

Summer 2025 Vol.4 - Issue 2

THE STORY BEAST

For Story Artists, Listeners, and Dreamers

SIZZLING SPLENDOR





About the Cover Artist

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](#). You can usually find her telling her stories to an audience of children ranging from preschool to high school. 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 2025-26 Themes

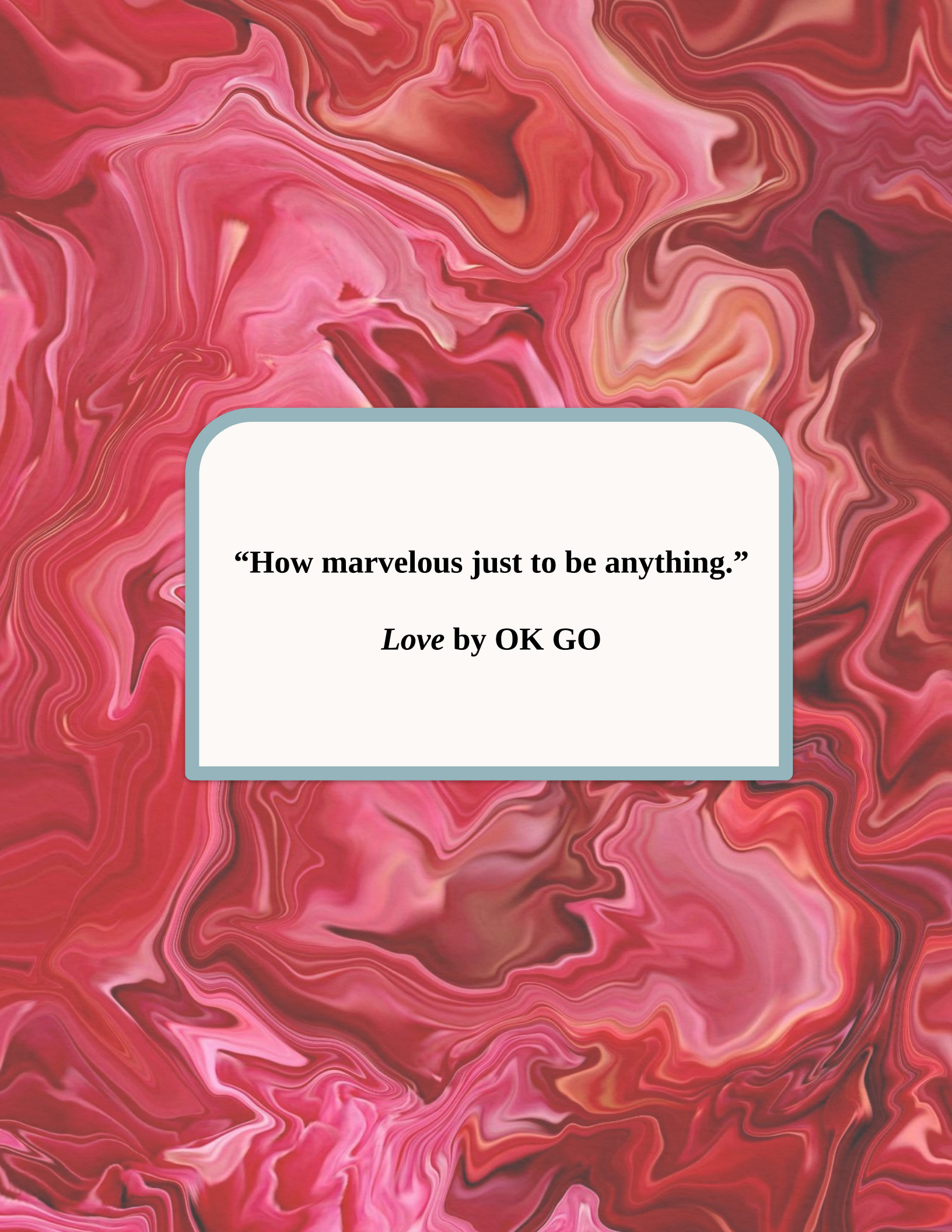
Fall - Quirky Quandaries - Due Aug 15

Winter - Frosted Glass - Due Nov 15

Spring - Boisterous Blooms - Due Feb 15

Summer - Cerulean Sighs - Due May 15



The background of the entire image is a vibrant, swirling pattern of pink, red, and orange, resembling marbled paper or a liquid paint effect. In the center, there is a white rectangular box with rounded corners and a thin blue border.

“How marvelous just to be anything.”

Love by OK GO

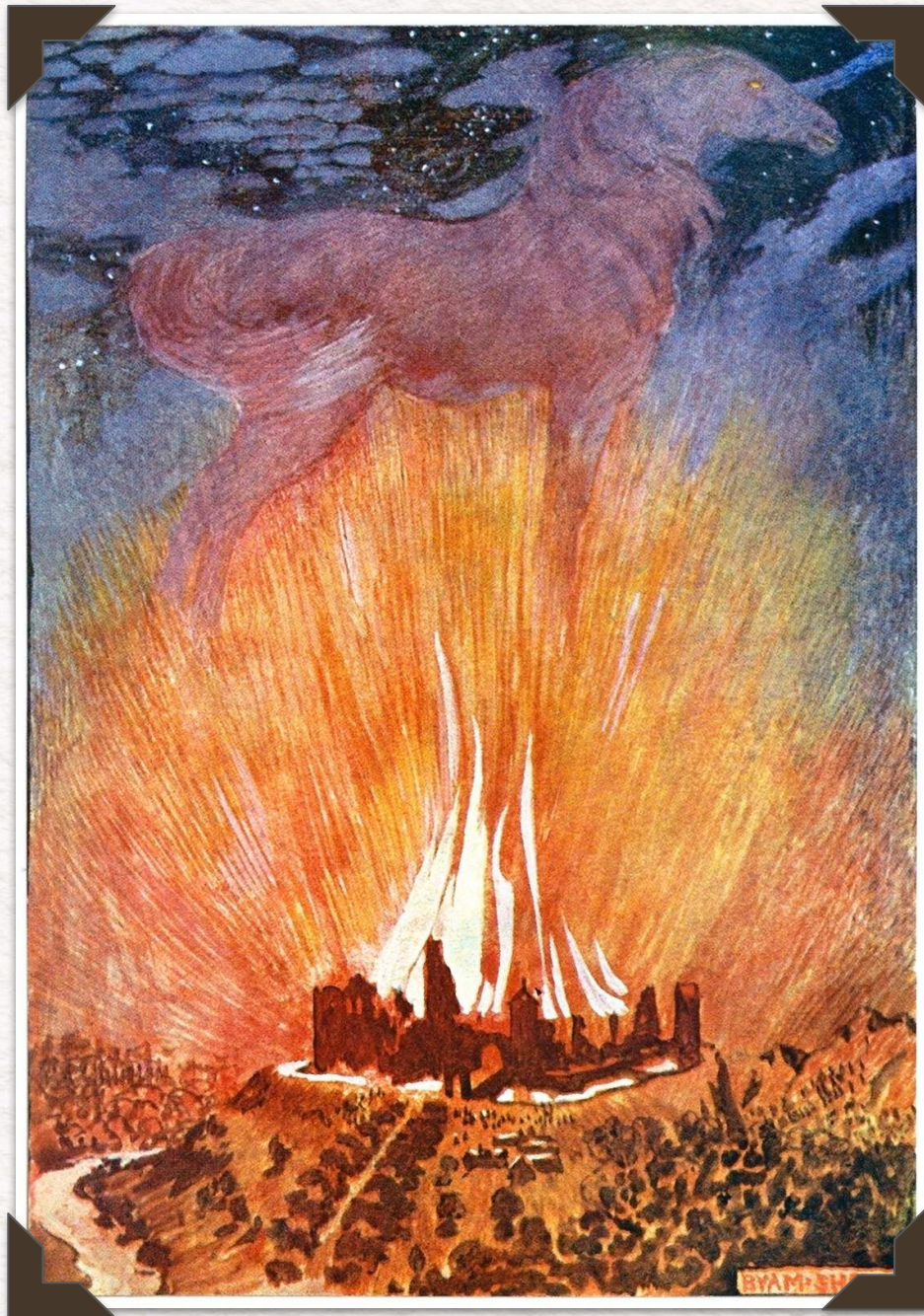


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Sizzling Splendor

Vol. 4 ♦ Issue 2

Summer 2025



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Publisher

The Story Beast
storybeast.org

Editor-in-Chief

Alton Takiyama-Chung

Managing Editors

Sara Armstrong, Rachel Hedman,
Brandon Spars, Asia Starr, Bowen
Lee, Jen & Nat Whitman

Art Department

Head Design & Layout - Asia Starr
Design Assistant - Alex Randall
Cover Art - Asia Starr

Staff Writers

Karen Chace,
Jo Radner

Proofreaders

Sara Armstrong, Ashton C. Clarke,
Via Goode

Contact Information

The Story Beast

Website: storybeast.org

Email: storybeasteditor@gmail.com

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Goody Two Shoes Walter Crane
Wood carving

The Story Beast is produced with the support of Artists Standing Strong Together (ASST).



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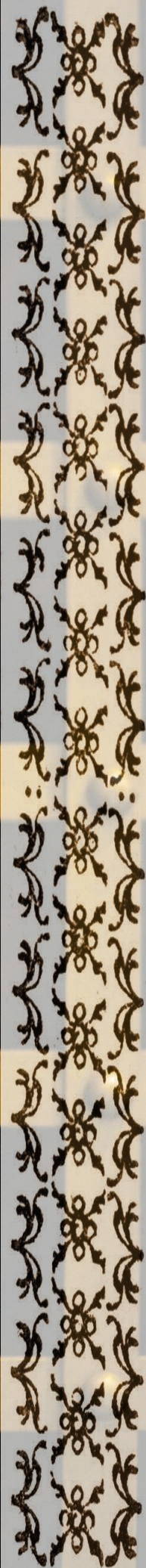
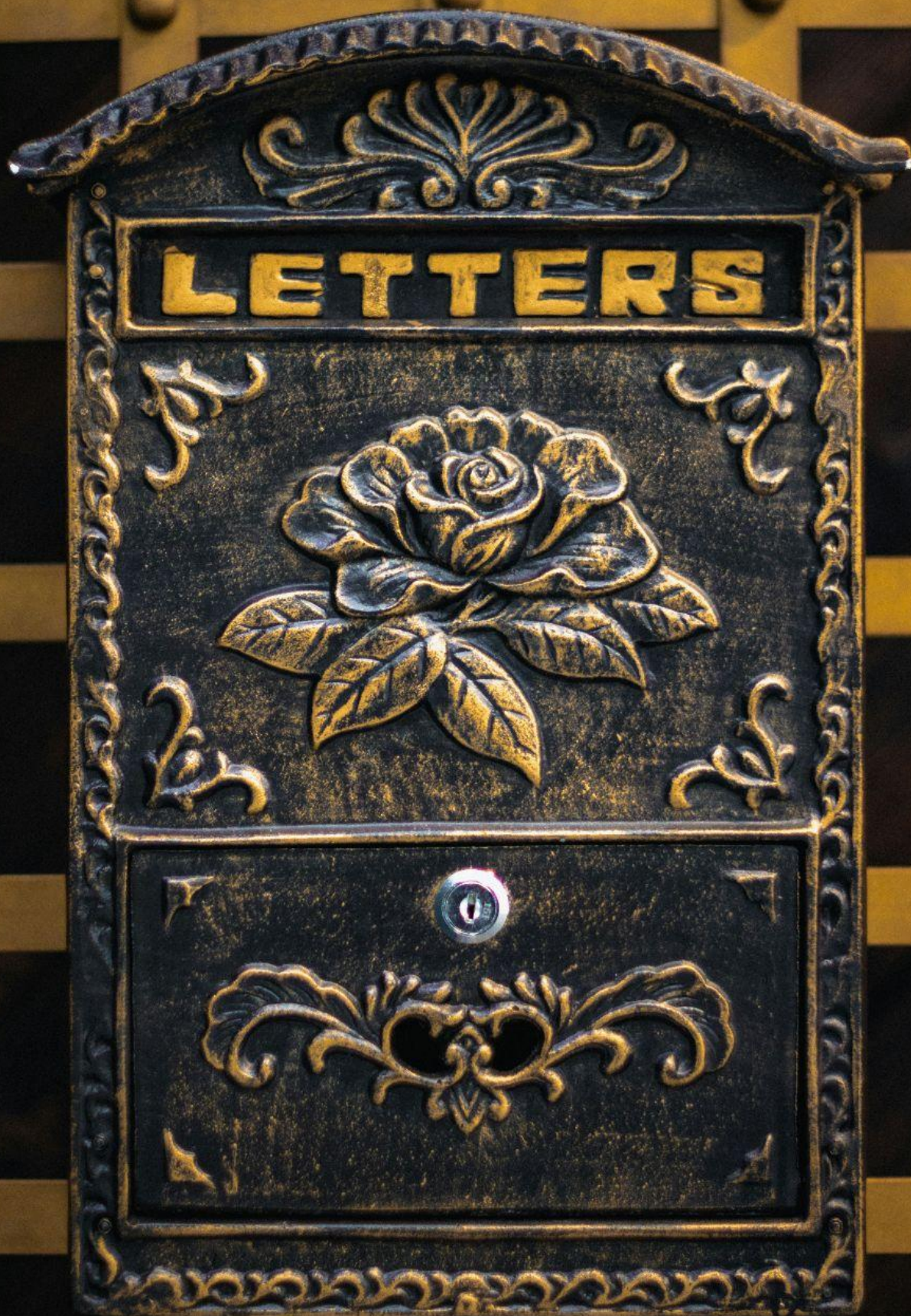
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WELCOME

It is summer, and that means that it is time for the NSN National Conference, this year near Atlanta, GA. The annual conference is like the gathering of the tribe, the meeting of the storytelling clan. It is an opportunity to see old friends and make new ones. It can be an occasion to speak with folks you may have only seen online, and share a meal with colleagues, whom you rarely see in person. It is a chance to learn from masters of our craft, gain new insights from peers and panel discussions, and see curated performances from some of the best tellers in the country.

It can be a large commitment of time and expense to attend the conference. Nevertheless, there is a timely and affordable alternative. Virtual tickets are available and include an all-day live stream from the Stillwell Theater and highlights of conference programming. Events include the Georgia Storytelling Network's regional storytellers' concert, the national concert, the NSN general membership meeting, the ORACLE awards ceremony, and the ORACLE awards concert.

With your virtual ticket, you can interact with fellow virtual attendees, as well as the folks in the theater through the live chat. Got schedule conflicts? No worries. You can catch up on the four days of programming at your own pace and convenience with the recordings. The links for viewing the recordings will be active until the end of September 2025.

Whether you are in person or there virtually, take advantage of this once-a-year opportunity to connect with other members of our storytelling tribe. Improve your craft, make new friends, and be inspired by your family of choice.

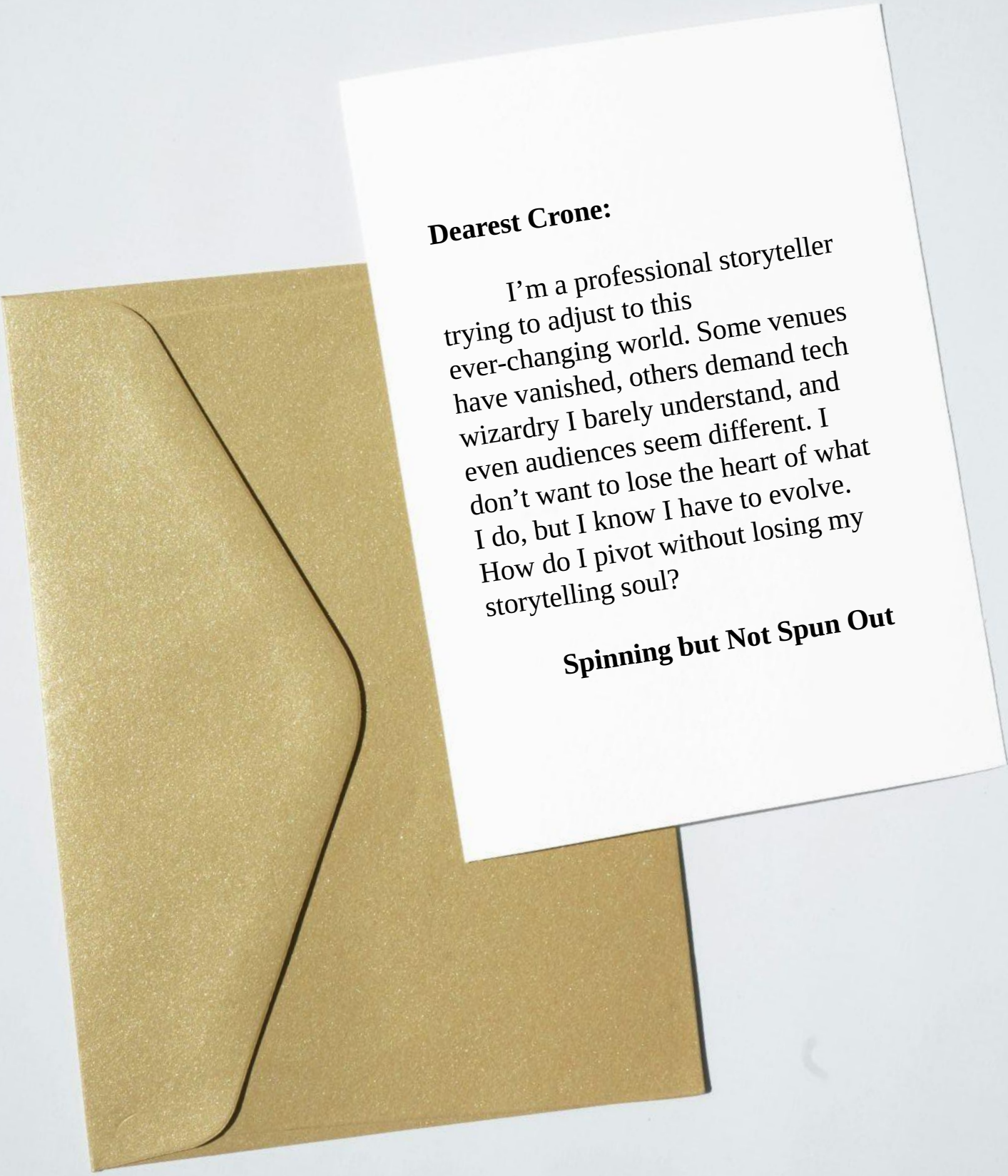
The Story Beast is your quarterly e-Publication forum and is your place of community. Please share your creative works -- poems, stories, artwork, or articles -- with us and let your friends know about *The Story Beast*. Let us know what you think and send your contributed works to storybeasteditor@gmail.com.

The deadline for contributions for the next issue of *The Story Beast* is August 15 for the Fall 2025 issue. The autumn issue's theme is Quirky Quandaries. Thanks for reading. See you all at the Conference, and enjoy the summer.

Respectfully,

The Spirits of the Beast

storybeasteditor@gmail.com

A brown envelope is shown with a white card partially inserted into it. The card contains text and a title. The envelope is positioned diagonally across the frame.

Dearest Crone:

I'm a professional storyteller trying to adjust to this ever-changing world. Some venues have vanished, others demand tech wizardry I barely understand, and even audiences seem different. I don't want to lose the heart of what I do, but I know I have to evolve. How do I pivot without losing my storytelling soul?

Spinning but Not Spun Out

Dear Spinning:

Oh, how familiar your footsteps sound, echoing on the path between “what was” and “what next.” You’re not alone — I’ve known many a bard and tale-spinner who has stood at the edge of this particular cliff, cloak flapping in the wind, wondering if the leap would be survival or surrender. Let me tell you: it’s a rite of passage, not a defeat.

Let’s begin where all true magic starts — with the bones.

Reaffirm Your Mission, Child

The world will demand glitter, gadgets, and gimmicks. Resist the urge to chase every passing trend like a pixie on cider. Instead, hold fast to your story’s heart. What remains unchanged when the skies split and the crowds scatter? That is your true north, and no pivot is worth making if it turns you from it.

Listen With Your Third Ear

Your audience is not the same. They’re wearier, warier, perhaps a bit wiser — or wounded. So don’t speak at them. Speak with them. Ask what they need, and not only when you have a show to sell. The best storytellers have always been the best listeners, their tales shaped like water to fit the vessel of the times.

Embrace Form as a Trickster’s Tool

Format is not identity. You are no less a storyteller on a screen than beside a bonfire. Whether you whisper into a mic, type into a caption, or perform beside a pop-up puppet stage, the tale can still thrum with soul. Flexibility is not betrayal — it is evolution.

Narrate the Pivot Itself

You’re not hiding a change — you’re inviting others to witness your transformation. Speak plainly. Say, “Here’s how I used to share stories, and here’s how I’m doing it now.” Your community will come not in spite of the shift, but because they trust the teller within it.

Use Technology as You Would a Wand

Only if it serves. Only if it enhances wonder, not distracts from it. No need to cast fireballs when a flicker will do. The tool should fit the hand, not twist it.

And if coins are tight — be the clever mouse.

Find new paths: offer short tale scrolls for sale, trade stories for gold in workshops, partner with others who seek the magic you offer. Diversify, yes, but always stay true. Even an old crone sells charms from time to time, but never her name.

Now, I promised you something for the satchel — tomes that will light your lantern:

Emergent Strategy by Adrienne Maree Brown — Dewey 303.4

Storyworthy by Matthew Dicks — Dewey 153.6

The Freelancer's Bible by Sara Horowitz — Dewey 331.25

So go now, my windswept wayfarer. Shift, adapt, but never abandon the ember that lit your first tale. The story doesn't end at the fork in the road — it begins again, stronger, stranger, and more necessary than ever.

May your voice carry like a crow's cackle across the valley, and your pivot be as graceful as a cat leaping from roof to roof.

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:

Fall - September 2025 - Quirky Quandaries - Due August 15

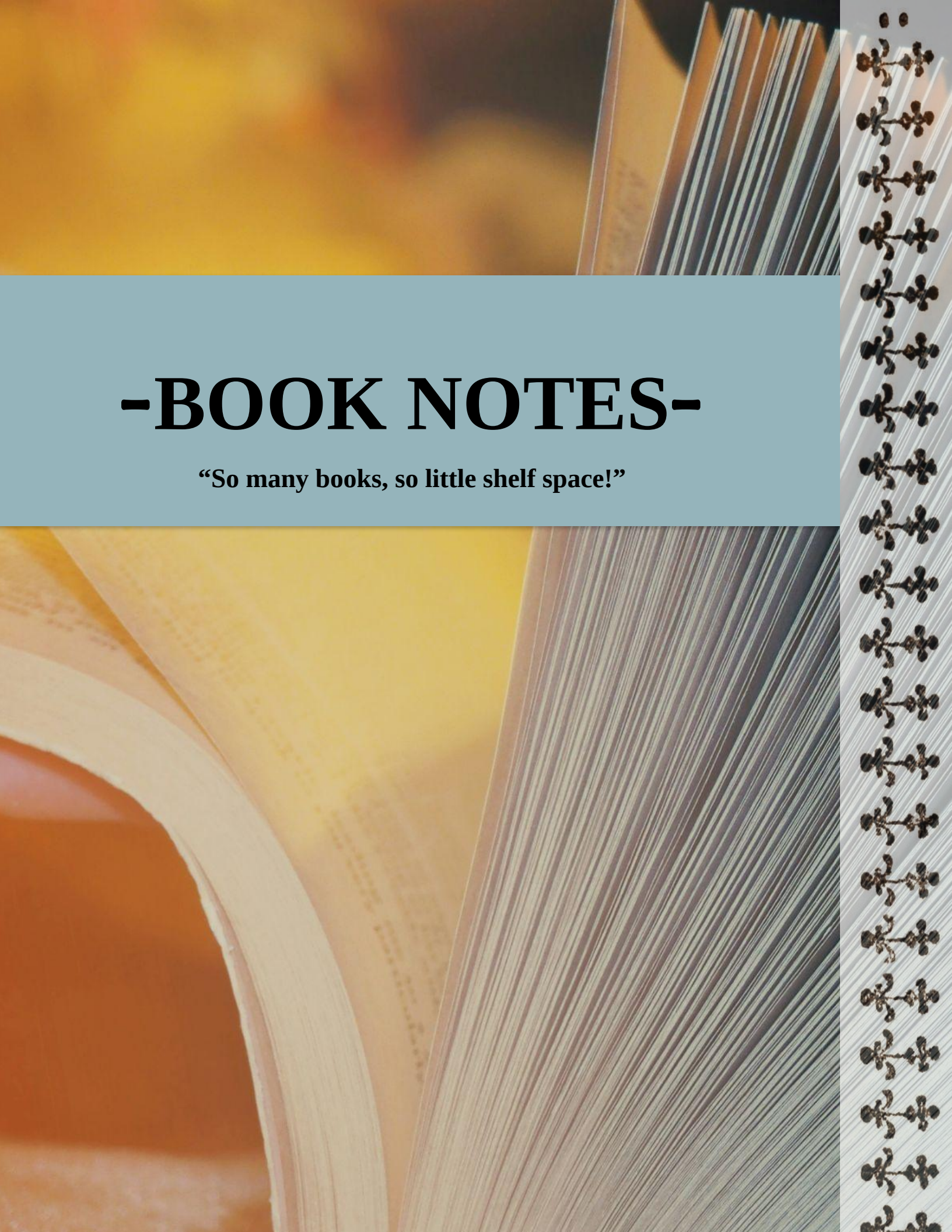
Winter - December 2025 - Frosted Glass - Due November 15

Spring - March 2026 - Boisterous Blooms - Due February 15

Summer - June 2026 - Cerulean Sighs - Due May 15

For Submission Guidelines go to storybeast.org/submissions

Submit to storybeasteditor@gmail.com

The background of the image is a collage. The top half features a warm, orange-toned close-up of book pages. The bottom half shows a similar view but with more distinct, layered pages. On the right side, a vertical strip shows the spiral binding of a notebook, with the metal or plastic rings visible against a light background.

-BOOK NOTES-

“So many books, so little shelf space!”

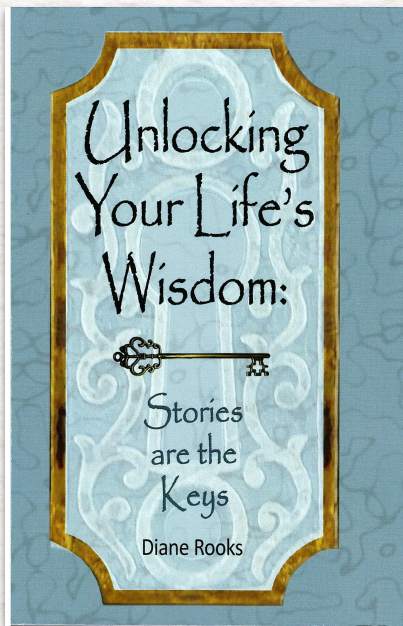
BOOK NOTES

This month's miscellany includes two very different books of autobiography: Jessica Robinson's stories crafted for performance, and Diane Rooks' fluid and comprehensive memoir. Both offer storytelling readers inspiration. We also review a book of coaching tips and a rich collection of trickster tales. AND a bonus: a book of poetry by the late teller Leanne Ponder. Riches!

My usual promise: I will give any book marked with an asterisk (*), FREE, to the first person who requests it by email. I ask only \$5 for postage and handling. (I note each book's list price in parentheses.)

I want MORE books for review! Have you – or has someone you know – published a storytelling collection or a book about the art form in the past two years? Please let me know and I will request a review copy. Thank you.

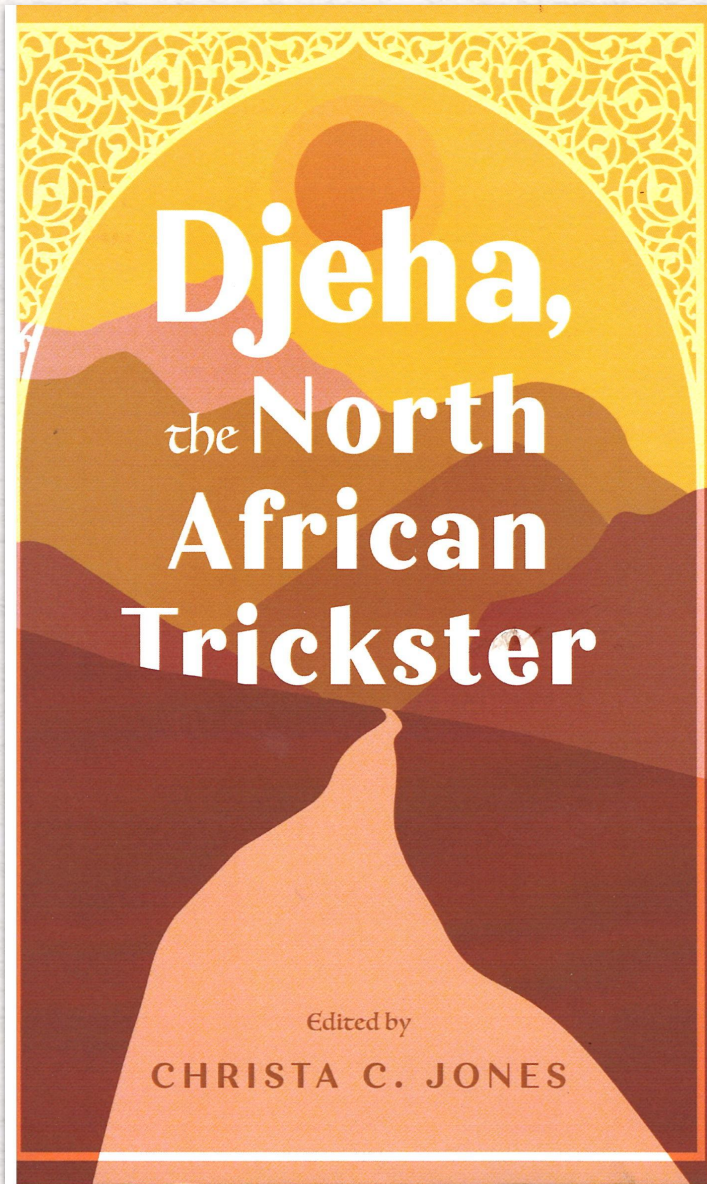
Wishing you many glorious stories,
Jo



***Diane Rooks, *Unlocking Your Life's Wisdom: Stories Are the Keys*. Buford, GA: LAD Publishing, 2022. (\$16.95)**

Reading *Unlocking Your Life's Wisdom* is like accepting an invitation into Diane Rooks' family. Or perhaps, sitting at the knee of a beloved grandparent whose memories uncover a lifetime. Or perhaps, allowing these stories to evoke your own and to inspire you, too, to write your own life memories for future generations. Diane Rooks' stories are not individual performance pieces; they run from one event to another, loosely gathered into chapters by chronological periods from preschool years, through schools and college, adult marriages, parenting, and, finally, grandchildren and retirement at Lake Lanier. Anecdotes are brave and sometimes also funny (the truly dreadful encounter with breast cancer), often enviable (creating "Camp Rooks" -- a three-day institution for family children).

This is an extensive chronicle, full of detail. How can anyone have such a perfect set of memories? I asked myself, wondering whether I am simply inadequate and forgetful. I know that gathering such full accounts is an extraordinary amount of work. Then I realized that just reading Diane's book has helped my own memory fill out my past; that, in fact, I had found some of my own stories in reading hers. And in the process of reading, I had engaged with a delightful storyteller. Recommended highly!



***Christa C. Jones, ed., *Djeha, the North African Trickster*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. (\$30.00)**

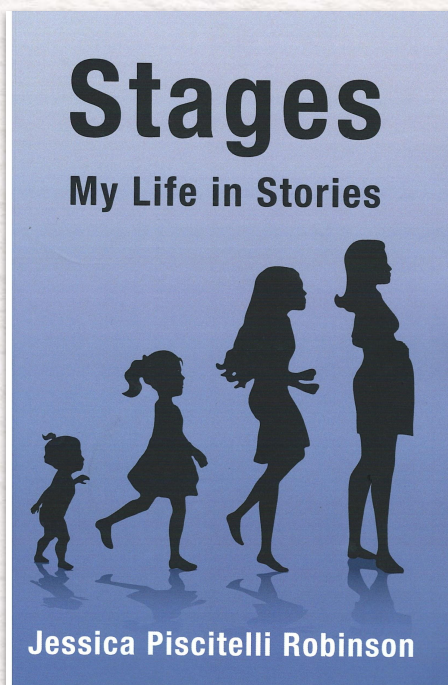
This is a treasure trove! Storytellers who love the trickster tales of Juha, Ch'ha, or their Turkish cousin Nasruddin Hoca will find new delights in these stories of the Berber prankster Djeha. Some will be familiar to those who know other trickster tales in the Middle Eastern and Islamic narrative tradition, but many of these stories from the Maghreb, particularly from Algeria's mountainous Kabylia area, are not well known.

Christa Jones has translated sixty Djeha tales from *Les Fourberies de Si Djeh'a*, an 1892 collection by Auguste Mouli  ras, and has organized them into six thematic groupings: Family and Kinship; Animal Tales; Faces, Places, or Daily Life in the Village; Foodways; The Intricacies of Hospitality; and Religion, Death, and the Afterlife. In sum, Djeha is a classic trickster, amoral, sometimes clever and sometimes ignorant, poor, greedy, hungry, resourceful, and funny. One tiny sample:

Djeha and the Bread

One day, he was traveling with a group of people. His companions bought loaves of bread and sat down for lunch. Djeha said to them, "My children, I cannot eat a whole loaf of bread by myself. Why don't each of you take one loaf of bread and give me half of each loaf. That's all I can eat."

Christa Jones presents far more than a collection of tales. This volume actually gives its reader a comprehensive overview of North African and Islamic trickster folk narratives. Jones' extensive introduction surveys the folkways and reflects on the influence of colonialism on the tradition. In addition, each of the themed chapters is framed by a short essay relating its stories to culture, history, and regional literature. This book is an enormously useful contribution not only to our individual repertoires, but also to our understanding of a fascinating oral heritage.



***Jessica Piscitelli Robinson, *Stages: My Life in Stories*. Columbus, OH: Tucker Press, 2024. (\$19.99)**

Jessica Robinson has performed extraordinary service to the storytelling community in the United States. She has generously applied her professional expertise as a videographer to make innumerable performances, festivals, and conferences accessible to a wide audience. With artistic insight and excellent administrative abilities, she founded and directs Better Said Than Done, the Northern Virginia organization that produces not only regular storytelling shows, but also the widely respected annual Women's Storytelling Festival. And on top of all that, she is a writer and storyteller!

Stages is evidence of that artistic talent. Through a series of crafted stories, Jessica takes readers from her early childhood to her own first years as a mother. This is not a memoir per se -- not a chronological account, though the stories are arranged in roughly chronological order. Instead, each story is a finished composition, sometimes telling events from other stories from different points of view or in different relationship to happenings. Robinson has performed many of these stories on stage; they are shaped as complete units, and readers who are themselves tellers of personal stories will be interested to see the recursive structures. In one story, "Eurydice and Me," Jessica's mother's terminal illness and death serves as a powerful counterpoint to the dysfunction of her first marriage; in another story relating to her mother's death, "I Said I Love You," the focus is on Robinson's personal pain and loss as a daughter.

Readers (and listeners) will find echoes of their own life experiences in these stories. The different miseries attendant on divorce (first her parents', then her own). Adolescent awkwardness, isolation, bullying. Considerable courage in undertaking athletic challenges (SCUBA diving, then marathon running!). Professional challenges as a woman in the very male-dominated film industry. Dating and the (sometimes maddening, sometimes hilarious) search for a life partner. Not to mention agonizing struggles with infertility. A very engaging read, and an interesting set of narrative patterns.

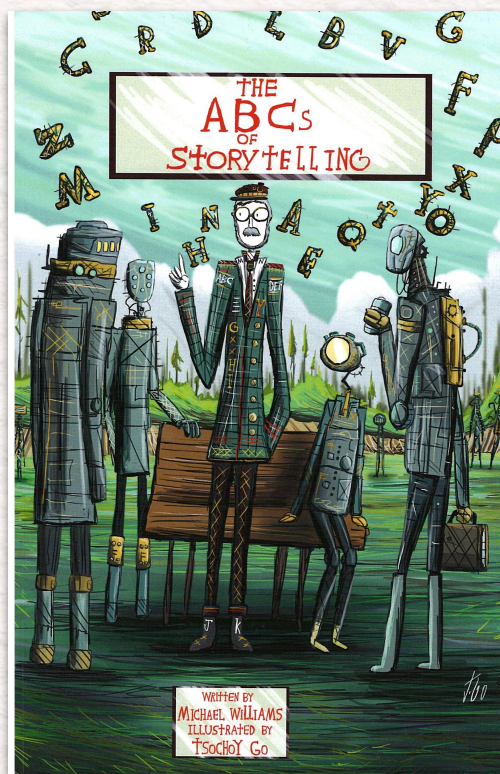
***Michael Williams, *The ABCs of Storytelling: Reflections of a Story Coach*. 2024. ISBN 978-1-0690351-0-3. (\$16.25)**

Writing book chapters based on words arranged in alphabetical order is an appealing challenge. Reassuringly finite -- you have only 26 letters! 26 short chapters! And perhaps there's just enough form to give inspiration and a sense of discovery. Michael Williams, a Canadian storyteller who has also spent much of his professional career in Scotland, has now produced a book arranging his personal tips as a story coach into alphabetical order. He's not the first teller to do this. In 2019 Laura Packer published a wonderful gathering of storytelling wisdom, *From Audience to Zeal: The ABCs of Finding, Crafting, and Telling a Great Story* (Tolleson, AZ: Small-Tooth-Dog Publishing Group; see my review in *Storytelling Magazine*, June 2019). (She broke the one-word-per-letter limit, by the way, and wrote not 26 entries, but 106!)



Not surprisingly, some of the same topics occur in both Williams' and Packer's volumes: Audience, Coaching, Listening, Self-Care, and more. And even in entries with the same topic, the advice is as different as the authors' personalities. Williams' volume will be most helpful for novice tellers, though coaches will also find his teaching tips useful. He includes some good solid advice, for instance, about listening (under "Ear" as well as "Listening"), about personal storytelling (under "I"), and about appreciations ("Golden Moments"). Some entries are sketchy ("Self-Care"). Others are quite interesting and even surprising. "Food" suggests the value of performing eating; "Testimonials" offers excellent tips for gathering testimonials from audiences; "Kitten" recounts a story about a student learning to tell a cat story, in order to describe the importance of vivid physical movements. On one occasion Williams chooses a commonly used term, "Delivery," in order to point out its inadequacy to describe storytelling ("It implies that a story is a package or a commodity").

The extraordinary letters of the alphabet throughout the book are designed by Ontario artist Tsochoy Go.



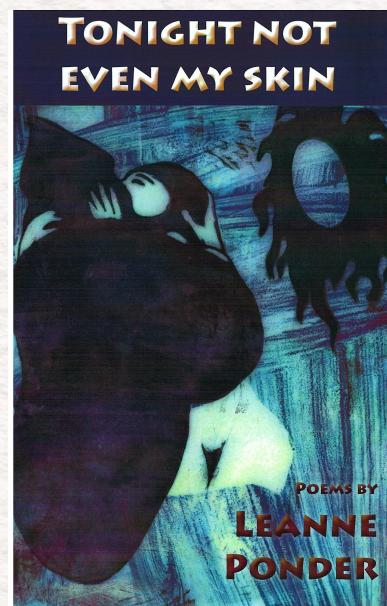
EXTRA! EXTRA! A STORYTELLER'S POETRY!

Those of us who remember with joy the musical storytelling team of Leanne Ponder and her husband Tim Jennings, and who shared the grief of Leanne's death in 2021, will be delighted to know that one more of Leanne's artistic gifts to the world is still available. A few copies remain of *Tonight Not Even My Skin*, a gathering of her poetry. During her illness Leanne, an extraordinary poet whose poems had appeared in national magazines, discovered a forgotten box of her poems, and Tim quickly had them published for her. They are wonderful, sometimes edgy, and varied, ranging from sensitive vignettes of relationship, to sardonic images of human folly, to reflections on folktales ("Rumplestiltskin" is amazing!). Here's just one tiny sample, to whet your appetite:

The Poet

"A page is no place for a poem," he said,
 laying down his pen
 to write a sonnet with his tongue
 on her
 astonished
 Skin.

If you'd like one of the remaining copies, the price is \$10, plus \$2.50 shipping and handling, 12.50 postpaid. Checks should be written to Eastern Coyote Productions, PO Box 522, Montpelier VT 05601. Or email the order to folktale@mac.com and use PayPal or Venmo.



FUTURE PLAN FOR BOOK NOTES

A CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

Some readers have suggested that Book Notes should occasionally recommend books not so new -- books of enduring value in our profession. Great idea! And because we have many, many experts in our community, I am opening up a new feature for us to share:

Which books about storytelling have you found most valuable in your storytelling career?

Please send me (jradner@american.edu) the title, author, and publication information for one or two books you feel are a must-read for storytellers --

AND

a few sentences describing what you personally find most useful about your choice.

I'll make reader recommendations a feature of Book Notes, going forward.

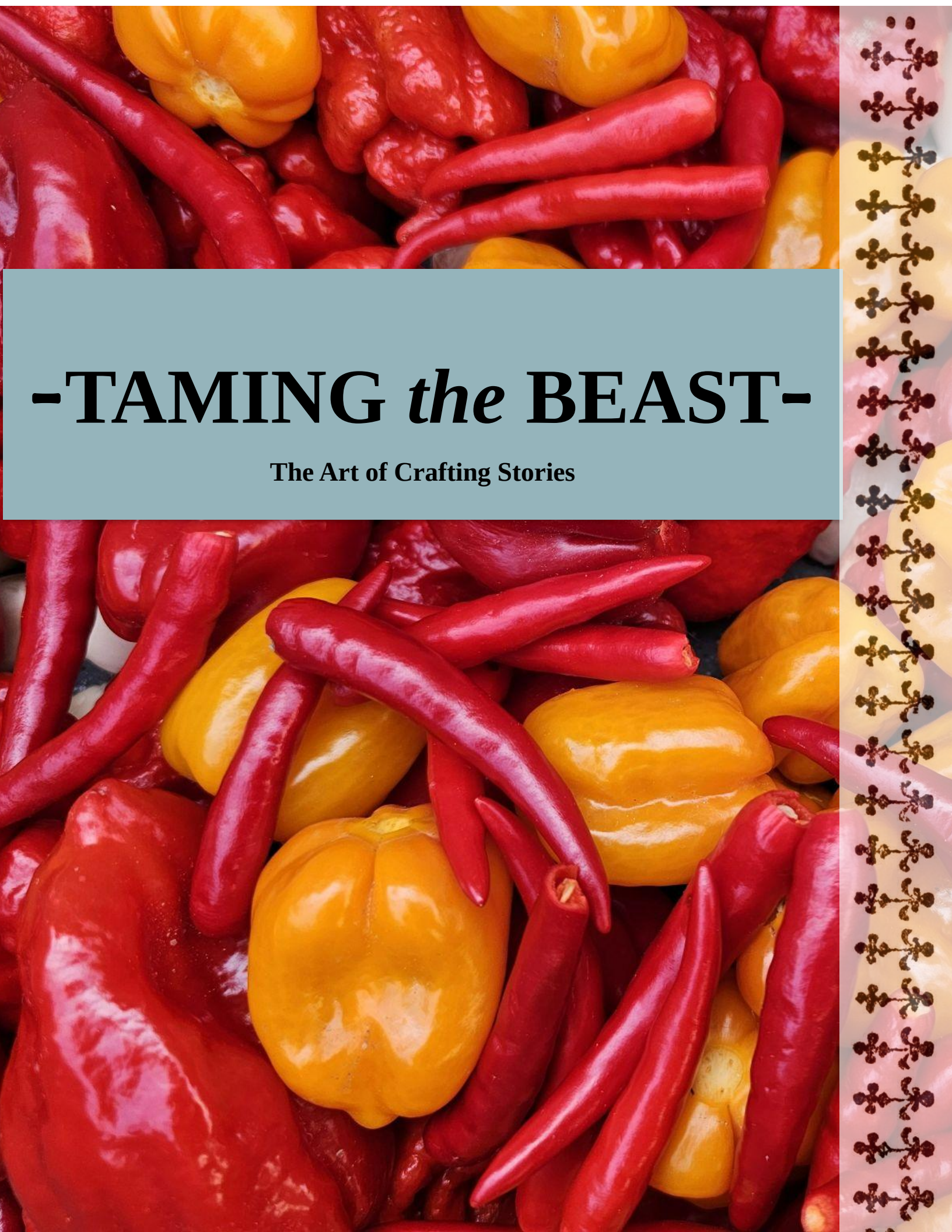
Eager to hear from you,

Jo



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



-TAMING *the* BEAST-

The Art of Crafting Stories



EMBODIED TELLING

Enlisting Breath, Muscle, Heart, and Mind

by Karen De Mauro

Stories dwell in the physical body as living beings inhabit a house. They gestate, develop, and wait to emerge when their name is called. They nest inside us, ready to tell when the time is right. A long myth like “Cupid and Psyche” asks us to pass through several stages of development, to visit many rooms of meaning, and to actively explore and incorporate its vital processes. For me, any journey, especially through the inner and outer places of a story, is first and foremost a physical thing, one that engages breath, muscle, bone, and heart. The story builds itself in me through immersion, research, regular inner and outer exercise, and a lot of help from my friends. My job as a teller is to keep my physical tools and equipment “ready to go” with regular exercise of body, voice, and mind. And to keep a healthy house where spirit dwells. To continue to maintain myself as vehicle to carry the heart and guts of tales in all of their sensory, bodily readiness out into the world.

Stories get established within in our very cells through breath, sound, and movement. In time, they take up residence and we are able to tell them at a moment’s notice. When tales live and nest inside me, I can speak spontaneously in a blend of complex, selected, prepared language, and conversation. During practice, words drop into my body on the breath when I read or speak them; they inform me and I inform them; and they fall out on the exhalation changed. This synergy of breath and body helps me tell long, complex tales with relative ease.

Muscle memory is enhanced by the lived experience of telling for and with all kinds of audiences. Practice with others gives me the freedom to place my attention on specific needs of the audience and the situation. I come to trust in muscle memory, vital images, and learning key moments by heart, to reduce my worry that I will forget an important part of the story. I am easily distracted, often by unimportant things, so to know that “my body has my back” and will deliver under pressure is liberating. I remain a poor memorizer, an automatic people pleaser, and seriously limited story dancer. But in all this, my body remains my most trusted and dear companion.

“Breathing in the Word” is one useful technique that helps tellers access the wisdom of the body. Embodied telling relies on the muscles to learn and retain rhythmic patterns of the breath, voice, and gesture. Try the simplified version of the exercise and see if it suits you.



About the Author

Karen De Mauro is an international storyteller and coach who creates collaborative multi-arts-events that activate the artist-in- everyone. She performed at The United Nations, Smithsonian Institution, Japanese Noh Theatre, and in venues from National Parks to Broadway, churches to boardrooms, in schools and communities throughout the US and Canada. karendemaurotac@gmail.com
karedemauro.net

The Practice of “Breathing in the Word”

Pick a short written phrase that captures the essence of your story, like “Psyche only wanted to be known,” or “and then the god came in.” Breathe in the short phrase from the page. Pause. Simply speak the words out loud on the exhalation. Pause again and free associate to let images, memories, song snippets, and smells arise. The pause encourages the open body to create a felt sense of the story’s key images and feelings. Wait. Muse. Next, dance the phrase, mime it, overact and play with it. Try on different voices, pitches, volumes, rates, and timbres. Send it far out into space, then direct it near and close. Walk around the room speaking the words as you lead with your heart, chest, and hip centers in succession. Feel how leading with each center changes how the phrase lives and sounds itself. Sing it as an opera, chant it as a rap, and improvise it as a riff.

This blend of work, play, repetition, stillness, and motion embeds the heart and spirit of the phrase through what Michael Chekhov calls “psychological gesture.” Storyteller Antonio Rocha uses a version of this practice in shaping his stirring “The Malaga Ship,” and I have used it with dozens of performers to bring visceral power to complex ideas. When we practice a few short core phrases from a story, the body remembers what feels right and true, and automatically recalls and appropriately replays this in performance. The moment arrives in us, even when our mind thinks it doesn’t know what happens next in the tale! This results in the odd, but distinctly pleasurable, experience of having the intellect freeze up for a moment, while the body and voice keep on working automatically. Somehow the body says and does exactly what’s called for in that moment.

This auto-rescue happens when the body has incorporated its own wonderful dance of repetition and variation, a dance filled with breath and carried by sound and rhythm. The story body is in-formed by a sensory storehouse stocked with images and grounded in movement, emotion, and the play of sound. Once the inner choreography of the tale is implanted, the conscious mind and intuition are freed up and have an increased alertness to the present moment and the audience at hand.

The breath, as it travels in and out of the body, provides ready access, to and from the outer physical world and the interior invisible world of the teller. It acts as one good starting point for the beginning of a story journey. There are many other equally useful entry points for embodied telling — the word, the plot, the character, the place, to name a few. Whatever portal we choose, the body remains a helpful guide to walk ourselves and our listeners through the story.

With one step at a time, one breath at a time, one word at a time, and one story at a time, we get up and do it again. And again. Until the story comes to live and nest inside us. And our human urge to communicate and share life learnings with others via stories takes us on a wondrous kind of pilgrimage — a journey away from home that returns us home, to where new and old stories abide.

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

Let The Audience Taste Your Stories

by Joan Leotta

How many of you tell the story of Stone Soup? The Great Big Enormous Carrot? The Theft of a Smell? Big Pot (Hodja tale)? When putting your program together have you ever struggled with how to make your version of these well-known stories stand out, beyond their “message?”

I do it by letting my audience go beyond seeing and hearing my stories. I often bring three more senses, taste, touch, and aroma to the audience when I tell — at least to the imagination of those seated before me. There is a common element in all of these tales and in many others — food! Yet when I listen to many folks tell these tales the teller often touches only lightly on the food. For example, the cooperation of the folks pulling up the carrot is the main point, but the carrot itself is an oft-forgotten “character.” The same is true of the soup, often overlooked is how the soup tasted, the particular elements of each of the ingredients added, the tactile sensation of a potato’s eyes, or how a ripe onion sits like a baseball in your hand, and how it smells.

So, take another look at the way you tell stories that mention food. Enlarge food descriptions in such a way as to make your audience long to savor the items you describe. Don’t think of these words as useless background description. Instead, share your love of certain foods with the audience as a way to invite them into the story with you, to experience the story with you. These descriptions will also help them anticipate the end of the story where you can perhaps offer an imaginary tasting (of the stone soup, of the pastries, carrot, etc.).

This technique has made The Theft of a Smell one of my most successful stories for audiences old and young, (I am sure to include pastries that appeal to all ages in my descriptions, and I sigh, roll my eyes, and invite the audience to “enjoy” these goodies with me. I cover both the taste and smell, so audiences can imagine themselves as patrons of the baker that very day. It makes them much more willing to cheer the poor man on, to applaud at the end as the courtroom verdict is announced against the man who wants to deprive the poor man of his enjoyment of the aromas.

The carrot story, often told as an example of how cooperation achieves goals can be enhanced by telling what each person/animal called to help, loves about carrots as well as just wanting to help. You can involve the audience in this as well or simply say, the horse loved a good crunch sweet carrot, the grandfather liked carrots roasted with honey, the mice liked to nibble bits of cut carrot, sweet and delicious from the kitchen floor, etc. And of course, when the enormous carrot comes out of the ground, mention that it is big enough for each group that helped to share in the delights of the carrot, big enough to divide up for carrot sticks, carrot cake, honeyed roast carrots, and a lot more.

Five Tips to use my “Enlarge it with Food” Method

- 1) Sit with your story a few minutes. Go over the elements in the story and the action points. Are any foods mentioned? What are they? Decide if this method will apply to this story.
- 2) Describe the food itself (use just a few precise words accompanied by expressions of enjoyment): its color and shape (the look of it), the feel of it in hand, the smell of it (cut, uncut, cooked, uncooked, depending on the tale), the taste of it (again depending on the story).
- 3) Sometimes, perhaps just mention a longing to taste a certain food and what you (and your audience) think it will taste like) and the sounds made by the food, when it falls, when it is cut, when you eat it — great words, plop, crunch, thwack — accompanied by movements your audience can imitate with you (another participation element).
- 4) Not all food items will warrant a complete five sense description. For example, in “Theft of a Smell,” I spend only a few words on the look of the pastries, more on the taste and most on the aromas that float about the store, in the town.
- 5) Try it! Assess which of your stories might benefit if you and your audience can taste, smell, and feel your tales as you speak them.

Enjoy



About the Author Joan Leotta is a teller who loves food. She has been a food writer in several regional and national newspapers, and yes, she does embellish her tales and poems, her fiction and non-fiction, with food — especially her Italian American tales and personal stories. Even her one-woman show starring Louisa May Alcott offers some culinary information! Contact her at Joanleotta@gmail.com

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



–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.”



Storytelling Science of Climate Motivation

by Bowen Lee

Thanks to the wonderful NSN EcoTellers SIG (Special Interest Group) for providing the content to this quarter's Storycology. If you are not yet part of the EcoTellers, please join this wonderful group of dedicated storytellers involved in improving the environment of our planet through storytelling.

An email post to the EcoTellers by Fran Stallings drew our attention to an article published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Bruce Kirchoff made an AI summary of the article, which reports the results of a study of 7,624 Americans to find out which communication approaches best motivated people to:

1. Take climate-friendly actions
2. Believe their actions make a difference
3. Share climate information with others

The most effective approaches for motivating people to take climate-friendly actions were:

1. Guided Imagination (Prevention-Self): Imagining yourself personally experiencing negative climate impacts in the future
 - This created a sense of urgency through emotional connection
2. Letter to Future Generation: Writing to a child you know about what you're doing to ensure they have a healthy planet
 - This combined future thinking with a personal connection to someone you care about
3. Action Planning: Choosing a climate goal and creating detailed step-by-step plans
 - This made abstract goals concrete and achievable
4. Personal Benefits: Identifying immediate personal rewards from climate actions
 - This connected long-term climate benefits with short-term personal advantages

The researchers found these approaches worked by:

- Creating emotional responses like constructive anger and determination
- Increasing people's belief in their ability to act effectively
- Making abstract future threats feel more concrete and relevant

Key Insights for Creating Effective Climate Stories



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



Based solely on this research, here are the most effective ways to craft climate stories that motivate action:

1. Make it personal AND social

- Include characters that viewers can identify with
- Show how climate impacts affect both the individual and their loved ones
- Use first-person ("I") or second-person ("you") language

2. Create vivid future scenarios

- Help audiences picture specific futures 15-30 years ahead with sensory details
- Show both problem futures (creating urgency) and solution futures (creating hope)
- Use concrete timelines ("In 2040...") rather than vague references

3. Bridge generations

- Connect today's adults with tomorrow's children
- Show how current actions affect future generations
- Create emotional links between present choices and future outcomes

4. Show practical action steps

- Include characters working through specific, achievable actions
- Demonstrate how obstacles can be overcome with planning
- Balance big goals with immediate next steps

5. Highlight both immediate and long-term benefits

- Pair climate actions with short-term personal rewards (saving money, better health)
- Show how small individual actions add up to meaningful collective impact

6. Blend multiple psychological approaches

- Combine personal relevance with future thinking
- Mix emotional engagement with practical action steps
- Link individual benefits with collective outcomes

7. Balance emotions carefully

- Use constructive anger about preventable harm to create urgency
- Pair with determined hope about possible solutions
- Avoid both paralyzing doom and unrealistic optimism

This research shows that the most powerful climate stories combine personal relevance with forward-looking narratives and clear paths to action, helping people connect today's choices with tomorrow's consequences for themselves and those they care about.

I'm passing this information on to all Story Beast Readers, for don't we all want to connect today's choices with tomorrow's consequences to help people and the planet? We are storytellers, we can make connections for people.

Next issue, I promise I will write a letter to the future generation. My grandson needs to hear from me, why he has been given a future that is so bleak, and what he and I can do to make it better.

Resource: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2426768122>

To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.



-TEACHER TALES & TENTACLES-



Using a “Reading Rope” to Capture Curricular Connections

by Jen and Nat Whitman

Summer is here! It’s time to enjoy the sizzling heat and relax in the splendor of the great outdoors. For those of us who work in Education, summer is also the perfect time to reflect on last year’s practice and look forward to the coming year. The great thing about teaching is that each new school year brings a FRESH START!

In this issue of Tales and Tentacles, we want to reflect on the current conversation around reading instruction and share how we, as storytellers, can use models like “Scarborough’s Reading Rope” to be more effective advocates for storytelling in schools in the coming year.

There has been a major focus in Education lately on the Science of Reading or “SoR”. This is connected to a concern that young readers have not been explicitly taught the skills they need to decode words effectively and efficiently. As is often the case in Education, when the pendulum swings we sometimes over-correct, and teachers often suffer from the sudden pedagogical shift. While that plays out in classrooms and teachers find the best path forward to support young readers, those of us in the storytelling world have an important voice to add to the conversation!

One model for describing the reading process that is widely accepted as a foundational element of the Science of Reading is Scarborough’s Reading Rope. It was developed by literacy expert Dr. Hollis Scarborough in the 1990s and it looks like this:



About the Authors

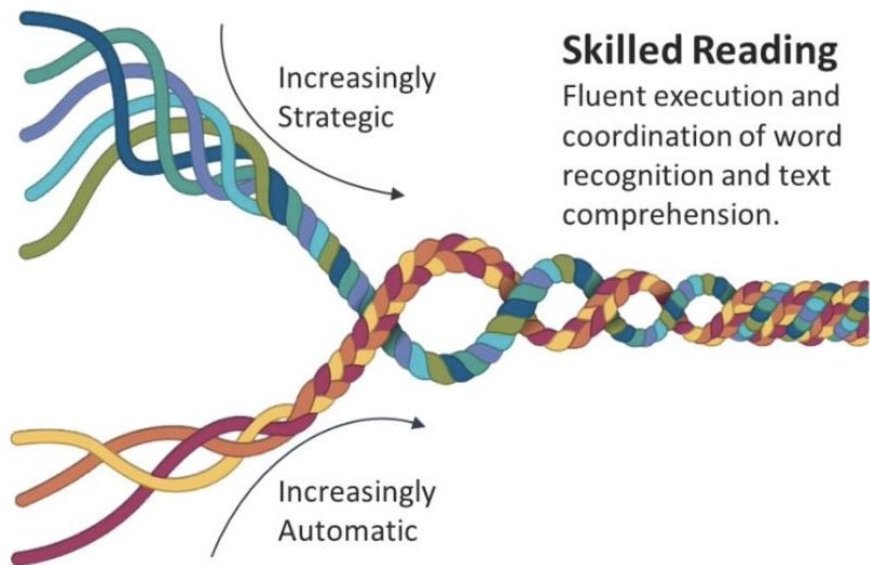
Jen and Nat Whitman recently moved back to the United States after 23 years teaching and telling in international schools in Thailand, Germany, and Hong Kong. Jen is an Early Childhood teacher and Nat is an Elementary Librarian. They teamed with Margaret Read MacDonald to write a “How-To” guide for using 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 sharing stories of political cooperation across the 50 States with a series of social media shorts called “Purple Minutes” for the Purple Points Project. You can learn more about the Whitmans at www.whitmantellers.com.

Language Comprehension

- Background Knowledge
- Vocabulary Knowledge
- Language Structures
- Verbal Reasoning
- Literacy Knowledge

Word Recognition

- Phonological Awareness
- Decoding (and Spelling)
- Sight Recognition



Scarborough, H. 2001. Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. Pp. 97-110 in S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Literacy*. NY: Guilford Press.

Image source:

<https://www.readingrockets.org/reading-101/how-children-learn-read/models-reading>

This helpful visual illustrates how decoding skills (word recognition) need to be woven together with essential meaning-making skills (language comprehension) in order for students to become skilled readers. If you ever find yourself needing to justify time spent on storytelling to anyone in Education, just show them this picture. Those language comprehension threads are stitched into the heart of storytelling!

Let's take a familiar fable and explore how it could connect with the language comprehension strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope:



The Lion and the Mouse

An Aesop's Fable Retold by Jen and Nat Whitman

Mighty Lion was sound asleep.
Tiny Mouse wasn't looking where she was going.
She ran right across Lion's nose.
"ROAR!"
WHUMP!
Mighty Lion trapped Tiny Mouse with his great paw.
"EEK! EEK! EEK!"
"PLEASE don't eat me! Let me GO!
I could help YOU, don't you KNOW?"
"ROAR-HA! ROAR-HA! ROAR-HA!
Help ME?!? SO FUNNY!!!
Okay...I'm feeling kind today...
You've made me laugh...
Now RUN AWAY!
ROAR!"
Mighty Lion lifted his paw.
Tiny Mouse scampered away to safety.
The next day...
Mighty Lion wasn't looking where HE was going.
He walked right into a hunter's trap.
WHUMP!
"ROAR!"
Mighty Lion was surrounded by thick ropes.
He was trapped.
He was scared.
"ROAR! ROAR! ROAR!"
Tiny Mouse heard the call...
"Mighty Lion...I am here!
I will help you...have no fear!"
And with that,
Tiny Mouse began to chew the ropes...
Nibble...nibble...nibble...SQUEAK!
Nibble...nibble...nibble...SQUEAK!
Nibble...SQUEAK!
Nibble...SQUEAK!
Nibble...nibble...nibble...SQUEAK!
And quick as a flash...
Mighty Lion was free!
"Oh, kind Tiny Mouse, thank you...thank you...
I never knew how much tiny creatures COULD DO!"

So how might this tale connect to the Language Comprehension strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope? You will have MANY ideas, but here are a few to get started.

Background Knowledge

You could use the story to build student understanding that lions are large and ferocious, while mice are small and timid.

Vocabulary Knowledge

You could use the tale to explore words and their meaning, e.g.,

Verbs: trapped, scampered, roared

Adjectives: mighty, tiny, kind

Language Structures

You could play with language and create other rhymes that mouse or lion might use to speak with one another.

Verbal Reasoning

You could explore "quick as a flash." What does that mean? Are there other idiomatic expressions that also mean "move quickly"?

You could talk about the meaning of the tale. What do you think are some of the lessons from the tale of the Lion and the Mouse?

Literacy Knowledge

You can explore the genre of fables.

What is a fable? What are other examples of fables?

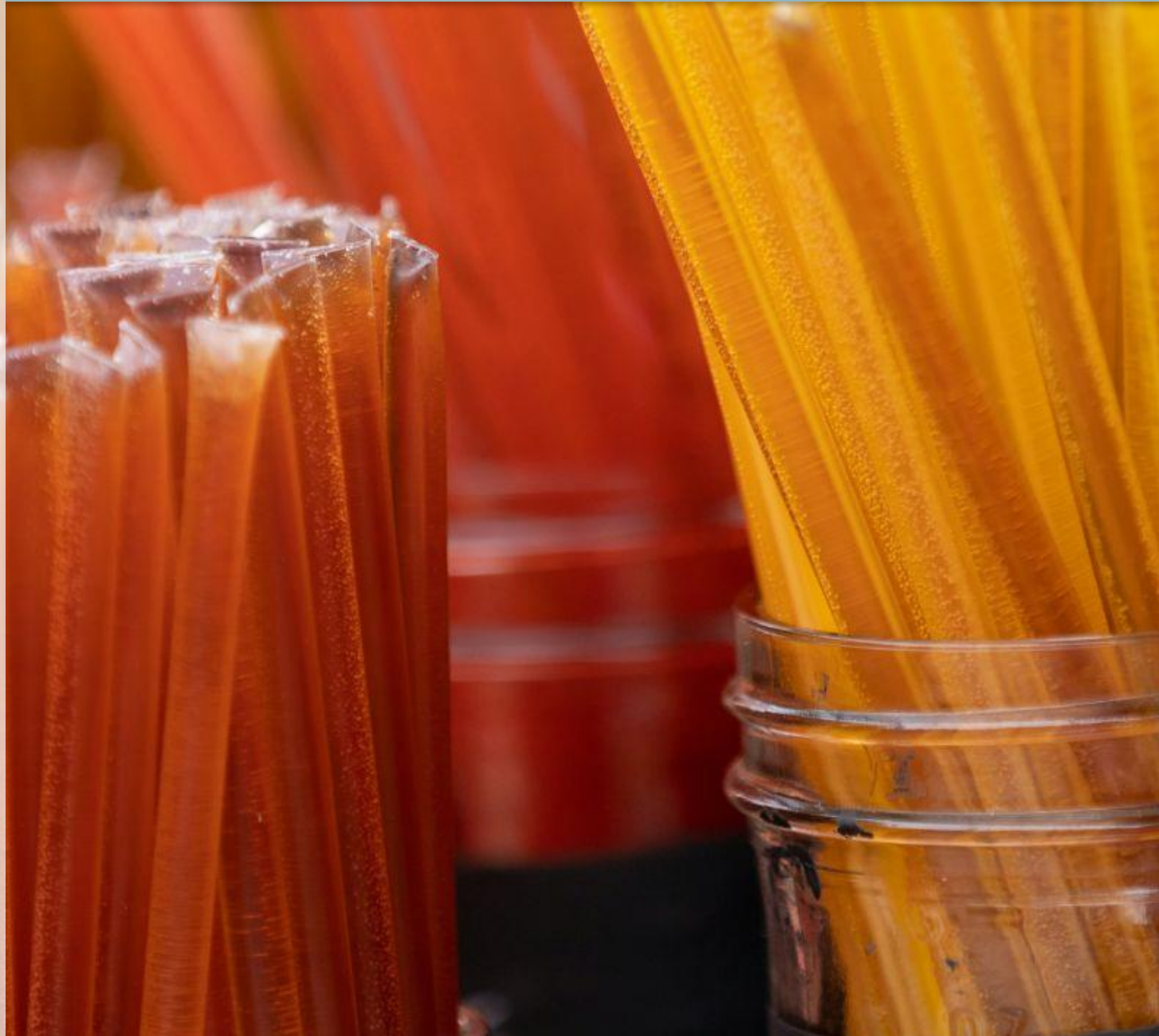
Of course, there are many other directions you could take this one short tale with your students. Scarborough's Reading Rope is a useful tool for talking with teachers about the many ways storytelling can support students in their journey to becoming accomplished readers. The language comprehension threads can be woven through our stories into many different curricular tapestries.

Enjoy the weaving!



-STORY FEAST-

A bounty to share



STORY FEAST

by Karen Chace



Summer by Alphonse Mucha, 1896

The theme for this issue is Sizzling Splendor so we begin with stories about fire!

[The Fire-God – China](#)

[How Fire Was Stolen from the Red-Crested Cockatoo – Australia/Aboriginal people](#)

[The Fairies and the Fire – England](#)

[The Fire Bird – Russia](#)

[The Little Old Man Made Young by Fire - Grimm](#)

[The Origin of Fire – Native American](#)

[The Snow-Daughter and the Fire-Son – Armenia](#)

[Snow-White-Fire-Red – Italy](#)



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

CALENDAR

July 1 is Canada Day. Let's celebrate with our friends to the north.

[Canadian Fairy Tales by Cyrus Macmillan.](#)
[Twenty-six folktales published in 1922.](#)

[Canadian Folklore – Twenty-four stories to add to your repertoire.](#)

[Canadian Wonder Tales by Cyrus Macmillan, 1918. Find out How Summer Came to Canada, meet The Boy and His Three Helpers, The Duck with the Red Feet, and many more.](#)

July 25 is Thread the Needle Day. Here are six tales to help you stitch a story together!

[The Baba Yaga – Russia](#)

[The Darning Needle – England](#)

[Last Darning Needle – United States](#)

[Spindle, Shuttle and Needle – German](#)

[The Tsarevna Frog - Russia](#)

[The Wasp, the Winged Needle and the Spider - Brittany](#)

August 11th is World Lion Day. Let's take a moment to revel in the beauty of these beautiful and magnificent creatures.

[Dinner of the Lion – Africa](#)

[The Hare and the Lion – Africa](#)

[The Hunter and the Lion – Aesop](#)

[The Lily and the Lion – Grimm](#)

[Lion and Jackal – Africa](#)

[The Lion and the Crane – India](#)

[Lion and Jackal- South Africa](#)

[The Lion and the Mouse - Greece](#)

[The Lion Who Was Made Tsar – Ukraine](#)

[The Lion's Enchantment – Spain](#)

[The Lion's Share – South Africa](#)

[The Lion in the Water – Twelve cultural variants from D.L. Ashliman](#)

[The Lion and the Wolf – South Africa](#)

[Story of Lion and Little Jackal – South Africa](#)

[Why Does Lion Roar? – Angola](#)

June is Adopt-A-Cat month. Here are some tales of our fun and fuzzy feline friends.

[Around the World with Cats – Eight international folktales from India, Aesop, China, and more.](#)

[The Boy Who Drew Cats – Japan](#)

[The Cat Who Could Eat So Much - Norway](#)

[Cat and Mouse in Partnership - Germany](#)

[The Cat's Elopement – Japan](#)

[Domingo's Cat – South America](#)

[The Enchanted Cat - Hungary](#)

[Liza the Fox and Catafay the Cat - Russia](#)

[The White Cat – France](#)

[Why Cats and Dogs Never Get Along – Haiti](#)

[You will find these seven folktales at the link below, along with a few Aesop fables.](#)

How Cat's Got Their Purr – England

The Master Cat, or Puss n' Boots - France

The White Cat - France

Kissa the Cat - Denmark

The Lion and the Cat - England

The Cottager and His Cat - Iceland

The Clever Cat - Iran

[Here are twelve different stories about cats from Nigeria, Palestine, Tibet, and other countries around the world.](#)



Here in the United States, the Collaborative Summer Reading Program theme for 2025 is Color Our World. What better way to add more color to our lives than with these vibrant stories?

[The Black Bull of Norway - Norway](#)

[The Blue Belt – Norway](#)

[The Blue Light – Grimm](#)

[The Blue Rose](#)

[The Bronze Ring](#)

[Felicia, and the Pot of Pinks](#)

[The Gold Bread – Hungary](#)

[The Golden Ball – Yorkshire](#)

[Green Willow – Japan](#)

[The Magic Orange Tree](#)

[The Purple Jar](#)

[The Red Bear - Inuit](#)

[The Red and Blue Coat – Africa](#)

[The Spirits of the Yellow River – China](#)

[The Three Orange Peris – Turkey](#)

[Violet - Italy](#)

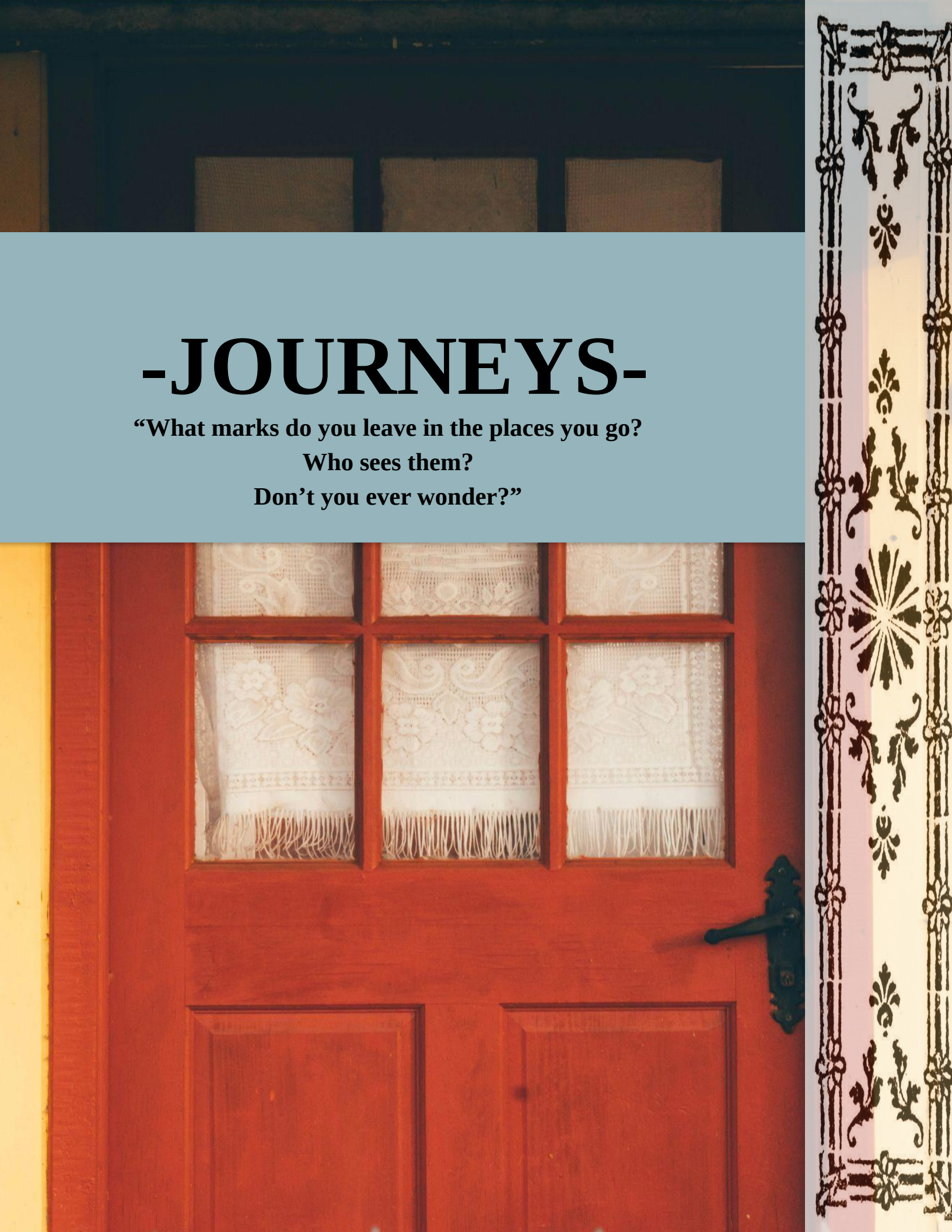
[The Water Lily and the Gold Spinners](#)

[The White Cat - France](#)

[The Yellow Dwarf – France](#)

[Yellow Lily - Ireland](#)



The image features a wooden door with a six-pane window. Each pane is covered by a white lace curtain with a fringed bottom. To the right of the door is a vertical decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern. The top of the image shows a dark, textured surface, possibly a book cover or a wall.

-JOURNEYS-

“What marks do you leave in the places you go?

Who sees them?

Don’t you ever wonder?”

Powered by Story: Reflections of 2024 FEAST Conference in Suwon

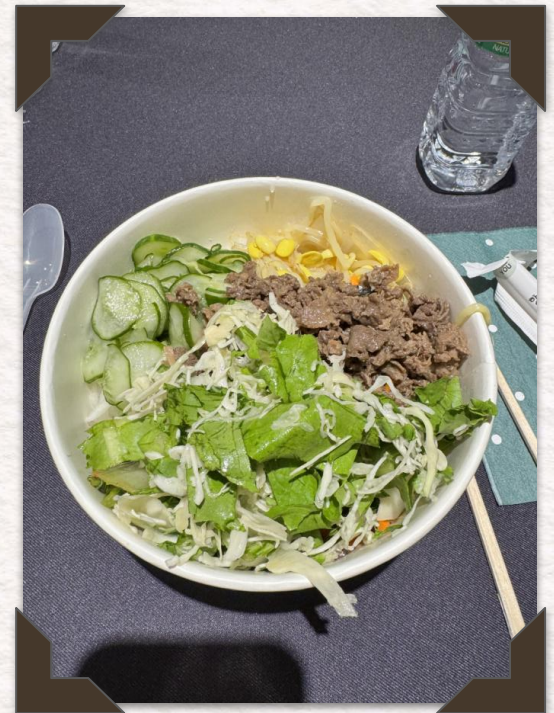
by Brandon Spars



From September 6–8, 2024, storytellers from around the world gathered in Suwon, South Korea, for the fourth Federation of Asian Storytellers (FEAST) Conference. Held at the Suwon Convention Center, the conference featured twenty-two workshops exploring narrative techniques, cultural traditions, and performance skills. I was honored to have been selected as one of the presenters — joining none other than storytelling legend, Alton Chung, for a joint workshop titled “Bringing Characters to Life.”

I tell mostly personal stories, many of which are about my experiences and travels living and working in Indonesia, but, as a high school humanities teacher, I study and tell folktales in the classroom. Most of these are from Asia, particularly Indonesia. I learned about the Indonesian storytelling organization called Ayo Dongeng (“Come on Let’s Tell Stories Together”) and had long dreamed of meeting some of its members. That is actually what led me to FEAST in the first place. Their third conference took place in Jakarta, Indonesia in November 2023, and it featured many of the Ayo Dongeng artists I had long admired. While I didn’t make it to the Jakarta conference in person, I watched what I could on Zoom and aimed to apply to the next conference in Korea.

I traveled with my wife several days in advance and spent those days in Seoul mostly enjoying the food (and a wonderful alcoholic beverage called makgeolli). On Thursday, September 5, I boarded a bus using the amazing app called KakaoMap, which tells you where to stand to wait for your bus or train, and where exactly to get off. The app helped me feel quite independent and comfortable traveling not only in Seoul, but also to other towns like Suwon. I got off my bus and made a short walk to the Ibis Hotel, where my room wasn't quite ready. As I sat in the lounge, I realized I was surrounded by fellow storytellers, and sitting right in the middle, in a Singaporean styled buttoned shirt was none other than Roger Jenkins. He is one of the founding directors of FEAST, and I began to wonder about how to approach him when all of the sudden there was a cacophony of cackling, whooping, and hooting. Silence fell over the lounge. Roger stood up and calmly announced "Ah... I believe the Indonesians have arrived."



As they emerged, my heart leapt. I spotted Ariyo immediately, whom I had seen perform on Zoom before. He is the current head of Ayo Dongeng, and he was probably the one I most wanted to meet. My palms grew sweaty, and I got a lump in my throat. But Ariyo was not alone. He was surrounded by other gifted Indonesian tellers, including Zulfin, Poppy, Novi, and, of course, Paman Gery! I watched as Roger greeted everyone, and began to wonder how I would ever make my way into the FEAST world. Everyone already seemed so close to one another. That was when there was a gentle tap on my arm. I found myself face to face with Sheila Wee, who recognized me from the photos I had sent for my workshop. Her kind eyes put me at ease immediately, and she extracted Roger from the Indonesian hullabaloo and introduced me. Soon, with Roger and Sheila at my side I was meeting Ariyo and the Ayo Dongeng members. When they found out I would be presenting an Indonesian folktale, "Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih," they all promised to come. I was delighted, and then very nervous.



Finally, after much anticipation, the 2024 conference began.

FEAST 2024 was presented in partnership with KISA (the Korean International Storytelling Association), and this spirit of collaboration was beautifully embodied in the opening ceremony. Roger Jenkins and KISA president Alicia Dong Bang-joo stood side by side on stage to deliver a bilingual welcome—telling a story, not just in words, but in harmony, about building bridges rather than walls. It was more than a metaphor; it was a declaration of purpose. In their tale, a wall once stood between two communities, blocking understanding and friendship. But when the people dared to take it down and construct a bridge in its place, stories began to flow freely across the divide—bringing laughter, healing, and connection. The audience was visibly moved, and the room seemed to settle into a shared breath. What followed deepened that unity: a cultural performance featuring masked dancers whose precise movements evoked tradition and myth, and a dynamic two-person dragon dance that wound through the aisles like a living current of energy. The message was clear—this was not merely a conference. It was a convergence of voices, a celebration of cultural expression, and a reminder that storytellers are among the most powerful people in the world. In fact, that was the central message of the joint opening: Storytellers are the most important people in the world!. Since my workshop with Alton wasn't until Sunday, I got to attend two full days of panels before presenting myself. Here are a few other memorable sessions I attended during the conference:

Friday Morning, September 6 – "Find Your Story" with Rachel Smith and Niharika Aggarwal

Based in Hong Kong, Rachel and Niharika specialize in personal storytelling. While most of FEAST leaned toward traditional tales, their session encouraged participants to plumb their own lives for story gold. They created a warm, courageous space that gently invited honesty and creativity.

Friday Afternoon – "Using Another Language in Storytelling – Solo or in Tandem" with Kiran Shah and Anamika Bhati

This was a multilingual storytelling workshop where we paired up across cultures. The highlight was a riveting rendition of "The Lion and the Mouse," performed by Simone Sales (in Tagalog) and Eunsong Kim (in Korean). Despite most of us not speaking either language, we followed every moment thanks to the power of expression, gesture, and pacing. It was pure magic.

Saturday Morning – "The Moral of the Story" with Susan McCullough

This session focused on using folktales to support young people's mental, emotional, and social well-being. As a U.S. high school teacher, I resonated deeply with this. Folktales in my classroom aren't just about the past — they're a break from screens and a chance for students to rediscover deep listening. I found community here with others who feel the same.

Of course, the toughest part of each day was choosing which workshop to attend. In choosing "Find Your Story," I missed "Poetics in Storytelling" by Simone Sales and Leandro Reyes. In attending "Use Another Language," I missed Fran Stallings' "Sing a Story, Tell a Story." And during "The Moral of the Story," I missed Colin Urwin's "Something Old – Something New." But FEAST had a remedy for that: lunch.



At mealtimes, everyone was eager to share what they'd seen. On Saturday, I sat with Colin Urwin himself, who not only described his presentation in detail but also gifted me a copy of his extraordinary book, *The Madman's Window*. His generosity and insight inspired me so much that I started writing a new story that very afternoon.

The snack and lunch breaks proved to be just as informative and inspiring as the workshops. One lunch I found myself sitting next to four Korean tellers from the Korean International Storytelling Association Festival. Though I couldn't speak any Korean, and they couldn't speak any English, we communicated our respect and affection for one another with our eyes. That was when one of the tellers, wearing a traditional hanbok, noticed my plate. She frowned. I had assembled a collection of items from the buffet into a bowl, which was supposed to be bibimbap. I had not done things correctly. The four storytellers began analyzing my recipe. One of them sprang up and quickly bounced through the buffet line, grabbing sprigs of this and that, chopstick loads of pickled carrots, an egg, which she skillfully balanced on the chopsticks while still gripping the carrots, and then she returned. There was a flurry of activity: stirring, tossing, and dicing. A sauce from someone's purse was squeezed over the mixture, and then it was placed back in front of me. All watched me try a bite. Ah... it was fantastic. Much better than the rice with a side of lettuce I had made. All of them cheered, and from that point on they sprang up intermittently to secure more items, which were thrown in front of me. I ate and ate, and the level of my bowl never went down.

In addition to the dynamic workshops and performances, the FEAST 2024 Conference was held in tandem with BOOKIZCON, a book fair dedicated to storytelling and cultural exchange. This parallel event brought publishers, authors, illustrators, and educators into the same space as storytellers, creating a vibrant environment of cross-disciplinary inspiration. The collaboration between FEAST and BOOKIZCON, initially set for a two-year trial, proved to be a natural pairing — storytellers wandered among booths filled with colorful picture books and bilingual editions, while book fair attendees, especially the children, drifted into storytelling sessions, drawn by the sound of laughter, song, and drumbeats.



Participants at the conference, during the registration process, had been encouraged to sign up for storytelling sessions, at which they would be paired with a translator to tell a story to the many children attending BOOKIZCON. During my time at the conference — on bus rides from the hotel to the convention center or over lunch — I became acquainted with Dee Palanisamy, who had presented a workshop titled "Story Beats: Drumming, Rhythm, and Body Percussions in Stories." Dee is a lively person, the sort to whom Shakespearean adjectives like saucy and spicy easily apply. An international and multicultural storyteller and educator from Singapore, Dee is currently based in Melbourne, Australia. Dee was one of those who signed up to perform at BOOKIZCON. For her story, she had devilishly chosen a Korean folktale, "The Farting Daughter-in-law." At first, she was unsure about how her more reserved translator might respond to the tale's, shall we say, explosive content. But Dee's mischievous spirit proved infectious. Her translator soon dropped all guardedness and joined in the fun. Together, they dramatized the thunderous flatulence that first knocked down a family's house but later turned out to be surprisingly useful—shaking ripe fruit from trees, pushing boats across rivers, even speeding royal carriages along the road.

As Dee and her translator unloaded their rear-end choreography, punctuated by skillfully blown raspberries, the crowd of children seated on the floor grew larger and larger. They stared wide-eyed, laughing uncontrollably, as the two women knocked pears from branches and sent dignitaries hurtling toward their destinations—powered, of course, by the mighty wind of storytelling.

Some things, it turns out, are universally funny. Farts are definitely one of them.

I have never become so close to so many people so quickly. Before the final assembly, you could feel the pangs of disappointment that we wouldn't be hurrying through breakfast again to make the shuttle, so that we could spend another day doing what we love with those we love. When and where would we meet again?

Preceding Suwon, the first conference was held in Singapore in 2018; the second, in Bangalore, India in 2019; the third, in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2023. As Founding Director Jeeva Raghunath took the stage to announce where the fifth conference would be, everyone held their breath, and then... Suddenly from the back of the conference room, there was banging and cheering. A long train of brilliant colors was flowing into the room: it was every South Asian storyteller, decked out in brilliantly colored saris, dancing their way to the front. "The fifth FEAST Conference," Jeeva announced proudly, "Will be held in Chennai, India!" The audience erupted in applause as the dancing, drumming, singing, and cheering wound around him like a long serpent.

I am sure to Jeeva and Roger and Sheila and Krupa and all of those who were part of the planning of the Suwon conference, 2026 couldn't have been far enough away given how much work they had put into planning the Suwon conference, but for those of us who had simply presented and attended workshops, toured beautiful Suwon and Seoul, and enjoyed each other's company, this seemed painfully far off in the future.

Well, the months are flitting by and our WhatsApp group chat has not stopped pinging away with announcements, comments, chatter, and much, much laughter from all corners of the world. In fact, I just got a private message from Dee. She has been telling stories all over Australia... and she just told a doozy about a belching grandma. Belches are funny, too, I guess... at least in Australia....

In Suwon, amid laughter and learning, deep conversations and daring tales, I was reminded again and again that storytellers are not merely entertainers — they are architects of empathy, guardians of culture, and sparks that ignite transformation. We can knock down walls, ferry people across divides, and sometimes even power royal carriages with laughter. In a world brimming with noise, it is the storyteller who helps us listen again — who teaches us to see, to laugh, to remember. And if FEAST 2024 was any indication, the most powerful people in the world are not always the loudest. They are the ones with open hearts, moving voices, and stories worth telling.

The 2026 FEAST Conference is currently scheduled to take place on September 24 and 25. The call for workshops will go out in November or December 2025. For more information go to the FEAST website (<https://www.feast-story.org/>).

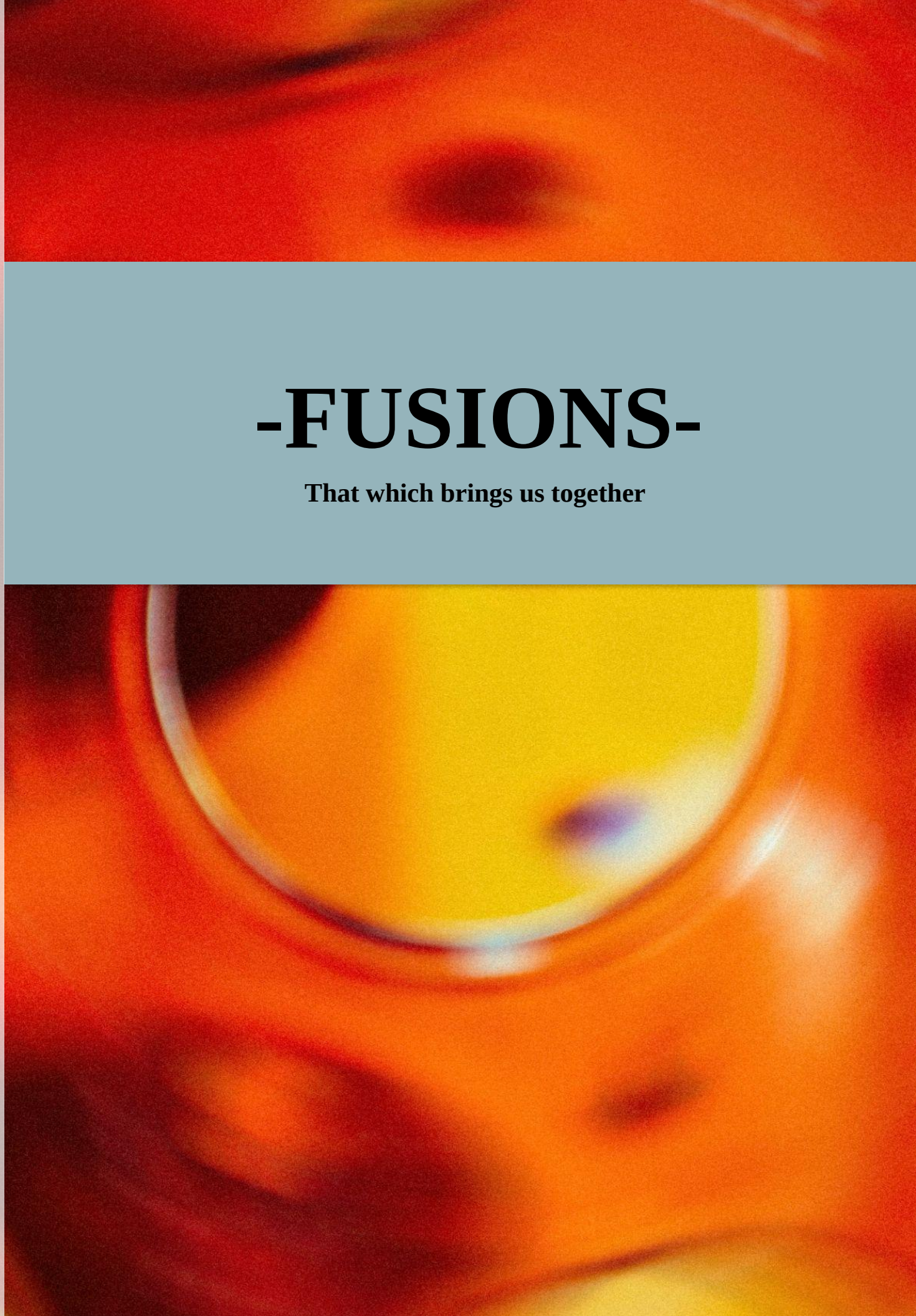


About the Author

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.

Website: brandonspars.com





-FUSIONS-

That which brings us together

Puppets: From Zero to a Show

by Patricia Coffie

I was a volunteer at the magnet school attended by my oldest son in 1970. The librarian divided her time between two schools. On Wednesdays, my son's school library was closed completely. "I have library experience and could come on Wednesdays," I said.

I like to talk and so I talked some more. Our deal was made for stories. Somehow that became a puppet show in six days' time.

I did not own a puppet. I had never owned a puppet. I did have a friend whose name was "Pat" and she was a children's services librarian for the Public Library of Des Moines and she had puppets. I must have talked about her and, as the story moved on by word of mouth, I must have become that Pat.

This was 1970 and Sesame Street had begun in 1969. The principal notified the school first and said, "Ms. Coffie will do a puppet show next Wednesday and any class interested should sign up." Thirteen classes signed up for that day.

I cut up an old fuzzy yellow bathrobe and made a grouch. We had a black and white TV so did not know the colors but did know the grouches were fuzzy. I cut the head off a piggy bank, then glued on a pink body. I called my friend, Pat, and she gave me a pattern for moving mouth puppets. I went through the toy box again and found a sock puppet horse to use as a mule.

By the next Wednesday, I could do Swinging on a Star complete with a grouchy emcee — not Oscar but fuzzy and grouchy. Children remained glued in place for the puppets. They talked back and forth with the grouchy emcee.

I added The Little White Duck and So Long; It's Been Good to Know You with alternate grouchy lyrics and had a 20–30-minute show. I performed it in the magnet school, in our home school, and in my cousin's school. I said that the Superintendent could run a note saying I would do a 20–30-minute show in classrooms that were interested. The next day, 27 requests came in from schools all over and around town. I was a puppeteer.



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*, *Our Iowa*, *Storytelling Magazine*, and in "Stories from Home" Waverly Iowa Newspapers, print and digital. maemaude@mac.com





Continuing to learn from puppeteers, I developed some improvements that suited my style. I used no ventriloquism and I stayed with hand and rod puppets. Kids want to play and imagine and I found they needed prompts to do that. Eventually I added a stage that allowed puppeteers to stand and perform behind a half curtain, shielding the head and shoulders of the puppeteer from the puppets.

At one point, I made a set of moving mouth puppets for the home school in our neighborhood. Kids loved them and used them so much their fingers wore through the velvet under the moving mouth by the end of six weeks.

I experimented until I had strong, washable moving mouth puppets. I used iron-on denim for the mouths and fleece for the face and arms.

I went further and began to make “Stuffies” for those of us who are not seamstresses and don’t have big budgets.

One year, I set up a session to follow the Summer Lunch Program. About 20 elementary school students and their adults came together. I prepared by gathering stuffed animals, sewing the gloves to use inside the stuffed toys, and providing wrist pin cushions. I used the draft stops (long fabric tubes) that had stopped the unpleasantly cold air from coming in under my front door or under the windows to hold the already threaded needles.

Table by table the kids came to choose a stuffed animal and a glove. Scissors, pin cushions, and threaded needles were on their tables. Then they unstuffed the animal, inserted the glove, and stitched the glove in.



I can still picture the happy and accomplished kids leaving with their creations. One pair had their stuffies talking to each other as they walked home. Another was talking to his stuffie. Another cuddled her stuffie.

Fifty some years now and I know I enjoyed and learned as much as the kids did from my puppets.

Hooray! For the inspiration of Sesame Street! And the joys of working with puppets from 1970 until 2025. I used all the creativity and work that the Arts take.

From zero to 50 – some years of joy and sharing through puppetry.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



Patricia Coffie
Stories from Home
203 Emery Drive
Waverly, IA 50677
maemaude@mac.com
319-230-0659

There's a story for that...

Cut 2. Use lightweight cotton or other fabric. Worn out sheets and pillowcases or old clothes often have a spot still strong and useful for making these gloves.

Do not cut down size because you are making the puppet stuffie for a child.

- Children grow.
- Hands grow.
- Hands sweat.
- Children want adults to play too.
- No one needs another thing to throw in the toy box.
- Puppets are for action by many so large and small hands need room to work.

Select a stuffed toy that has arms open to the body.

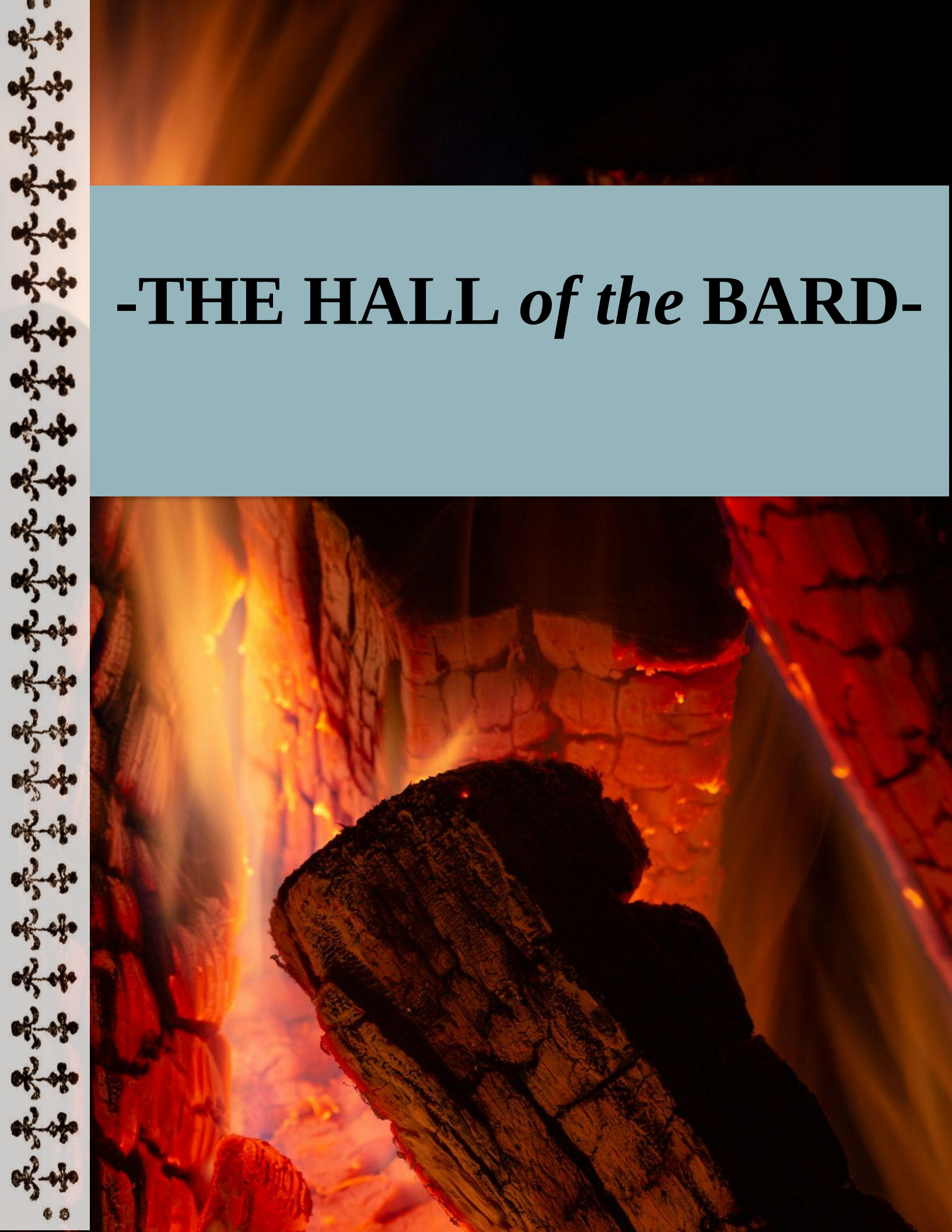
Unstuff the toy. Take too much out. You want room for a sweaty adult hand to move easily.

Sew around glove leaving bottom open.

Assemble so that the best match is made between the toy and the glove.

Whip stitch (or any hand-stitch you make up) the toy and the glove together across and around bottom.

Now you have a stuffie to enjoy for years and years.



-THE HALL *of the* BARD-



POEMS



The Matchless Fire

by Sara DeBeer

I shake myself awake
and crouch down beside
the circle of stones,
checking for signs of life.

The coals are cuddled together.
Each glows deep orange
beneath its dusting of ash.
They need me to feed them.

Last night, I had gathered fuel:
toothpick-sized tinder;
pencil thin kindling;
branches I could barely lift.

Last night all were dry
but I snap a few to be sure
this morning's dew
has not ruined them.

I take some wood
from each pile, recreate
those piles beside me
as if organizing a buffet.

Next, some tinder on the gap
where the coals nestle
against one another,
then send my breath to that spot.

As soon as a faint flame
licks the littlest sticks,
I add a bit of the kindling.
Then a little more. And more.

I alternate breath and fuel. The fire
devours the tinder, the kindling;
tongues of flames lap the sides
of the larger branches.

My cheeks are flushed;
heat and smoke surround me.
I am Fire-Rouser.
I am Giver-of-Life.

I leave the circle of stones
in search of a metal pan
and some water. I am ready
for a cup of tea.

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

Their Own Beat

by Sara DeBeer

Man, oh, man, here they come –
The proud marchers of the banned book
band.
Mark Twain, out in front,
Tossing words in the air and catching
them again
Like a catcher in the rye –
Now Mark goes by . . .
See, that's Alice walking past
In that fine purple suit,
Playing the blues on a purple flute.
Maurice Sendak on spoons
Beating out ribald rhythms –
A bit more cacophonous than harmonious,
But I can feel my ears, my mind stretching
to keep up
With the writers, the fighters, the
imagination-igniters
The proud marchers of the banned book
band.

Sizzle

by Sara DeBeer

On the black
iron griddle,
a drip
of batter
spatters.

No bigger
than
the head
of a
thumb
tack
but
a pancake
nonetheless.

Retenant Mon Souffle (Holding my Breath)

by Sara DeBeer

First, tap the egg on edge of copper bowl
Or strike it with a knife. The goal: a clean
Thin break in the white fragile shell. A stream
Of viscous liquid drips. A glowing globe

Floats in its cradle of shell. Slowly slip
It, with exquisite care, to join the rest,
All yolks, together in their stoneware nest.
Take copper bowl, take silver whisk, then
whip

Until stiff white peaks form. But if you hit
The shell too hard, small bits of it may fall
Into the egg whites. Or that golden ball
Might bleed gold blood, no longer separate.

Yolk now mixed with its whites. Your meal
that day:
Mere scrambled eggs, no hope of a souffle.



About the Author

Sara's great love is telling folktales from world cultures. A listener said, "Sara is a captivating storyteller, sensitive to her audience and their interests. Her extensive repertoire enables her to present programs on a wide variety of themes." Sara is a published poet who also teaches poetry-writing classes.
Website: storydebeer.com

The Bag Lady of Springfield

by Jim Kissane



A fully functional patent model of Margaret Knight's groundbreaking paper bag machine at the Smithsonian. Image cite (MLA): Smithsonian Institution. "Patent Model for Paper Bag Machine by Margaret E. Knight, Patent No. 220925." ca. 1879, National Museum of American History, Accession No. 1980.0004, Catalog No. 1980.0004.01.

Long before the brown paper bag became a fixture in every grocer's store, carrying food home was a daily struggle. But in 1867, in the bustling Columbia Paper Bag Company of Springfield, Massachusetts, one woman's determination would forever change not just her factory, but the way people around the world lived and shopped.

The clang of machinery echoed across the factory floor, mingling with the sharp scent of glue and fresh-cut paper. Sunlight, filtered through high, grimy windows, fell on rows of women hunched over their work. Among them was Margaret Knight, newly hired, her hands deft as she bundled stacks of flimsy, V-shaped paper bags. She felt the familiar ache in her back from her many years of manual labor for other companies. But her mind was restless with questions.

Why must this be so slow? Why did these bags collapse beneath apples or potatoes? She watched her coworkers, their fingers raw from folding and gluing, and felt a familiar itch; the same urge that, years before in Manchester's cotton mills, had driven her to invent a safety device after seeing a girl injured by a flying shuttle. Margaret, or "Mattie" to her family, had always been drawn to tools over dolls, a habit she'd carried through jobs in upholstery, engraving, and home repair.

One evening, as dusk settled and the factory emptied, Margaret lingered at her workbench, sketching ideas on scraps of paper. Her landlady, Mrs. O'Rourke, who ran the company boarding house next door, paused nearby, her voice tinged with concern. "You'll wear yourself out, Mattie. They pay you to bundle bags, not build machines."

Margaret smiled, brushing a strand of hair from her brow. "But if I can make a machine to do the folding and gluing, think how much faster we could work. No more sore backs, no more wasted paper. I think Mr. Taylor" — she nodded toward the foreman's office — "would be grateful for the improvement."

Mrs. O'Rourke shook her head, but pride glinted in her eyes. "Just don't let them take credit for your work."

To Margaret's surprise, the company did not object to her tinkering. Mr. Taylor seemed more amused than concerned. One evening, as Margaret adjusted a wooden gear on her prototype, Mr. Taylor paused at her bench. "Still at it, Miss Knight? Most folks just do their job and go home."

Margaret tightened a bolt, her hands steady. "But what if we could do it better?"

He chuckled, shaking his head. “If you can make these bags faster, you’ll have my thanks-and maybe a few less sore backs on the floor.”

In the 1860s, company rules about inventions were loose. Many workers experimented on their own, and the idea that a woman might become a business rival was almost unthinkable. Perhaps the company saw her efforts as a curiosity or simply underestimated her.

Either way, Margaret was left to her own devices, and within months, she had a wooden prototype that could cut, fold, and glue paper into sturdy, flat-bottomed bags. The machine was rickety, as one witness later described in court, but it worked, churning out more than a thousand bags with the turn of a crank.

Margaret’s heart raced with excitement. She could smell the oil on the gears and feel the vibration of the machine through the floorboards. This invention was different. This time, she would patent it.

But as she worked with local machinists to build a more durable iron model, a man named Charles Annan visited the shop. He watched her closely, asking questions, taking notes. Margaret, eager to share her ideas, answered him openly, never suspecting he would later try to claim her invention as his own.

When she learned Annan had filed for a patent, Margaret was stunned, but not defeated. She gathered her sketches, journals, and testimony from her landlady, employer, and machinists. In the stifling air of the courtroom, Annan’s lawyer sneered, “Surely a woman could not have devised such a complex machine.”

Margaret stood tall, her voice steady. “I built it. My hands shaped every piece. My mind solved every problem.”

The judge listened as witness after witness described Margaret’s work at Columbia, her tireless experimentation, her determination. At last, the verdict came: the patent was hers.

With her invention secured, Margaret co-founded the Eastern Paper Bag Company in Hartford, Connecticut, and licensed her machine. The flat-bottomed paper bag soon spread across the world, transforming how people shopped and carried their necessities home.

Margaret’s story endures as proof that ingenuity and persistence can flourish even in the most unlikely places, and that sometimes, all it takes is a company willing to let a curious mind work — and a woman determined to claim her place in history.



About the Author

Jim Kissane is a historical author and oral storyteller based in Tampa, Florida, renowned for bringing America’s industrial era (1850s–1950s) to life through vivid, character-driven narratives. Drawing on a family legacy rooted in the primary industries of that era, Jim’s work blends firsthand accounts with meticulous research to illuminate the unsung everyday heroes and pivotal moments of industrial America. He has published five works in his “Story of Industrial America” collection, and his stories have appeared in numerous publications, with several featured in *The Story Beast*.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



-HEALING SPRINGS-



I Never Got to Go to Camp as a Kid

by Patti Smith

I never got to go to camp as a kid. I suffered from asthma badly enough that I had to spend my time in air-conditioned buildings. Rustic camps or tents weren't in the cards.

But as I got older, my asthma improved, and camp cabins got air conditioning. And it was time to go to camp!

I landed at Camp Cavell in Lexington, Michigan, on the beautiful shores of Lake Huron. I was to spend a week making crafts, English Country dancing, singing, and watching sunrises. Everything was wonderful that first night — until I realized that none of my fellow dancers from my group in Ann Arbor were there. I knew absolutely no one.

Like many people who love the spotlight and being on stage, I am extremely shy. I can jump on stage and ad-lib in front of hundreds but drop me into a party where I don't know anyone, and I curl up in the corner and pray for death.

I spent most of the day on Monday in classes. Mealtimes saw me sitting and smiling vaguely at strangers who were nice but didn't really include me. Tuesday brought the same. But at dinner that night, one of the leads announced that there would be a camper talent show at lunch the next day. You could sing, dance — or tell stories.

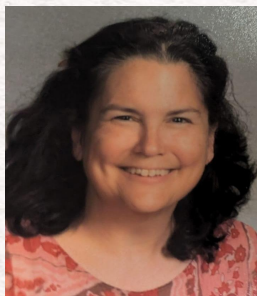
My ears perked up like my dog's when he smells chicken. Finally, here was something I could do and do well. I spent that night in my air-conditioned cabin rehearsing the story I wanted to tell. When I finally got it down to 10 minutes, I fell asleep and dreamt the dreams of people who would soon be doing the thing they loved the most.

At lunch the next day, my hand shot up immediately when the lead camp guy asked for volunteers. I told him my name and what I was going to do. And then I stepped in front of the mic. All of the awkwardness of the past two days slid away as I launched into my story about how I misunderstood a book back in elementary school. (Long story short: I picked up a book from the nonfiction section about a virus sweeping the country that turned people into plants. My librarian could not POSSIBLY have erred when shelving the book, so this must be true. I panicked. My parents saved the day by explaining it was fiction. Much laughter ensued.)

And then, telling the story, much laughter was had again. People were delighted with the story of innocent, naïve me trying to save my grandparents from being turned into oak trees and my dad into a cactus.

As I walked back to my seat with applause ringing in my ears, people whispered praise. When we adjourned to the lunch line, I found myself surrounded by people. Suddenly, through the power of storytelling, these were no longer strangers. I was no longer shy. I had something to talk about with people: being a kid, the books we loved, our misunderstandings, being young. I didn't have to hide in the corner anymore.

And it was all because of a story.



About the Author

Patti Smith is a special education teacher and storyteller in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She believes everyone should stand on a stage and have people applaud them. She aims to make that a reality for as many people as possible.

Facebook: Patti Smith

TeacherPattiS@outlook.com

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work

The Puppet's Friend Got Dead

by Patricia Coffie



Patricia Rose Ballard Coffie 1982
Inspiration at Ames Public Library for a milk drum stage in Waverly
Public Library.
Children's Services Librarian.

In the days when Waverly Public Library was building its programming, it was sometimes necessary for the Children's Services librarian to be in two places at the same time. That is why I took the six preschoolers down to the meeting room to try out the new puppet stage we had made out of a powdered milk drum from the local milk packaging plant.

There would be room for two preschoolers in the stage at a time. The first two chose a puppet apiece and snuggled inside lifting their puppets up at the top. Their show would be their own.

The first puppet began to sob. I said, "That little puppet seems very sad."

The puppet said, "I am very sad because my friend got runned over by a car."

I said, "That is very sad and maybe you would like to rest for a while to feel better?"

The puppet disappeared. The other puppet moved to the center and then the first puppet's sobs began anew as the puppet came back up.

I said "Little puppet, you seem to be sad some more. Maybe your friend will be better after lunch."

"NO," said the sobbing puppet. "My friend got killed dead by that car."

I said "Oh, my. That is sad. Could this puppet talk to Mommy and see if that would help?"

The puppet disappeared and the sobbing stopped. Almost immediately, the puppet reappeared sobbing anew. I continued the conversation with suggestions as they came to me: talking to Dad, talking to the teacher, thinking good thoughts, etc. We spent much of the 45 minutes in conversation about love and loss and sorrow.

I did have the puppeteer with the sobbing puppet come sit on my lap long enough to have the other five puppeteers take turns in the stage.

When Storytime ended, we all walked dry-eyed up the stairs to Moms, Dads, and other adults. I spoke to the Mom and she said indeed the little friend had been killed by a car the day before.

The child had used puppetry to work through overwhelming tragedy.

Puppetry and the library once again provided a safe place to express feelings and experience healing.



All puppets are whatever is needed, not just what they look like.



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*, *Our Iowa*, *Storytelling Magazine*, and in “Stories from Home” Waverly Iowa Newspapers, print and digital. maemaude@mac.com

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work

David Walker Brock and Leslie Miller Buie

by Michael Brundy and Viveca Deanes



David Walker Brock



Leslie Miller Buie

It is with profound sorrow and deep sadness that we share the passing of David Walker Brock and Leslie Miller Buie.

David Walker Brock, a remarkable young man whose light touched our storytelling community, passed away on May 9, 2025, after a year-long journey with cancer. He was just 23 years old. David's story was anything but ordinary. Despite health challenges early in life, he lived with immense curiosity, creativity, and compassion. A proud member of the Youth Storytelling Group at the Zula B. Wylie Library in Cedar Hill, Texas, David trained under the guidance of Toni Simmons and Traphene Hickman, eventually earning recognition as a National Youth Storyteller. He participated in the 2020 and 2021 Timpanogos National Storytelling Festivals, and, during the pandemic, generously volunteered to help with Tejas Storytelling Association virtual storytelling programs.

David later joined the Tejas Storytelling Association Board of Directors, where his insight and quiet wisdom left a lasting impact. Even while juggling college coursework and ongoing medical treatments, he continued to support the storytelling world with the same passion he brought to science, technology, and learning. David was an accomplished STEM scholar, a presenter at national mathematics conferences, and a contributor to research in physics, robotics, and large language modeling. He embraced life barefoot, under the trees, building chain reactions, folding origami, telling stories, and exploring the natural world with wonder.

Though his time with us was brief, his legacy is enduring. He reminds us to live curiously, love deeply, *live* until you die, and tell our stories with honesty and heart.

A graveside service and simple, green burial was held for David on May 17, 2025 .at the Mountain Creek Cemetery in Grand Prairie, Texas. Attendees brought memories to share and flowers to place on David's casket. A Celebration of Life was held on May 23, 2025. A small flame was lit to represent the light of David's life. Memories of David were shared during this service. Attendees were invited to light a memorial candle from David's flame, symbolizing the end of his physical life and his continuing to live through those who love him.

Leslie Buie, a long-time and devoted member of the Rockwall Storytelling Guild and the Tejas Storytelling Association, passed on May 14, 2025.

Leslie was not only a gifted storyteller, even winning a Liar's Contest, but also a generous volunteer and leader within our community. Leslie was committed to perpetuating the art of storytelling and shared much of this time encouraging budding storytellers as they honed their storytelling skills. He offered tips, but only when asked, on how to sharpen/strengthen their stories, and encouraged them to do the same, not because he said so, but because he did so. He was a founding member and Treasurer of the Rockwall Storytelling Guild. When Viveca Deanes shared her vision with Leslie of starting a family-friendly story circle, he responded, "That sounds like a good idea. Let's do it! May I invite some friends?" Three of the friends he invited attended the first meeting, and the Rockwall Storytelling Circle was born. Eventually, the Rockwall Storytelling Circle became the Rockwall Storytelling Guild, and with Leslie's help, received non-profit status. Whatever the Rockwall Storytelling Guild was doing, Leslie supported it as long as he could. Leslie's motto regarding the Rockwall Storytelling Guild events was, "Be a friend, and bring a friend." He served on the Tejas Storytelling Association Board and the Financial Committee, and for at least two years, he was our dedicated Volunteer Coordinator for the Texas Storytelling Festival. His energy, warmth, and unwavering commitment helped shape the heart of the gatherings of the Rockwall Storytelling Guild and Tejas Storytelling Association.

Obituary and full tribute for Leslie Miller Buie:

<https://www.resthavenfuneral.com/obituaries/Leslie-Miller-Buie?obId=42554540>

Please keep the Brock and Buie families in your thoughts during this difficult time.

Michael Brundy, President
Tejas Storytelling Association

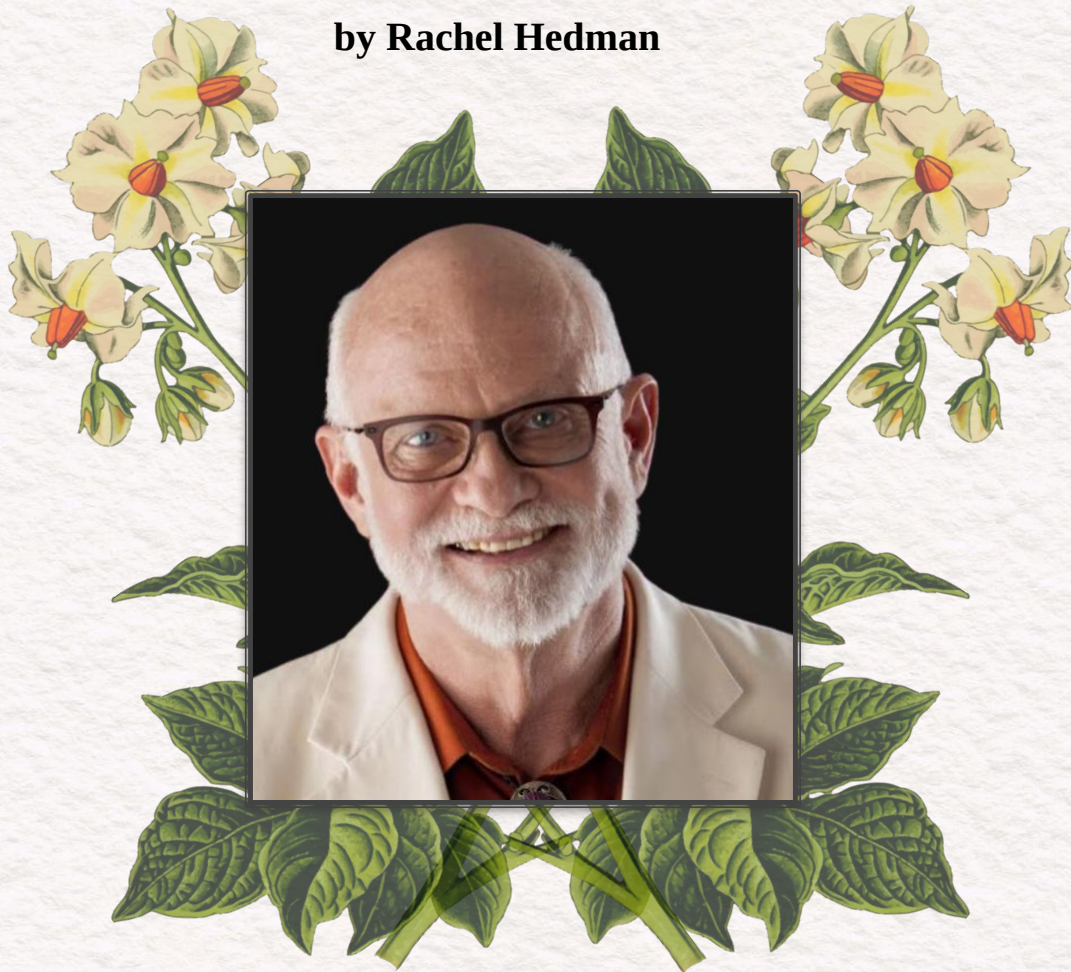
Viveca Deanes, President
Rockwall Storytelling Guild
Affiliate Guild of Tejas Storytelling Association
VivecaDeanes@outlook.com.

**See bios for Michael Brundy and Viveca Deanes on p.74. Reach out with your own memories.

The Man Behind the Movement:

A Personal Reflection on Jimmy Neil Smith

by Rachel Hedman



The following article contains my personal reflections and opinions. They do not represent the views of any other individual, organization, or the e-publication in which this article appears.

Jimmy Neil Smith was, above all, human. He experienced the full spectrum of life's ups and downs, yet he never let challenges stop him from becoming a legend in the storytelling world. He was a dreamer, who put action behind his ideas, a risk-taker, who understood that some dreams falter, while others surpass even the boldest expectations.

His vision transformed storytelling in America. While storytelling has always existed, the art became more visible and accessible through the festival model he envisioned. As the founder of the National Storytelling Festival, he catapulted the American Storytelling Movement into national and international recognition. The International Storytelling Center described him as a "visionary leader who saw the power of storytelling to connect people, foster understanding, and celebrate our shared humanity." Under his leadership, Jonesborough, Tennessee, became a storytelling mecca, drawing thousands each year to celebrate the power of narrative. His contributions reached beyond storytelling circles—he was an advocate for the arts, a passionate community builder, and a mentor to countless individuals who carried forward his dream.

Yet, like all visionaries, his legacy is not without complexities. The evolution of the movement he helped to build included moments of unity and moments of division. One such pivotal moment was the separation between the International Storytelling Center (ISC) and what is now the National Storytelling Network (NSN). Initially, there was a financial agreement in place between the two organizations, with ISC providing NSN a portion of the festival's gross profits. However, when that agreement was nullified, it created a fracture. Some saw it as a necessary step for ISC to sustain itself and focus on its own vision. Others saw it as a sudden severance, which left NSN struggling for funding. It was a difficult chapter, one that underscored the competing interests and challenges inherent in any movement built by passionate individuals with different priorities.

But legacies are rarely simple. Visionaries take risks, and those risks sometimes lead to unintended consequences. Yet, even in that complexity, one truth remains: without Jimmy Neil Smith, the American Storytelling Movement would not have soared as it has today.

I first encountered his name, while perusing the Brigham Young University Library, deep in my own journey to understand storytelling on a national and global level. Joseph Sobol's *The Storytellers' Journey: An American Revival* mentioned him repeatedly, underscoring his role in shaping modern storytelling. I had already founded the BYU Storytelling Club, and my passion for the art was evident to all my professors. Though I studied Communications Marketing with a Business Minor, storytelling was my true focus. So much so that my Honors Thesis—*Transformation of the Storyteller's Identity and Role Through the American Storytelling Movement*—was approved along with a grant that took me to the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

It was there that I met Jimmy Neil Smith in person. Two visionaries, face to face, talking big ideas. He listened to me with the same intensity and curiosity with which I listened to him. At the time, I had a grand, Olympic-sized dream for storytelling, a vision I tentatively called the World Story Conference. The right name would come later: Story Crossroads. Jimmy Neil didn't dismiss it. Instead, he engaged, questioned, and encouraged.

He had a way of making big ideas feel possible. He thrived in conversation, whether at a bench or a table, where he could explore possibilities, challenge assumptions, and ignite inspiration in those who dared to dream alongside him. That was his gift—his belief that storytelling was not just an art but a movement, a force for community-building and inner growth.

His passing leaves a void, but his impact endures. The tributes pouring in from storytellers, artists, and friends paint a picture of a man whose passion was contagious, whose influence was profound, and whose dream lives on in the countless people he inspired. He reminded us that storytelling is more than entertainment—it is a way to connect, to inspire, and to leave the world richer than we found it. I am grateful for the moments I shared with him, the conversations we had, and the belief we both held: that dreams mean little unless you put them into action.

Rest in story, Jimmy Neil Smith. Your vision lives on.

-THAT'S AMAZING!-

Behind the scenes of great performers.



Fairytale Variations

by Cooper Braun

I never expected to say, "I produce one of the most well attended virtual storytelling shows in the world!"

In my early days as a teller, whenever I was at a conference and talked about curating fairy tales for an adult audience, I was invariably asked "Did you ever go to Winter Tales?" and "Did I know about the thing they did with fairy tales." While I was sadly never able to attend Winter Tales, I quickly learned about the thing that they did. The featured performers at the festival agreed on a fairy tale, and each of them did a different version of the same story. People particularly raved about David Novak's performance of Cinderella in iambic pentameter.

In March of 2020 the world shut down. That first summer Stories with Spirit (my company with Rachel Ann Harding) produced six shows on Zoom. When it became apparent that the world was not going to be opening up anytime soon, Rachel Ann and I took a step back and considered what it was we really wanted to do. The idea of a show based around fractured fairy tales was nothing new to us. But we had friends we wanted to perform with, and Winter Tales kept coming up in our conversations. Rachel Ann and I both had a version of Snow White. We loved Milbre Burch's What the Queen Saw. I knew that Laura Packer did Snow White several different ways. And Janice Del Negro offered to write something new for us. So, on Saturday November 28th, 2020, we performed Fairy Tale Variations: SNOW WHITE. 150 people signed in to watch the show!

So we planned a second show for January. There had been a version of Hansel and Gretel in the back of my mind for years, and on January 8th, 2021, we produced Fairy Tale Variations: HANSEL AND GRETEL, and 241 people joined us for the show! We realized we had something magical on our hands.

In that first year of the pandemic, it felt to me that so many folks were using Zoom as a hold over until they could get back to "real" storytelling. For me it was never an either/or. While I love in-person telling, virtual performance has let me reach an audience I would have never met. While the bulk of our online audience comes from North America, we have a regular attendee who eats breakfast in Singapore while we perform at 6pm in Denver, CO. We have had folks tune in from Sweden for a 2 AM start time. There might not be 200 people in Denver who want to listen to me tell fairy tales, but there are certainly 200 people on earth who do. As of April 2025, we have produced a total of 23 Fairy Tale Variations shows, with an average attendance of 165, and up to 450 folks watching each recording after the fact.

If there is a "secret sauce" to Fairy Tale Variations' success, it comes from several factors. The first was choosing to do only one thing. We do fairy tales curated for an adult audience. If you want personal stories, this is not the show for you. But if you want fairy tales, we endeavor to put on the best show possible.

From the beginning we wanted to produce a professional show. This was not a place holder, but an event as well realized as it could possibly be. In addition to being a storyteller, I am a theater technician. The idea of producing my own shows was nothing new to me. Nor was figuring out the best lighting, camera, and microphone setups. Most of our tellers are professionals, and we treat them as such. We pay well and expect folks to come prepared, while at the same time supporting folks who are still figuring out the ropes of Zoom performance or have never fractured a fairy tale before.

The last ingredient to our "secret sauce" has been ticketing the show via "Pay What It's Worth!" As anyone who has attended one of our shows knows, the tickets are "free." At the end of each show I ask the audience what an hour and half of professional art was worth to them. Folks have sent me three crumpled dollar bills, and checks for \$500. We have trusted that making our show worth watching has made it a show worth paying for, and our audience has risen to the occasion. At the same time we are able to keep drawing in a crowd and supporting audience members who have only their applause to give.

At the core of our process is trusting storytellers that we respect to bring new and interesting work to the table. That Fairy Tale Variations has allowed me to perform alongside some of the best storytellers in the country is never lost on me. What started as asking our friends if they "wanted to come and play fairy tales with us?" has grown into a show that I can proudly say is professional, draws one of the largest audiences, and pays among the best. And creates a space where tellers are allowed to experiment and play with stories in ways they often feel unable to do (especially if they mostly tell to families and children, or fairy tales are not their normal fare).

While I could write a whole article about how I retell fairy tales, the core of my process boils down to finding a question that I need to answer. I start with the old stories (in my case usually the Brothers Grimm). I sit down, really read the story, and pay attention to what strikes me as odd, or strange, or does not make sense, or asks a question that the story does not answer. In the case of our recent Snow White show it was that in every version of the Grimms', she is 7 years old when her stepmother (or mother in the first edition) orders the huntsman to murder her! Seven years old! That was something I needed to answer. I had the beginning of the story.

If I learned anything from the pandemic it is that virtual storytelling lets me produce shows in a way I never dreamed of. Zoom meant that I could do it. It lowered the cost of producing shows to a manageable number. Compared to almost any other art form the cost of investing in gear to produce virtual shows is minimal (less than \$500 for a very solid set up). There is a learning curve to the technical side of things, but it is not insurmountable.

I feel a little like Fairy Tale Variations caught lightning in a bottle, but the recipe is not a hard one to follow. We chose to do one thing as well as we could, from the tech to the telling, as professionally as possible. We treat our virtual shows as seriously as we would any in-person show. Our audience has continued to support us, and as far as I am concerned virtual storytelling is here to stay.

¹ For real, if you want to learn how to produce shows on Zoom, drop me an email. I will talk you through everything I have learned. Virtual storytelling has been a godsend for me, and I want more folks to feel comfortable producing their own shows. Good art begets good art.

cooper.braun.enos@gmail.com

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



About the Author

Raised by "granola-eating coyotes" in Boulder, Colorado, Cooper Braun grew up without television and instead fell in love with storytelling through records and cassette tapes. A trained actor and veteran theater technician, he co-founded *Stories with Spirit* in 2013 and has since become a nationally recognized storyteller known for his darkly funny, poignant fairy tale reimaginings and the hit virtual series *Fairy Tale Variations*. CooperBraun.com



-PUZZLES and GAMES-

"Curiouser and curiouser!"

A Riddle For You

He has lived for days, and months, and
years

Almost away from air,

And never a leg, nor arm had he,
And never a lock of hair.

But neither crippled or lame was he,
Nor had he a coat to wear.

What is he?

 -SB

Last Issue's Answer: The End.

LOST WORD SOCIETY

by Carmen Agra Deedy

Summer is here with lazy, sunny days, romantic, starlit nights, a time for glorious adventures, and infinite possibilities. Yet, the cotton and pollen counts are high and the grass needs mowing. Again. Agog and aghast at this trite amalgamation of pedantic, mindless drivel? Feeling lurgy and finding yourself in zugzwang? Then gardyloo!

If you have an attack of the collywobbles brought on by this cacophony of gobbledygook from a sialoquent flibbertigibbet and snollygoster, who is often yclept as an ultracrepidarian, it would be best to turn widdershins and xertz some warm water with a tittynope of bicarbonate of soda. This should decrease your wambling and desire to defenestrate this mumpsimus who orchestrated this kerfuffle with their constant susurrus, designed to bumfuzzle, like the discombobulating drone of a doodle sack. There is always something.

And that something is an antique, anachronistic, antediluvian assemblage of the discarded, dated, and disused vocabulary accumulated, arrayed, and archived in this excellent, exceptionally exquisite exhibition known as The Lost Word Society.

In each issue we will give you an archaic, obsolete, or otherwise “lost” word. We will make up three silly definitions for the word, mostly incorrect, to amuse ourselves and hopefully you, dear reader. Your job is to make up your own definition, sonnet, a myth, or even a one act play about the lost word, just for fun. Next month, we will publish the true definition of the “lost” word and provide you with another one. Enjoy!

FICULNEAN (adj.) obsolete.

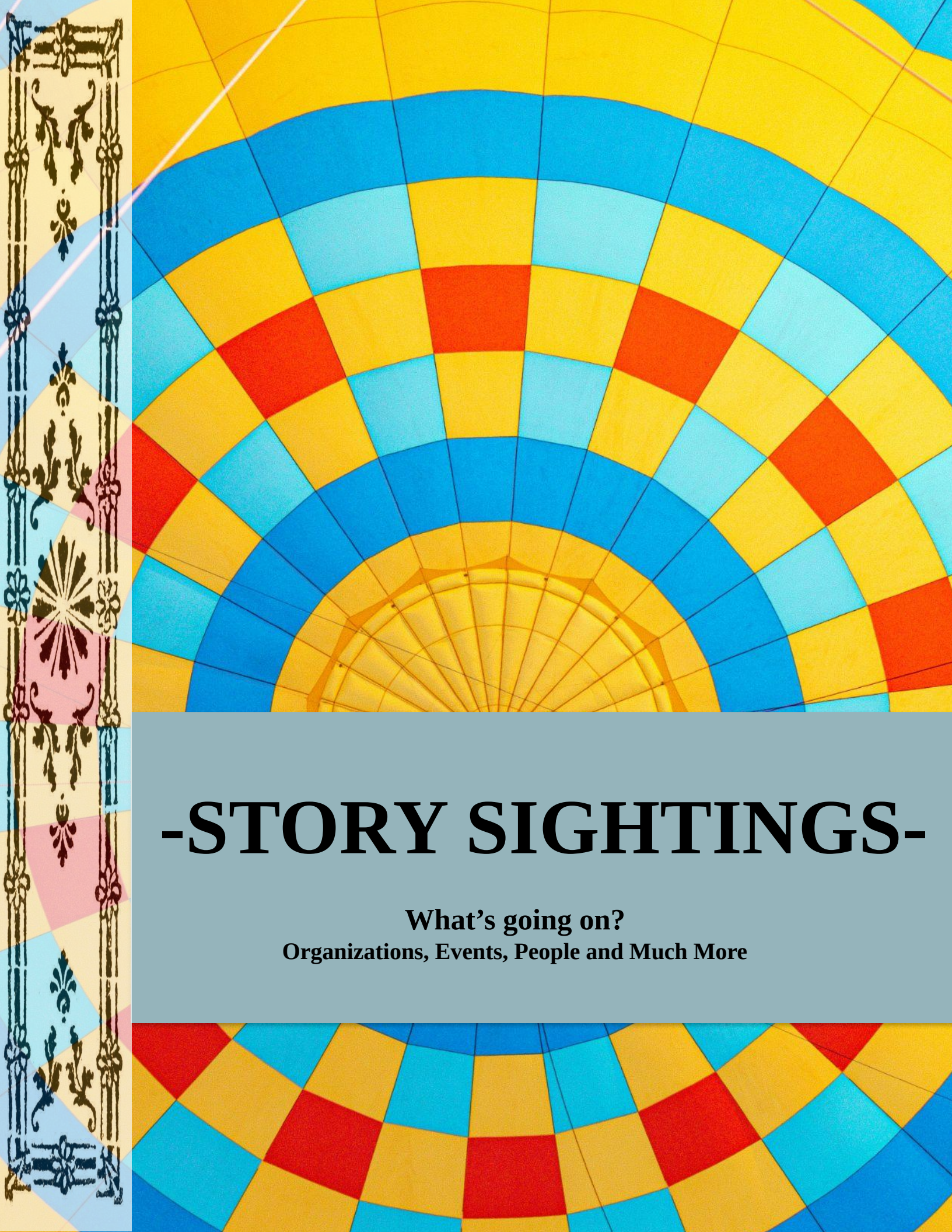
- 1) To be insignificant, small, or petty.
- 2) To be punctilious, exacting, or exceptionally particular with regards to one’s dress and/or diet.
- 3) To compulsively collect, sort, and display printed ads and labels in the most fastidious manner.

Last Month’s Lost Word:

BAJULATE (v.) - to bear a heavy burden. *Etymology: from bājulāre, to carry; bājulus, a porter.



For more fun explore:
Carmen Agra Deedy’s LOST WORD SOCIETY
at facebook.com/carmenagradeedy
for new words every weekend!

The image features a decorative border on the left side with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern in blue, red, and gold. The background is a large, colorful, semi-circular pattern composed of concentric arcs and segments in shades of yellow, blue, and red, resembling a stylized sunburst or a stained-glass window. The central text is set against a solid grey rectangular background.

-STORY SIGHTINGS-

What's going on?
Organizations, Events, People and Much More

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Selina Eisenberg
Professional Storyteller

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Stages: My Life in Stories

by Jessica Piscitelli Robinson

Stages

My Life in Stories



Jessica Piscitelli Robinson

At first glance, *Stages* is a memoir, a collection of amusing, moving stories that follow the author through her life.

As you reach the end of the book, of course, you see the larger picture, like an image arising out of mosaics.

It's also a masterclass on storytelling, and Jessica Piscitelli Robinson a master storyteller.

-author, Anne Janzer

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—**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

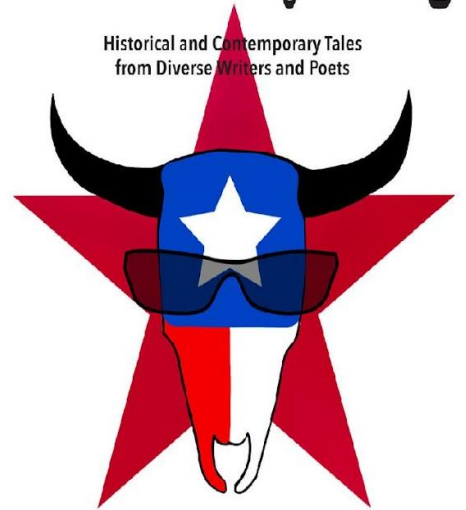
"**A love of oral storytelling** imbues this celebratory book with the flavors of many cultural traditions that call Texas home. Share these stories with your family, your classroom, and faith community."

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



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"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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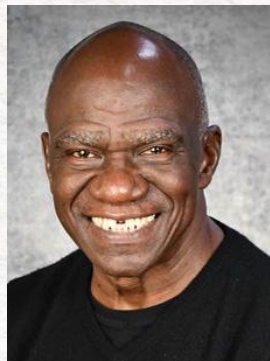


BIOS



Viveca Deanes fuses stories with music, rhythm, and rhyme to share personal, family-friendly stories about family and faith in, hope in, and love of Jesus Christ and to share poems about life lessons - bought, borrowed, and taught - to make them memorable. She shares in-person and on Zoom.

VivecaDeanes@outlook.com.



Michael Brundy is a motivational speaker, storyteller, and author of four books, including “Make a Point Tell a Story”. He is President of the Tejas Storytelling Association and Past President of the Dallas Storytelling Guild. A Toastmasters Hall of Fame speaker, Michael informs, inspires and entertains audiences with personal and historical stories.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bridgman, Lewis Jesse. (1929) The Guess Book of Riddles. Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co. Library of Congress, Public Domain (2019).

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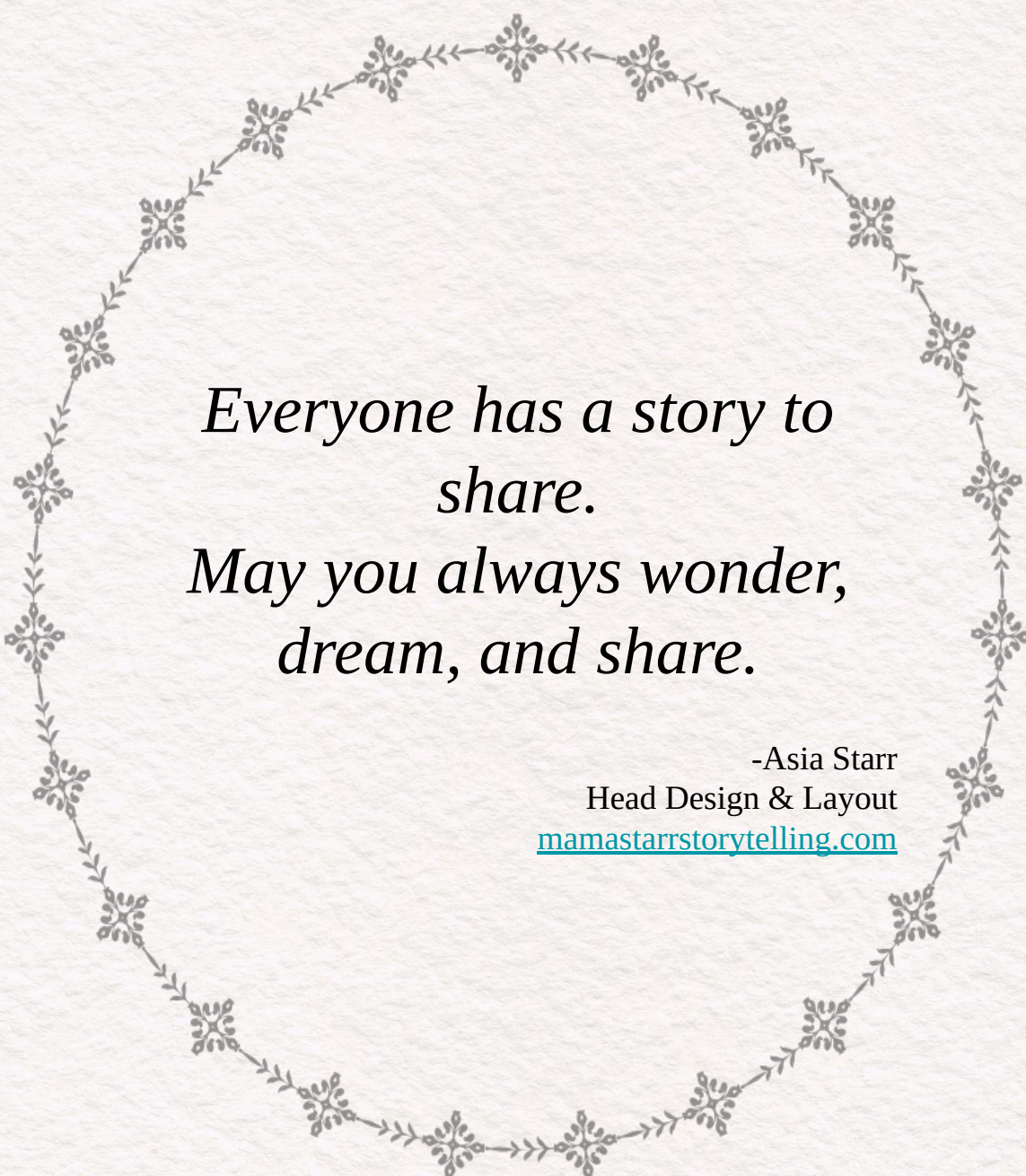
About the Font

Tinos was designed by Steve Matteson as an innovative, refreshing serif design that is metrically compatible with Times New Roman™. Tinos offers improved on-screen readability characteristics and the pan-European WGL character set and solves the needs of developers looking for width-compatible fonts to address document portability across platforms.

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

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*Everyone has a story to
share.*

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

-Asia Starr
Head Design & Layout
mamastarrstorytelling.com

Thoughts? Feedback? Feelings?
Contact us at:
storybeasteditor@gmail.com.





