storytelling across the nation. Ted and his wife, Linda, the lead graphic designer on this project, have gone an extra mile to see this book through to completion. We appreciate them.



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Updated in May 2013 with improved hinting and released under the Apache 2.0 license.

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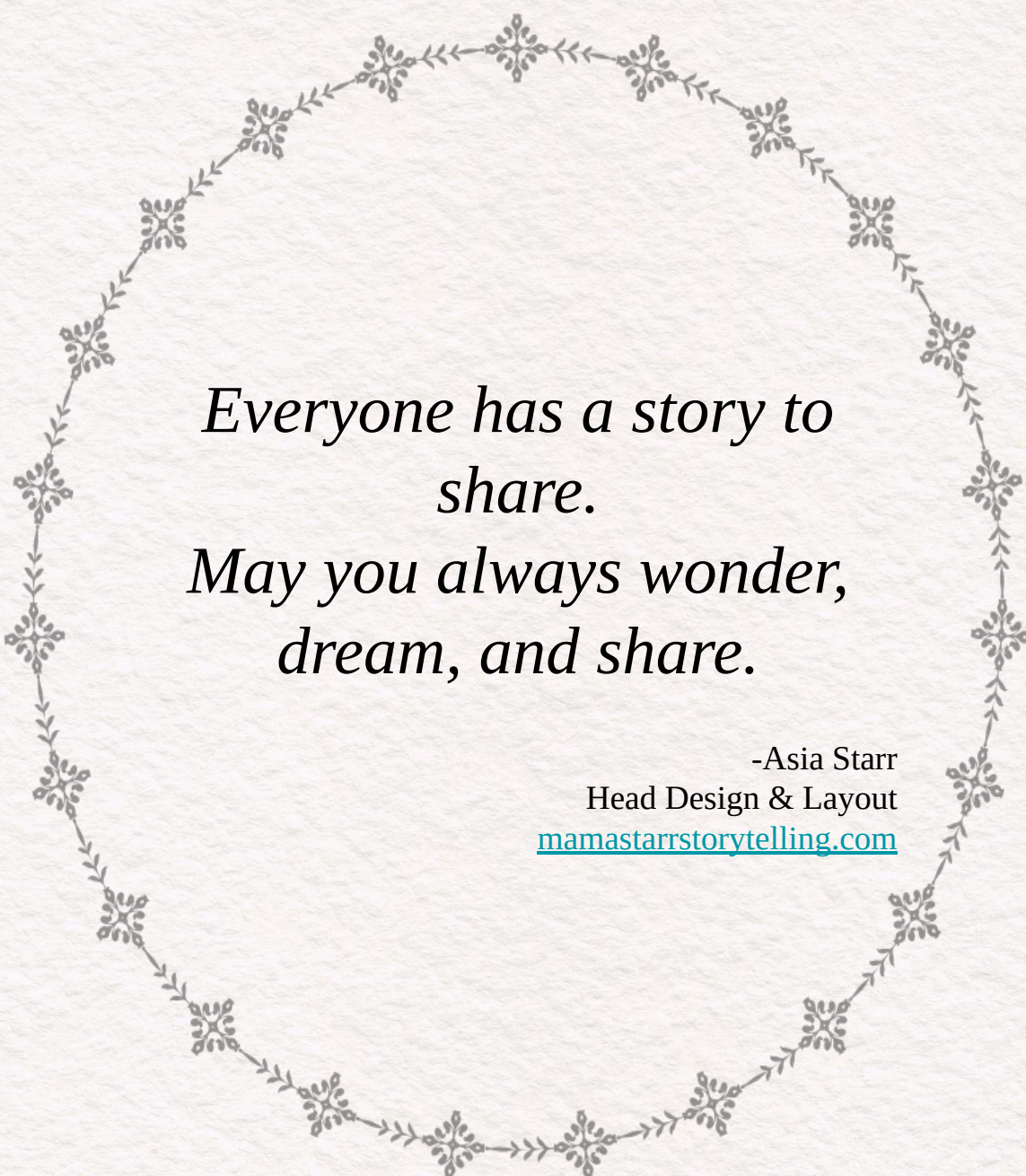
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*Everyone has a story to  
share.*

*May you always wonder,  
dream, and share.*

-Asia Starr  
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Thoughts? Feedback? Feelings?  
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