

THE STORY BEAST

For Story Artists, Listeners, and Dreamers

STEPPING STONES





About the Cover Artist Joey Fletcher

Joey Fletcher is an aspiring storyteller and hobbyist illustrator (meaning he likes to doodle). He grew up in his backyard, being told stories and making up his own. He grew up utilizing his imagination to the fullest. This sparked a lifelong joy of stories and images that accompany them.

He also loves his cat.

[-Instagram-](#)

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

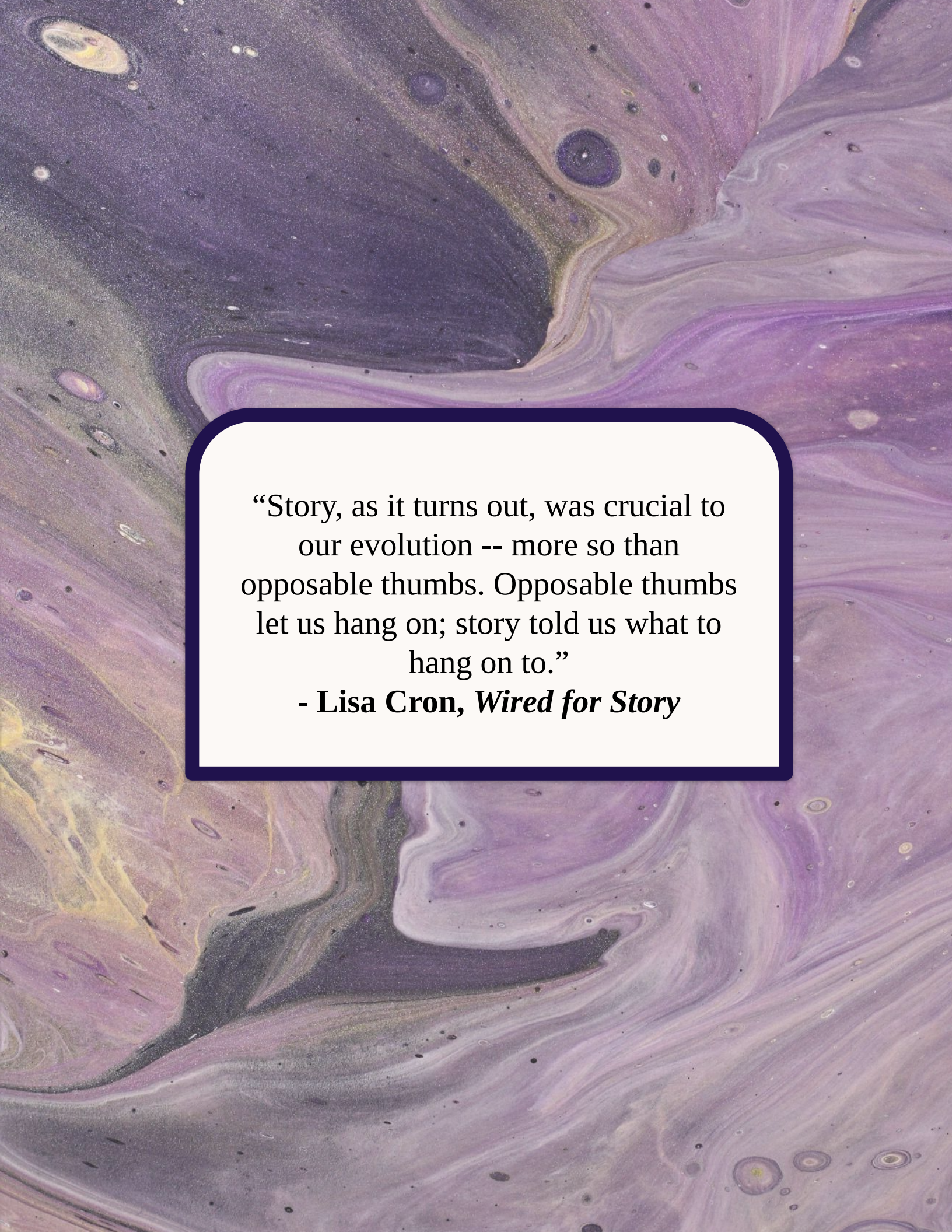
The Story Beast 2024 Themes

Summer - Chaotic Creations - Due May 15

Fall - Flavored Fright - Due Aug. 15

Winter - Whirling Winds - Due Nov. 15





“Story, as it turns out, was crucial to our evolution -- more so than opposable thumbs. Opposable thumbs let us hang on; story told us what to hang on to.”

- **Lisa Cron**, *Wired for Story*



THE STORY BEAST

Stepping Stones

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Spring 2024



The Story Beast
Vol. 3 ♦ Issue 1 ♦ Stepping Stones
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The squirrels got up very early and went fishing.

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin
Beatrix Potter, Color Process

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MAIL



MARCH 2024 WELCOME

We are excited to introduce two new features in this issue. In the “That’s Amazing” section, we will get an inside look as to how a renowned storyteller crafted an amazing performance piece. In the “Surviving My Art” section, tellers will relate anecdotes of some of their more memorable Mayhem Moments they have experienced in the pursuit of their art.

Meanwhile, there is nothing like the rush of energy and the buzz of meeting and hanging out with a group of storytellers. After years of COVID isolation, the National Storytelling Network (NSN) in-person Conference is back! The Conference will be held at the Dumas Bay Center in Federal Way south of Seattle, WA from July 11 - 14, 2024. Can’t make it in-person? You can also attend some of the sessions virtually via Zoom.

This will be an opportunity to see friends you haven’t seen in years, meet people you have only met on Zoom, and make new friends and connections. Where else can you learn and talk for hours on end with folks who love stories? Where else can you see amazing storytelling and fringe performances, workshops, and interact with folks who are as passionate about stories and storytelling as you?

I get energized when I learn something new about storytelling or experience an incredible performance, and I love chatting with other tellers about their craft and their latest projects. Attending the Conference is like reconnecting with your tribe. There is something electrifying about being with folks who just get you.

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

The deadline for contributions for the next issue of *The Story Beast* is May 15 for the June 2024 issue. The Summer issue’s theme is Chaotic Creations. Thanks for reading and May the 4th be with you!

Thank you very much,
The Spirits of the Beast
storybeasteditor@gmail.com



Dearest Crone:

So I heard that crones are known to trust their inner wisdom and have a holistic approach? Instead of trusting the rumors, I decided to ask you. So...

So Curious It Hurts

Dear So Curious It Hurts:

Am I to be honored or insulted? Were there any other crones being considered to get this answer? And who is this “they” that you refer to? I assume you are talking about storytellers. They seem to be one of the few people who talk about crones these days. As I am featured in many stories – published and unpublished – then how about I focus on holistic storytelling practices? Oh, and I’m not waiting for your answer on this part. I will simply share what I want to share.

A storyteller could focus all energy on body language. Or only work on word choice. Or be obsessed with dramatic pauses to the point that you forget that this is not a mime piece. Of course, a mime piece would be fabulous. When someone only thinks about one part, the overall experience could suffer due to the lopsided attention to, well, everything.

Now let’s return to me, a crone (Or THE Crone – I much prefer that emphasis). If I only focused on tricking people to see if they are kind or terrible, then I could lose track of the big purpose that I decided upon when I was a young one 223 years of age. I could be drawn into the allure of fabrication, stratagem, and concealment and be distracted from the ultimate goal. What is that goal? That is part of my own personal artistic statement as a crone. None of your business!

By the way, do you have a mission statement of some kind? Oh, you think you have to be some la-di-da corporation or something? It doesn’t matter if you are a storyteller, a cook, an engineer, a knight, a princess, or a troll – you need a mission statement. Perhaps instead of wondering about my “inner wisdom” as a crone, you can trust your inner wisdom. Are crones the only ones with access to instinct and intuition? Bah! I have enough sense to know that we all have that potential to guide our paths to good or ill.

Oh? You want to at least learn a meditation technique so that my answer will be good enough for you. Fine. Being mindful can help any human or creature.

First, find a comfortable place to sit. I wouldn’t recommend standing on one leg unless you happen to be a flamingo. And you could be. I’ve seen princes as frogs and princesses as dragons. A flamingo could be a pleasant transformation compared to the other incidents I have witnessed.

Then, take deep breaths. Inhale and exhale. I really shouldn’t have to say “inhale and exhale” as “deep breaths” seems self-explanatory. But I can’t take any chances. One time, a snake wanted meditation advice (as can be proven at how often you see snakes sunning themselves on rocks). I only said “take deep breaths.” To this day, snakes make that hissing sound, still confused by my instructions.

Finally, don't think. You can re-think your thoughts later. But for the moment, get rid of those distracting thoughts like "I wonder what my stage name could be when I'm famous." Or, "If I had a parrot, what would I teach it to say?" Yes, get rid of those thoughts. After about 20 minutes, go and re-enter the world and figure out the answers to stage names and parrots.

Go to Dewey Decimal 158.1 for Personal Improvement and Analysis. That delves more into meditation as well as other self-helps. Don't be surprised that nearby will be books about Applied Psychology and Interpersonal Relations.

What? You're going to go meditate now? No more time for me? Oh bother!

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:

Summer - June 2024 - *Chaotic Creations* - Due May 1

Fall - September 2024 - *Flavored Fright* - Due August 1

Winter - December 2024 - *Whirling Winds* - Due November 1

For Submission Guidelines go to storybeast.org/submissions

Submit to storybeasteditor@gmail.com

-BOOK NOTES-

“So many books, so little shelf space!”



BOOK NOTES

This month's "Book Notes" present a diverse range of valuable publications. At this time of violence across the world, I foreground Lyn Ford and Sherry Norfolk's anthology about storytelling as peace work. Elise Hurst presents an innovative "storytelling handbook" made of images rather than words. Steve Daut edits and re-tells Mark Twain – a tremendous gift to his storytelling colleagues. And two brilliant humorists and wordsmiths, Bil Lepp and Don White, give us sparkling memoirs-cum-fiction. What a feast!

And, my usual promise: I will give any book marked with an asterisk (*) below, 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.)

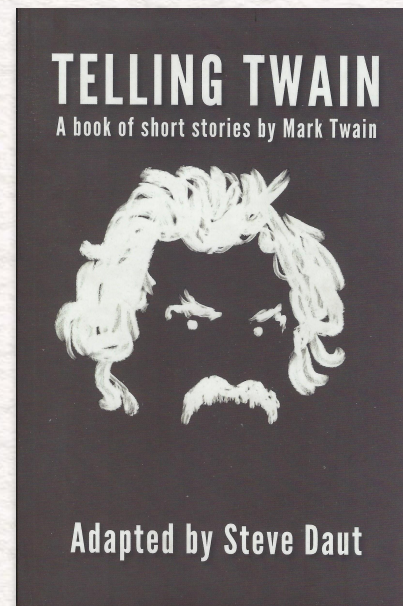
And yet I want MORE books for review! Have you – or has someone you know – published a storytelling collection or a book about the art form in the past two years? Please let me know! and I will request a review copy. Thank you.

Wishing you many glorious stories,
Jo Radner
(jradner@american.edu)

****Telling Twain: A Book of Short Stories by Mark Twain*, adapted by Steve Daut. Marion, MI: Parkhurst Brothers, 2019. \$14.95.**

How many of us are really familiar with Mark Twain's writings – beyond *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, at least? "The more I read, study, and tell Mark Twain stories," writes Steve Daut, "the more convinced I am of the importance of hearing his voice today." And this collection, carefully curated from a wide range of Twain's essays, stories, letters, and miscellaneous works, testifies to the extent of Twain's versatile voice and mind. He mocks human folly, laughs at himself, and skewers political pretensions and untamed greed.

Of course, Twain's language is not modern, and his allusions to events of his time are likely to leave contemporary readers blank. Taking advantage of the fact that all of Twain's writings are now in the public domain, Daut has done considerable editing of the pieces he has chosen, condensing and updating the language, freshening the pace, and often rearranging the structure of pieces so that they can be more easily followed. He welcomes other tellers to perform the stories, and requests only that they acknowledge the source and refrain from recording or publishing them.



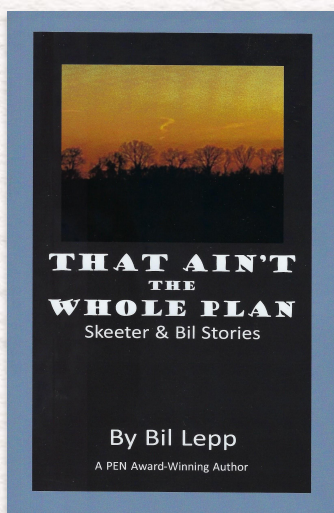
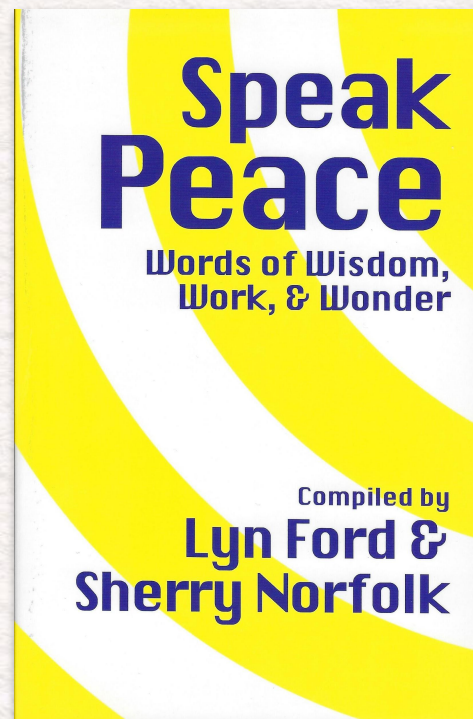
Lyn Ford and Sherry Norfolk, *Speak Peace: Words of Wisdom, Work, and Wonder*. Marion, MI: Parkhurst Brothers, 2019. \$15.00.

Somehow, when this book came out in 2019, it never came to “Book Notes.” I’m making up for that now – when, as never before, we need its messages. Sherry Norfolk and Lyn Ford, longtime gifted teaching artists and storytellers in widely diverse situations, are ideal generators of this anthology of tools to teach peacemaking. They teamed up with more than a dozen experienced storytellers, shocked by increasing violence in America and the world, to harness the stream of horrified conversations on social media into a permanent, written resource for action.

Essays by the participating artists, clustered into categories of “Wisdom” and “Work,” form the bulk of the book. Authors discuss not only their own practices of storytelling in the service of peace, but also their own moments of discovery, times when they, too, realized that they needed to be mindful of their own unexamined attitudes and responses. Bob Kanegis stretches his memories back to the elementary school duck-and-cover drills of his childhood, and forward to the recent moment when, rear-ended by a car at a stoplight, his anger was tamed by a glance at his own bumper sticker: “Wag More, Bark Less.”

Articles and anecdotes in the “Work” section present lessons and actions that foster peace. Sherry Norfolk and Lyn Ford present a series of school lessons to develop empathy. Jane Stenson shows how a folktale, embedded early in a kindergarten class, can teach cooperation and care. In an interview, Liz Weir discusses how peaceful change has come about in Northern Ireland. Susan Colangelo tells how the St. Louis Story Stitchers Artists Collective works together with minority youth to create and perform collaborative stories to prevent gun violence. The spirit of Brother Blue and Ruth Hill wraps round the book.

The final section is also valuable: ten folktales about peacemaking, retold by storytellers. Excellent material. Ways for us all to begin to answer Lyn Ford’s final question: “What will you do to nurture and uphold our rights to speak peace?”



Bil Lepp, *That Ain't the Whole Plan: Skeeter & Bil Stories*. Halfdollar Press, South Charleston, WV, leppstorytelling.com, 2023. \$20.00.

Don't read this book if you have a broken rib, or pneumonia, or any other condition that would make laughing painful. Those fortunate enough to have heard Bil Lepp tell tales in person might doubt that he could be as funny on the page as when he stands on the stage, hands in his back pockets, and builds his quietly earnest, outrageous stories. Wrong. Thirty stories are here, arranged in order of the ages of Bil and his friend Skeeter from their alleged first meeting, age five, to (well, probable) adulthood. Each story is explosively, snort-coffee-out-your-nose funny. And there are even some that Bil has not yet told on stage.

Skeeter and Bil are the crown princes of ingenuity. Ingenuity crowned, that is, with disaster. Building on new understanding of how dogs “claim” their territory by marking trees, they “claim” their kindergarten classroom on the day school starts – and are naively baffled by the response. In Cub Scouts, lost in a corn maze, hiding from wild hippos, they light corn stalks on fire in a desperate attempt to pop popcorn. They ride a washing machine in an impromptu rodeo. Dressed in eight-point buck masks, they drive a truck through town with a dummy dressed as a hunter lashed to the hood. Really, there is no limit to the ingenuity. Be careful, if you read this book in a public place.

***Elise Hurst, *The Storyteller's Handbook*. Everett, WA: Compendium, Inc., 2022. \$24.95.**

You might think, from the title, that this is another offering in the good line of how-to handbooks for our craft. But no. Elise Hurst's idea is very different: Begin with the imagination, and a unique story will follow. The pages of this *Storyteller's Handbook* are filled not with words, but with pictures – and such pictures! Hurst's brilliant illustrations fill every opening of the book – and a “reader” can start anywhere. Open a page at random. A giant praying mantis reads a library book, as a tiger, comfortably bedded on a pile of books, looks on. On another page, children are combing the fur of a sleeping bear as a nearby man sits and listens to a gramophone. On another, a mammoth tows a gigantic ocean liner. On another, a penguin on a rainbow-colored kite prepares to leap off a cliff, as his admiring flightless companions look on.



You get the idea. This book is a treasure-trove of inspirations. What fun to see how many different stories emerge from a single image! To see how your own imagination simply knows how to make a story. To play with such charming and excellent art. As Neil Gaiman says in his Foreword, “Take the pictures you find here, and use them as places to begin your journey into stories. Wonder about them, wander through them. Let them hold your hand and whisper to you, keep you safe in dark places. Explore with them. Let them bring you into stories and make magic.”

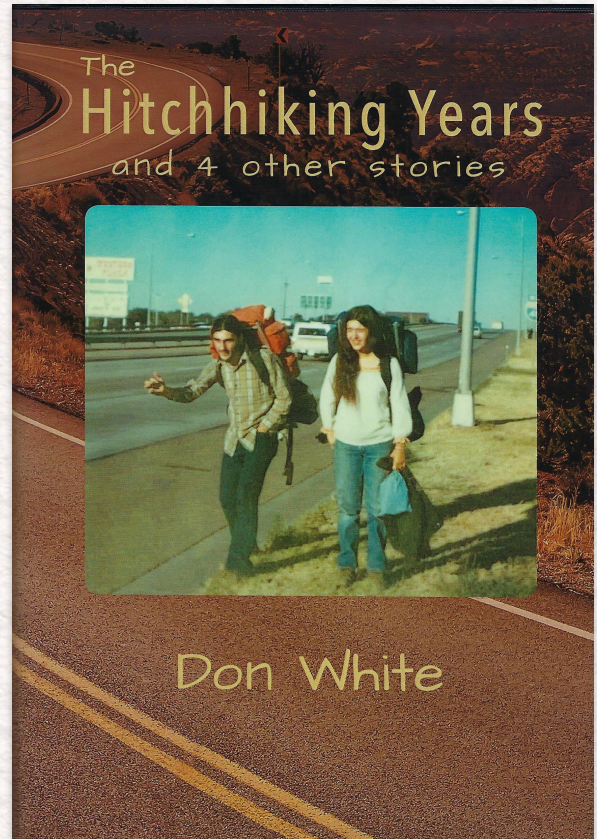
***Don White, *The Hitchhiking Years, and Four Other Stories*. Lynn, MA: Barry Park Press, 2021. \$25.00.**

Don White’s voice is unique among today’s storytellers – and he’s proud of it. “Over time,” he writes, “I have slowly come to realize that most Americans were not raised in a factory town near Boston by two wisecracking punks. Now I get it. I feel bad for all the fun you’re missing but I get it. You’re nice.” His taste runs to the “kind of friendly” attitude of eastern New Jersey (tough, unsentimental, no-nonsense), as opposed to the instinctive kindness of Midwesterners.

The *Hitchhiking Years* is in part fiction – three stories “melding together the personalities and idiosyncrasies of different people I have met to fit the needs of the stories I wanted to tell” – and in part two long memoirs. The impressive title story celebrates Don’s hitchhiking life in the sixties and seventies, when he and Theresa had “nothing to think about except spontaneity and adventure,” when “making plans” meant “we looked at a map and saw that there was a road that went there.” A delightful, giddy, roller-coaster ride of nostalgia for a long-gone age of “more obstinate, impulsive, unfettered freedom.”

The other memoir, “Behind the Wall,” tells stories of Don’s life with his parents, especially his alcoholic father, with side glances at his own parenting, in an interwoven series of anecdotes that finally present a strong fabric of wisdom. We all muse about our parents and why they behaved as they did; we all find bits of ourselves undeniably determined by our childhood lives. Sometimes, if we are persistent and/or lucky, we come to a place of understanding and acceptance, as Don does at the end of the story, committing himself to “do the work it takes to move it forward and try to make it a little bit better for the next group coming along.”

As you can see from this small review, it is hard to stop quoting Don White’s beautiful language. I hope you enjoy it for yourself.



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

The Auditorium

by Julia M. Morris

The children file in
One after the other
Seeking the promised entertainment.

I stand on a stage that was once a lunch room.
Small strangers look up, expecting something.

“Did you bring your voices today?” I ask.
A chorus of “Yes” ricochets back off colorless walls.
“Do you have your bodies and imaginations with you?”
Rows of seated figures nod and giggle, unsure of what I could possibly mean.

In this public school in this governed space,
They will use what they have brought with them
And be alone together.
The stories take them inside and elsewhere.

One child will walk with Vasilisa, while she retrieves the light.
Another will hold a quiet worry about the royal frog:
The princess is angry and she likes to throw her frustration.
Twenty children will dance above their chairs into Africa or China.

They are beyond the Bronx
In frozen forests, where talking animals
Know more than teachers.
They are happy to live here, even for the moment.

After forty-five minutes, the children file out
One
After
The other.

The music of once upon a time, I hope, has seeped inside somewhere.
But how shall I ever know?

Suddenly, chanting, wriggling tigers herd towards exits.
Baba Yaga’s horses gallop towards the hall, wearing the red dawn on their manes.
And I watch them, with their claws and hooves, looking back.
I dangle my feet, as if in a watered well, over the edge of the stage.

I wave and make wishes.

The song of a story is heard
Repeating its refrain down corridors
Banging its fire into classrooms like a dragon’s drum.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work

A Storyteller's Guide to Self-Publishing

by Robin Moore



Are you a storyteller who has always wanted to write and publish a book? Thanks to advances in printing technology and the expansion of the global book distribution network, it is now possible for any storyteller to translate oral stories into printed form and affordably publish a well-designed book before a worldwide readership.

I'm lucky. I have made my living for the last forty years as a storyteller and author of more than twenty children's books. In 1981, I quit my job as a magazine editor and began working as a full-time storyteller in the public schools in Pennsylvania. I self-published my first book in 1983 and began a wonderful career as an author of children's books.

I sold 1,000 books out of the trunk of my car in the first year and was able to acquire a literary agent who sold my book to HarperCollins and -- just like that -- I was off and running on a long and fruitful career as an author/storyteller. My books were eventually published by HarperCollins, Random House, and Simon & Schuster, three of the four largest publishing houses in the world.

But I always kept Groundhog Press, my small, independent publishing company, going in the background. Why? Because I learned about the many advantages of having total creative and business control over your printed works. I soon learned that the decision about whether to self-publish or sign on with a mainstream publisher is not an either/or kind of thing. You can do both, working both ends against the middle as you navigate the publishing world.

The second important lesson that I learned was this: Storytelling is a lot of money for a little bit of work. Writing books is (comparatively speaking) a lot of work for a little bit of money. Making a living as a storyteller is a possible pathway to financial success. For the vast majority of us, writing is not. But when you combine the two, there is a magical synthesis of two creative streams. When I went from becoming a storyteller to an author/storyteller, my status was immediately elevated and doors opened which had been closed to me before. The storytelling promotes the books and the books promote the storytelling.

The marriage of the spoken and written word is a happy union -- it's all about story, anyway. Oral storytellers have a distinct advantage over the average writer because we have already road-tested our stories and know what works and what does not. Writers have to wait for their invisible readers to respond. But performance delivers immediate feedback as the story unfolds moment by moment.

Thirdly, if there is one thing the pandemic taught us, it is that diversification is good. If you have multiple revenue streams coming into the house, it can get you through hard times when live performance is not an option.

In the last ten years, I have become a self-publishing consultant and have helped many people bring their writing dreams to fruition. All my clients have published their books on the Amazon platform using the free tools on the KDP website. You could hire a consultant like me to guide you through the process, but you do not need to hire me or anyone else. If you are somewhat computer literate, you can learn to do it yourself.

The beauty of this do-it-yourself approach is that there are no up-front costs, you own the copyright and 100 percent of the royalties come directly to you. What's more, you have total creative control over your project and the book will never go out of print as long as you have an active Amazon account. You can publish in paperback, hardback, e-book and even spoken word editions.

This is the revolution that is turning the book business upside down. It used to be that freedom of the press was only for those who owned one. Now, all the barriers between writer and reader have been removed. Every writer can now form their own publishing company and send their written works out into the world. It's an exciting time to be a writer.

If you are intrigued by the idea of seeing your stories cradled between the covers of a book, here are a few resources to get you started:

<https://kdp.amazon.com>
selfpublishingwithdale.com
robin-moore.com

This is what I wish for you: Someday the delivery truck will pull up to your front door and a messenger from the great beyond will drop off a package. Inside will be the first copy of your first book. You will open the box and, at last, hold the book you have made in your hands. Try to live long enough to have this moment.

Happy writing, my friends. And remember: Writing without publishing is like cooking without eating. Welcome to the word feast!



About the Author- Robin Moore has made his living as an author and storyteller for forty years. He has written more than 20 books published by the world's largest publishers and is owner of Groundhog Press, his own independent publishing house. He currently works as a Self-Publishing Consultant for first-time authors.

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Robin Moore on Instagram

SURVIVING

My Art

I was performing with a musician in a jazz club in the south island of New Zealand. We had two sets. During the break I noticed Steve was drinking beers with a few audience members. He rushed on stage for the second show.

Afterwards we had a standing ovation and decided to perform a tale that demanded a great deal of effort for both of us. It was exhilarating. Steve played north Indian bamboo flutes. The moment that was demanding occurred towards the end of the story - I had to chant in a high-pitched voice and Steve was to catch the top of the sound and play a higher note. We rarely were able to do what we hoped to do. As we came to that part of the story, I noticed he was moving around a lot behind me - which was unusual. But I had to stay with what was taking place and managed to reach the note we always sought. To my total pleasure Steve played the high piercing sound we had dreamed of. It was thrilling. Then, I waited for his refrain before completing the story. He was nowhere to be seen. I finished the story alone and the audience called for him. But he was gone.

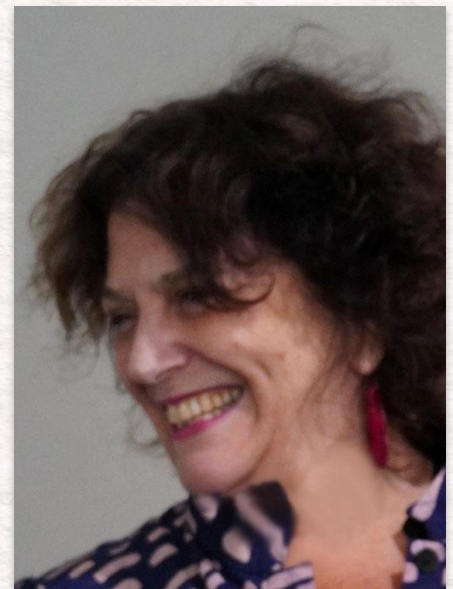
I moved across the stage hoping I would spot him and slipped in a puddle and fell, which brought a great deal of laughter and clapping. I stood up as gracefully as possible and left the stage embarrassed and a bit soggy. The green room was empty. I went out without saying goodbye to anyone, carrying our equipment and my own "stuff" into a freezing cold dark parking lot.

I heard wild laughter. Steve was in the car in a state of hysterics. He had had too many beers and when I began the last story, he had to keep moving to keep from peeing. He managed to reach that high note, but it took a great effort and he couldn't hold it anymore.

Driving back to Auckland in the dark we laughed until we thought we had no more laughs left. In the middle of the night he phoned me from his room and we laughed again wondering about the person who had to clean up the stage. We didn't perform the story for a long time, not because of the challenge, but because it was impossible not to laugh uncontrollably throughout.

--

Laura Simms



About the Author- Storyteller, author and humanitarian, performs, teaches and conducts projects worldwide. Her commitment is to compassionate action and the unique benefits of engaged storytelling. She weaves traditional and personal stories. She works with the Fetzer Foundation's Sacred Story Project, is storytelling consultant for The Constellation, gave a keynote at U of Kentucky conference Contemplative Practices in Higher Education and signed two new book contracts.

laurasimms.com

I have been telling since 1963. At one time, I was being asked to tell stories for Mothers' Day events. I accepted several at churches. I tell personal and family stories. At one church, I was cautioned that I must not go above the second step in the Sanctuary as above was reserved for the Pastor. Then the person asking me to present the program said I would need to tell the stories to the Pastor first so he could decide on their suitability. That's when I said "You need to find someone else."



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

Previously published in Hot Rod Magazine, in Our Iowa, in Storytelling Magazine, and in "Stories from Home" in Waverly Iowa Newspapers. Facebook: Patricia Coffie maemaude@mac.com

--
Patricia Coffie



Oh, there are many! One that stands out for me comes from the early days of my career. I agreed to tell for an art museum's family day. When I arrived, I was given a map and sent to "the storytelling space." It was a sign, just a sign, no designated or roped-off floor space, no chairs or floor mats for listeners, no microphone, in a high, wide, acoustically poor area meant for large art installations next to a newly constructed metal arena called ...wait for it ...The Globe of Death. The Globe of Death is a circus act wherein a stunt rider rides a motorcycle around and around inside a metal mesh sphere. As I remember my reaction, the word "flabbergasted" comes to mind.

With no help from anyone, for no one came to check on things, I moved the storytelling space. And when a docent noticed and tattled to the family day coordinator, I was chastised for moving the storytelling to a quieter area with some benches that I'd moved into a half circle. Yes, I was chastised, even though I'd already done several small and well-received tellings, and I immediately gave the coordinator a verbal education on effective storytelling staging.

I got fired, but I got paid. And I was never invited back.

--
Lyn Ford

One December many years ago when I first began to tell stories, I was hired to tell stories at a 6-year-old birthday party. The one request was that I did not tell Christian-related Christmas stories. I prepared stories and activities for the children.

During the event, the hostess was unhappy because I told the Gingerbread Man story and gave the children Gingerbread Men & Women pictures to color. She did not like me telling a story which many kids associate with death (of the Gingerbread Man getting eaten – even though my version ended with an escape). Also, the hostess of the party was once again not happy because I had the children sing and color pictures of "Dashing Through the Snow" She felt very strongly about the song being a Christian-related Christmas Song. There came a moment when she paid me and asked me to leave.

I was paid for the event, and I learned a great deal about listening to the hostess, planning and being specific about the needs of the event hostess. It was truly a memorable experience as a beginning storyteller and certainly added to my knowledge of the importance of preparation and planning. There was a part of me that felt empowered with my new-gained knowledge and experience.

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Cora Newcomb

In Indonesia, Dr. Murti Bunanta works tirelessly to spread storytelling and a love of children's literature throughout the islands. So, it was no surprise when she invited Anne Pellowski and me to join her and the Storyteller/Puppeteer, Suyadi, to fly to Palembang, Sumatra to tell. But the venue was a bit surprising...a fertilizer factory! We were amazed to enter their compound and find tidy streets lined with bungalows as if we had suddenly entered a US suburb. We were deposited at a fine guest house for the night and given a boat tour of the river...lined with fertilizer plant works. Next morning we entered our storytelling venue...a large, covered, pavilion with stage and 1,000 folding chairs arranged ready for our audience. Buses began to arrive and disgorge them...1,000 kindergarteners! They had been invited for a program to last from 9-12. Three hours in adult size folding chairs.

How are we going to keep them engaged for THREE HOURS? Apparently, no one was concerned about keeping them engaged, as the first hour was taken up by fertilizer officials and local politicians offering welcome speeches. By the time we came onstage, the littles had already consumed their lunch boxes and were stomping the soda cans in the aisles. Murti and Anne went first and the K's were moderately involved. Then it was Suyadi's turn. He arranges his puppets on a table and works them from there. So, he and I were standing behind the table, laying out the puppets, when suddenly a young woman who was handling arrangements leaped up and called to the audience, "Have the children come closer so they can see the puppets!" At once 1,000 kindergarteners leaped to their feet and charged the stage! The stage was four feet up, but with potted plants on the floor all around it. UP they clambered! Right over the potted ferns and onto the stage. And they just kept COMING! Suyadi and I were pushed back against the wall. I feared the flimsy stage might collapse. And suddenly I became fluent in Indonesian. "Tidak! Tidak!" "Duduk! Duduk!" I yelled. "No! No! " "Sit! Sit!" Gradually we beat them back. Eventually they all found their seats again. And the stories flowed on. But we learned a lesson. Never invite 1,000 kindergarteners to join you on stage!

It reminds me of another kindergarten moment. I was coaching a young library school student in storytelling and invited him to share a tale with a group of 100 K's I was telling to. He went last and told a sweet story in which the children were acting out being kittens. He ended the tale and was told our time was up. So, he added, "Now crawl back to your classrooms quick as you can little kittens!" Immediately 100 kindergarteners crawled meowing out of the room and down the hall, before anyone could head them off. Lesson from all this? Never tell kindergarteners to move unless you mean it. Because they will MOVE!

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Margaret Read MacDonald



About the Author- Margaret Read MacDonald is author of over 65 books on folklore and storytelling topics and translations into nine language. She travels widely, sharing her audience-participation folktales and encouraging new tellers. Her books include collaboration with tellers from Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Singapore, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia.
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In December 1999, a friend of mine asked me whether I'd like to perform as a storyteller together with his Klezmer band at a benefit event for the homeless on Christmas Eve. I said yes, because I was heartbroken at that time and in no mood whatsoever for a traditional way of celebrating Christmas.

About 250 people attended the event hosted by the Catholic church, each of the guests was entitled to half a fried chicken, potato salad and two bottles of beer for free. The mood was good from the start, with the guests tucking in and talking animatedly, while the band was playing. About an hour into the event, most guests had finished eating, the host, a Catholic priest, announced my storytelling over a rather outdated sound system from the 1950's, with the speakers installed in the ceiling.

I took the microphone and started my performance. But the guests, who had listened to the announcement with half an ear, had resumed talking as soon as it had ended. And it stayed that way: whatever I said, asked or did with my body and my voice, no one would even look at me, not a single pair of eyes. For the first time in my life I felt completely invisible on stage.

After endless four minutes or so, I said, without any bitterness, "Well, folks, I can see that you have better things to do than to listen to my stories, so I'm going to leave you to your talk with your friends", and I meant it from my heart. It was clear that they enjoyed the occasion at the most already, they didn't need me or my stories.

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Martin Ellrodt



About the Author- Martin Ellrodt has been a storyteller since 1996. He has been invited to perform and give workshops on four continents in four languages, in cooperation with the Goethe-Institut and other international organizations. He has also giving lectures at German universities and has been a trainer for narrative didactics.

Website: ellrodt.de Contact: martin@ellrodt.de

I do a newspaper column "Stories from Home" and had just sent an article on worst slot and worst spot for me in 45 years or so of public "speaking."

One bad weather scramble—sleeting—meant everything had to be jammed up inside the only big room in the only available building. My bad slot came when asked to tell immediately after a magician with him packing up on stage behind me as I told, and dogs arriving in front of me for the dog show to follow, while the cold and damp audience exuded a miasma of misery and the luncheon smells and noises came from the back corner. The only bright spot came as I ended my stories and walked through the audience distributing butter cookies to go with "The Butter Cat."

Another outside celebration, in wonderful weather, telling with my back to a tree and mic in hand, one of the food trucks began to move during my telling. It was a boxy sort of food truck and caught the edge of the picnic table at which many including my mother were seated. The table tipped up as screams (mine into the microphone) made him stop and back up. I don't work at that event any more although they did ask the next year.

My personal worst emcee was the one who announced me at a combined folk music and storytelling event by saying "Pat Coffie is to start this half with a story but I understand she is still on the toilet." I had been but at the time of the announcement, I was standing in place on the two-foot-wide plank over the lighting pit, ready to tell. And tell I did!

I told well at all three because we cannot let bad weather scrambles, lack of event organization, and rude announcers steal the show from the audience. Public speaking or performance is more than showing up on time, having something great to say or share, and looking right.

Public speaking is coping so that the promised event can be appreciated by the most people and later, we can share stories of gigs from Hell.

--

Pat Coffie


Have Your own Survival stories?
Share with us at
storybeasteditor@gmail.com



–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.”



I Want A Better Catastrophe

by Bowen Lee

If you have ever wondered, “All right, already! Why haven’t we just fixed climate change and made everything go back to normal?,” it is time for you to use the interactive flowchart by Andrew Boyd. The flowchart was designed to accompany his book, *I Want A Better Catastrophe: Navigating the Climate Crisis With Grief, Hope, and Gallows Humor*. What the title refers to is this concept; that the climate crisis will result in disaster, that depending upon what people do or don’t do, disaster can mean either the complete annihilation of the human species, a worse catastrophe, or the survival of a small percentage of human beings, a better catastrophe. And with that better catastrophe, a world that is more humane, equitable, and healthy.

This came to the National Storytelling Network Ecotellers Special Interest Group from Suzanne Whitby of Austria. Many thanks to her for sharing. Thank you to Prof. Dr. Marian Dörk, Information Visualization, Fachhochschule Potsdam, for permission to use this link. And many thanks to Andrew Boyd, the author and narrator of the flowchart, and Jona Pomerance for designing and making the interactive version.

As you journey through the maze that is climate change, I hope you will keep going to the very end of the flowchart, where all thoughts lead to “I Want A Better Catastrophe.”

<https://flowchart.bettercatastrophe.com/>



Isaac

by Bowen Lee

The Beautiful Bird *Taken from a story by Rumi, as told by David Heathfield*

There was a very wealthy merchant who had many beautiful things, but his most prized possession was a beautiful many-colored bird that he kept in a golden cage. When the merchant was sad the bird would sing and the merchant felt better. When the merchant was happy, the bird would be at the center of the celebration. The merchant felt that he could not live without this beautiful bird, who was the joy of his heart.

The merchant was traveling to the land where the bird was from, and so he asked the bird if there was anything he could get for her there. “The only thing I want is my freedom,” said the bird.

“Ahh!” sighed the merchant. “That I cannot give you, for you are my very life, and it would break my heart to let you go. But ask me anything else.”

The bird said, “Then go to the forest where there are birds just like me and tell them about how I live.” The merchant could certainly do that, and so he promised he would and traveled to the land where the bird was from.

When the merchant had finished his business in that land, he walked into a forest until he came to a grove of trees. There were many beautiful birds just like the one he had at home. He called out to them, “I have a bird that is just like you at home. I keep her in a golden cage, and she is my most precious thing that I own. She is my heart and joy and I could not live without her.”

Upon hearing this, one of the birds fell from the trees, and lay lifeless on the forest floor. “What have I done!” cried the merchant. “All I did was talk about my beautiful bird and now one of them is dead!”

Nevertheless, the merchant traveled back to his home, and when he returned he went to his beautiful bird in the golden cage. “I did as you asked, and walked into the forest where there were birds just like you. I told them about you, and one of the birds fell from the trees onto the forest floor, dead!”

Instantly upon hearing this, the beautiful bird fell from its perch and lay lifeless on the floor of the cage.

“What have I done!” wailed the merchant. He cried and grieved but the bird lay still and stiff on the cage floor.

“All you wanted was to be free,” said the merchant. “That I could not give you when you were alive, but now, I can at least put your poor body by the open window so you can be near the sky.”

The merchant opened the cage door and lifted the beautiful bird up gently. He placed the bird tenderly on the open windowsill.

And the bird lifted its wings and flew away.

When I wake up in the morning, I’m on a mattress with a fluffy polyester quilt covering me, which I keep clean with the stacked washer and dryer unit in my two-bedroom house. I make coffee with one of the three kinds of coffee makers in my kitchen, grinding the coffee beans, which I keep in my freezer to stay fresh, in an electric grinder. The water for the coffee comes out of the faucet in my kitchen, which I filter with special filters to remove chemicals that might be in the tap. This is only the very beginning of my normal day, among all the gadgets and tools that make life easy and convenient, and I don’t consider myself wealthy, I’m barely middle class, in a country where the abundance of things to make life comfortable is commonplace.



When Isaac wakes up in the morning, a blanket on the dirt floor has been his cushion for the night. If there is coffee this morning, it is boiling in the tin pot over the wood stove indoors, or on the fire pit outside the one-room building made of mud and sticks, home to eight or more people in the village. Several of them are to share this morning cup of coffee. Everyone will allow each one to have his share, a sip or two if that is all there is. The water for the coffee comes from a plastic jug that has been carried for many kilometers on a journey to search for a source of fresh, drinkable water. It may have taken days for this water to be found. But that is the situation on the coast of Kenya, where Isaac Lihanda is trying to help the poorest communities in their struggle with climate change.

Isaac Lihanda grew up in the Rift Valley of Kenya, which many archaeologists claim is the cradle of all human beings. He struggled to earn an education as an African in Africa, where higher education is something a person must strive for and work very hard to achieve. Despite many odds, Isaac became a field minister to help communities in Kenya, and he was sent to coastal Kenya, where the population is primarily Muslim, and a field minister is out of place. Nevertheless, Isaac continued his work in helping impoverished communities.

The devastating effects of climate change have hit the global South hard, in ways we in the global North have not experienced and can hardly comprehend. In North America, we might have drought, but we have water running through our taps and into our homes. We cannot imagine a community where there is not a drop of water for miles, and no evidence of any water available in the future, be it tomorrow, in the next month, in the coming years. Absolutely no water, whatsoever.

In the North, we cannot envision what no water means. Where there is no water, soil becomes lifeless and plants will not grow. Not only dehydration but famine plagues families, many with young children. Everywhere around you there is dying, first livestock, then wild animals, and then people. Only pests and disease do not die but proliferate.

Isaac Lihanda, whose home is the Rift Valley, could have gone home when it was clear he had no mission work in coastal Kenya. But he witnessed what was happening and stayed. His consciousness could not allow him to return to his own family and turn his back on what is happening in this part of Kenya. So for years, through the worst of this climate catastrophe in coastal Kenya, he has valiantly tried to mobilize, empower, educate, and bring about positive change in this region that is in utter despair.

And because Isaac has not turned his back on these people in need, he expects that we North Americans will not turn our backs, either.

He knows, as we all should know, that the people of coastal Kenya have done very little to create the climate crisis they are living in. We in the North have made their disaster possible. What Isaac does not understand is, why do people in the North do nothing to help?

Climate catastrophe is built into our daily life here in the global North. Our overdependence on fossil fuels and our lifestyles of convenience and quick fixes, immediate gratification and massive consumerism, is impossible to get away from. It is how we live our lives. Even though it is devastating to people living in other parts of the world, we can't help the way we live, even if we know we are killing the planet we live on, and making others suffer. It seems we cannot give up what we have because it makes our life possible.



There are many climate experts who believe that social injustice, inequity, and discrimination are the leading causes of climate change. It is only through enslaving and controlling people, natural resources, and other living beings, that industrial consumerism rules the world and pollutes and poisons it at the same time. If we address social injustice, these experts believe, we will not have the climate issues that are causing this global catastrophe. If we lend a hand to those in need, we help them and ourselves.

Isaac has started schools to educate children, feed them, and teach them agricultural practices that help the land retain water. He is giving these impoverished communities opportunities to restore their land and gain a sustainable livelihood. He is giving these people a chance to bring their region back to life again when others have abandoned it. He needs money to continue the work he is doing. He needs pencils for 300 schoolchildren who do not have books or learning materials. He needs us in the land of plenty to share a little of our abundance.

There is a fundraising link at the end of this article if you are moved enough to help. If you cannot contribute monetarily, you can tell a story that contributes to the welfare of people around the globe who are suffering because of climate catastrophe. Any story that helps people be more empathetic, more humane, more connected to one another, that is a story that needs to be heard, now, by as many people as possible. There is an urgency to this, as Isaac will tell you, as he sees children starving, adults despairing, and discontent and disillusion taking hold. Tell the stories about a planet that is healthy, peaceful, kind, and wise, and people who know how to take care of it.

Those are stories worth telling, and they will help us all.

If you'd like to contribute to Isaac's GoFundMe, this is the link: <https://gofund.me/f2b409b9>

[You Tube Link to Isaac's Climate Change work in Kenya](#)

To be told in educational and professional settings with attribution.



Storycology Head Editor

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

Website: storyrex.com

The background of the entire page is a dense, textured pattern of small, smooth, multi-colored pebbles in shades of red, blue, green, yellow, and grey. A semi-transparent grey rectangular box is centered over the middle of the page, containing the title text.

**-TEACHER TALES &
TENTACLES-**

ಕುತೂಹಲಕರವಾದ ಕಥೆಗಳು

Know and Respect Your Audience

by Mij Byram

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

National site to find State Standards:

ed.gov

Common Core State Standards:

thecorestandards.org



Standards addressed:

- **Enhanced Communication Skills:** Through storytelling sessions, students develop their verbal communication skills as they learn to articulate ideas, express emotions, and engage their audience effectively.
- **Critical Thinking and Creativity:** Storytelling encourages students to think critically about narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements. It also fosters creativity as they craft their own stories or interpret existing ones in unique ways.
- **Cultural Understanding and Empathy:** Exposure to diverse stories from different cultures and backgrounds helps students gain a deeper understanding of the world around them and fosters empathy by allowing them to see life through the eyes of others.
- **Language Development:** Storytelling exposes students to rich vocabulary, varied sentence structures, and idiomatic expressions, which contribute to their language development and literacy skills.
- **Confidence Building:** Engaging in storytelling activities helps students build confidence in expressing themselves in front of others, whether it's through reading aloud, performing, or sharing their own stories.
- **Active Listening Skills:** As students listen to stories being told, they practice active listening, which is a valuable skill in academic settings and everyday interactions.
- **Cognitive Development:** Analyzing stories, identifying themes, and making connections between different narratives contribute to cognitive development and critical thinking skills.

Twinkies, Teachers, & My Take on Standards

It was the second day of torrential Florida rains. At the Florence Fuller Child Development Center, 1st and 2nd graders came into the lunchroom, playroom, meeting room, story room. This meant all in one room. They were all herky-jerky and bouncy-flouncy after their milk and cookies snack. They had to be indoors at school, home, and now here. They were unable to sit or even stand still for more than three seconds. The energy was frenzied and palpable. What to do?

Let them move. Move in unison.

From an array of choices, I chose a few yoga moves and a little Qi Gong with some superhero imagery.

I told them I had a scary story for them. They liked that idea. I turned off half the fluorescent lights and told them the “Twinkies” story:

A story about a time when I was 7 and felt invisible and scared.

A story of how I used feeling invisible to my advantage.

A story of how I overcame fear by facing fear.

A story about how things have changed now that I can look back years later.



The kids, of course, wanted to know if it was a true story, (it was) and how I could turn invisible. I told them what it felt like. Many kids acknowledged feeling that way themselves. Others wanted to try it. We all stood and directed our eyes to the floor, hands by our side. We slowed our breath and put our focus inward. They floated out of the room, through the busy office, past the receptionist and astonished workers, past the admiring administrators, and past the clueless clients. For those few minutes on a wet dreary day, those children knew what it felt like to be invisible. It was not a feeling of helplessness or vulnerability. It was the feeling of a new power. A power over our/themselves and our environment.

Standards set a clear and measurable goal that teachers and students work toward. Millions of teachers and administrators are making sure standards are met. I don't feel that is one of my responsibilities as a storyteller in the classroom or not. I have something different to offer.

Some of my stories coincide with the state standards. Some goals are harder to measure, and others go beyond academic learning. They are all valuable and vital goals.

If I had written goals for the afternoon described, they would look something like this:

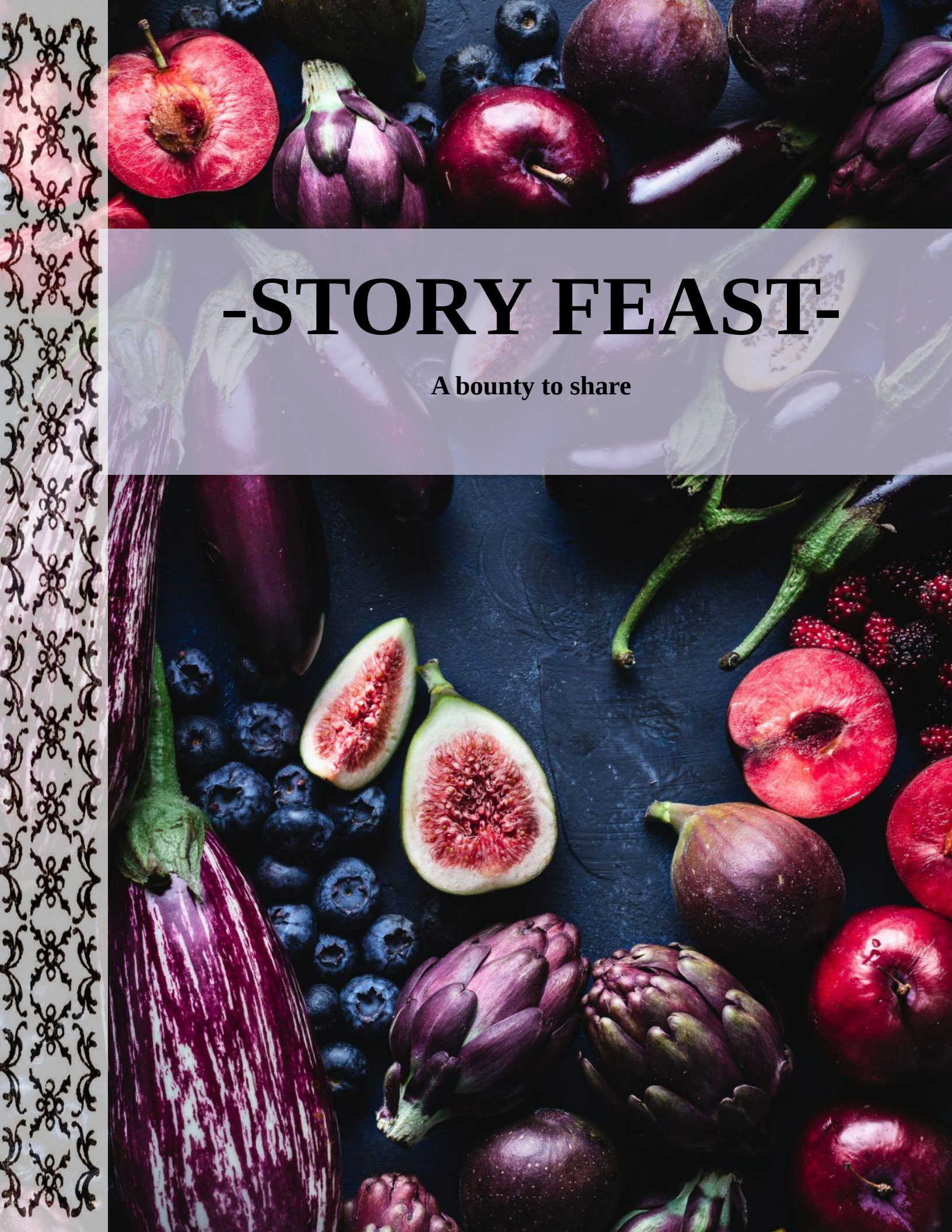
- Listen with your whole mind, body, and soul.
- Feel compassion for someone you don't know.
- See yourself in the place of another and ask yourself, "What would I do?"
- Realize that sometimes F.E.A.R. can stand for "False Evidence Appearing Real."
- Realize there are many ways to deal with all kinds of monsters.
- Find the truth in this surreal story.
- Find the humor in this story. Can you find humor in your life?
- Realize we all have a superpower. Find yours. Think about how you might use that power today and in the future.

My job as a storyteller is to provide the "in-between" as in nurturing the personal, the emotional, and the wonder. I explore the "what if" of childhood and growing up.

Children need to hear stories not just because storytelling promotes literacy or builds character. Those are indeed benefits, but not the only reason for telling stories to children. The pure pleasure and joy of listening to stories is reason enough. Our future healers and heroes, politicians and peddlers, warriors and woodcutters, teachers and tricksters, all need stories told eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart as often as possible.



Mij is a highly respected, sought-after Early Childhood innovator with over 20 years of experience using stories to plant the seeds of literacy and love of language. Her workshops and play-shops have trained teachers, librarians, parents, and storytellers from Maine to Florida how to build character and promote literacy through story. Mij has been a staff member the National Storytelling Network, a board member of the Florida Storytelling Association and president of the Palm Beach County Storytelling Guild. Mij is the founder and publisher of the monthly newsletter South Florida Storytelling News since 2005 – 2020 Mijbyram.com



-STORY FEAST-

A bounty to share

STORY FEAST



The Stonecutters
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot 1872-74

STORIES

[A Heart of Stone - Germany](#)

[The Devil's Stepping Stones – United States](#)

[The Grinding-Stone That Ground Flour by Itself – West Africa](#)

[The Jade Stone - China](#)

[The Magic Rocks and the Beggar – Brittany](#)

[The Stone by the Door – Morocco](#)

[The Stone Cutter - Japan](#)

[Stone Soup - Twelve variants from around the world.](#)

[The Witch in the Stone Boat - England](#)

TEACHING RESOURCES

[40 Playful Ways to Teach Young Kids About Rocks](#)

[Planet Pals.com](#) - This is a colorful, fun, and information filled website on all things Earth: Lesson plans and activities for both teachers and parents, the history behind Earth Day, coloring pages, puzzles, clip art, and so much more.

[Japanese Folktales](#) - Lesson Plans for K-8.

[Japan Society.org](#) – Lessons plans, background notes, kamishibai, and more.

[Teach Early Years.com](#) – Celebrating Japanese Children's Day

CELEBRATE

Many of us will be “wearing the green” soon in celebration of St. Patrick’s Day in March so here’s a head start on finding some of the faerie folk!

[Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland](#) - From 1902 a wonderful antique book full of tales and information by Lady Wilde, mother of Oscar Wilde.

[Celtic Fairy Tales by Joseph Jacobs, 1892.](#)

[Fairy Tales and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry - Edited by W. B. Yeats and published in 1888](#) the stories are here to enjoy, courtesy of Sacred Texts. Revel in tales of the Merrow, Changelings, Pookas, Fairies and Banshees, Saints, Priests, Giants and Devils, Kings, Queens, Earls, and Robbers; Yeats covers them all!

Earth Day is April 22, 2024. What better way to celebrate than sharing stories about our beautiful planet?

[Earth Cakes, Sky Cakes –Vietnam](#)

[Earth Care – World Folktales to Talk About](#)

A limited preview of this excellent book by Margaret Read MacDonald. You can read some of the folktales online, but I bet you will want a copy of your own.

[The Earth Stories Collection](#) – “a cultural seed bank, a base of global educational resources for the construction (or reconstruction) of a deeply sustainable global society, based on social and economic justice, and values of peace and democracy...” Under the Principal sections 1-16 you will find stories to fit many areas including Ecological Integrity, Social Responsibility, and more.

[When The Earth and Sky Were Married - /India](#)

[Why is the Sky So Far Away – Nigeria](#)

[The Story of Creation - Philippines](#)

May 5, 2024, is Children’s Day in Japan. It is a day set aside to respect children's personalities and to celebrate their happiness. Here are some tales to help you celebrate the day.

[Green Willow and other Japanese Fairy Tales by Grace Adams, 1910](#) – Thirty-eight stories from the Land of the Rising ballads told to children, complemented by the gorgeous illustrations of Warwick Goble.

[Japanese Folk Stories and Fairy Tales - Thirty-three folktales collected by Mary F. Nixon-Roulet and published in 1908.](#)

[Kids Web Japan](#) - A number of Japanese folktales for your students to read. Later, they may explore the culture of Japan using different links.

SOMETHING EXTRA

[Celebrate St. Patrick's Day With the Wee Ones](#)

One of my blog posts filled with fun: songs, fingerplays, rhymes These finger plays, songs and story stretches are found all around the web with no attribution.

[History Press – Folk-tales of rock and stone](#)

[National Geographic: Signs of Spring](#)

Learn about bluebells, bees, birds and more.

[Rocks Telling Stories: Rock Art in New Mexico's Guadalupe Mountains/Carlsbad Region](#)

“Humans have drawn or pecked or etched art on rocks throughout time... Rock art is a means of visual expression practiced by humans since at least the Upper Paleolithic Period of prehistoric Europe and Asia of 40,000 years ago...rock art sites were an intrinsic part of the manner in which past peoples engaged with and experienced the world around them.”



Resources Provided By Karen Chace

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



-JOURNEYS-

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



Till Death Do Us Part

by Sophia Lewis

They say the world is ending, and Nick brought me flowers.

I'm in denial about it, but Nick believes it, which must explain the dozen roses stemming from his outstretched fist. They're as vibrant as an open cut and smell like perfume. He's barely through the back door, his briefcase dangling from his other hand, his tie loose around his white collar. His grey-peppered mustache hides his curling top lip, an almost grin.

It's an apology bouquet for the fight we had this morning. He thinks it's foolish for us to stay; I think it'd be foolish to go. "How many apocalypse scares have we lived through, Nick?"

"What if it's real this time?"

The fight escalated, and then he left for work. I sulked all day, watching from the parlor window as all our neighbors vacated to safety. As he leaves the kitchen, Nick tells me he didn't go to work. "I was deciding what to do!" He calls over his shoulder.

What he means is he was figuring out whether to leave me. It's certainly not a new dilemma, but I doubt he's ever considered leaving me in the hands of the end of the world. The significance is he stayed. So either he decided I'm right, and it's just a rumor, or I'm worth dying for. My heart skips a beat because, either way, I feel like I won.

"What did you decide?" I ask when he returns downstairs, wearing a sweater and sweats.

He gives me a sad look. I think I understand and smile. The casserole in the oven will be ready in an hour. We'll spend the evening not talking to each other, go to bed, and wake up and do it all again. Nothing will change.

But he brought me flowers. I cut the cellophane from the bouquet, trim the stems, and arrange them in a crystal vase. My hands work idly; I've done this a thousand times before, not with store-bought-I'm-sorry flowers but with my own.

I watch the sky turn orange through the kitchen window. Light falls in shreds across the lifeless rose bushes in my garden. My blooms lost their petals weeks ago despite my tireless attempts to get them through fall. Now cast in this sunset light, the garden looks desolate. I bristle and try to convince myself that it was entirely out of my control.

The last flower plunks into the vase. Nick is in the living room, reading his sci-fi novel. I set the bouquet on the dining room table and watch his glasses slide down his nose.

"If you didn't think the world's ending, would you still have brought me flowers?" The question comes out before I can stop it. I need to know if his effort is worth my own.

He looks at me with a soft gaze. "Probably not."

I swallow. Sometimes I think I still love him, but usually, I just wonder how we're still together after thirty years.

"But Alice." He adds. "I pray to God you're right and tomorrow comes."

"Will you keep trying?"

I watch his Adam's apple bob up and down. "I will."

I nod. "Thank you for the flowers. They're lovely."

I check the casserole and put on my shoes and coat for my evening walk. Often I use my walks as an excuse to be alone, but today I pause at the front door. I picture him sitting in his chair, thinking he's about to die alone, reading pulp and filled with regrets.

I take a shaky breath. "Nick?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm going on my walk. Would you like to come?"

I wait for him on the porch, watching the empty street. When he joins me, we walk together. Our suburban neighborhood feels entombed by the evening, uncannily silent. Usually, the air buzzes with noise: children playing, dogs barking, and other walkers with whom I exchange pleasantries.

“Where do you think they went?”

Nick shrugs. “Shelters. The countryside.”

“If it's really the end of the world, then no one's safe.”

“I know.”

“You really believe it?”

He looks up at the sky. “I don't know.”

The road leads us up a hill, where the houses are big and old. Sometimes when I pass them, I imagine living in one, perhaps married to a different man, perhaps with children and a more successful garden. But today, I only think of Nick. He walks a few paces in front of me, occasionally looking back with a soft smile. I return his smile, and he slows enough for us to walk in tandem. I feel like I rarely look at him anymore. Now that I am, I see how old we've both become and feel slightly marveled by the amount of time that has passed.

We crest the hill and continue along on a ridge that overlooks the town made up of clusters of buildings nestled in the heart of a green valley. The sun has reached the horizon, and the sky blossoms in rosy hues, reflecting off a handful of cottony clouds.

We approach a bench and sit down. Our shoulders brush, and we rest in silence for a few minutes. The world feels on edge like something big is about to happen. I shift uncomfortably.

“Why have you stayed?” The question has burned in me for ages.

“I made a vow to you, Alice.” He says without hesitation. “Till death do us part.” Those words come out slow and thick as if weighed down by some inconceivable truth.

“Till death do us part,” I echo those love-soaked vows. Twenty-five years ago, I was sure I'd love him forever. Maybe I still do, and the feeling of love just changes with age.

“I'm sorry I've been a bad husband.”

“I'm sorry I've been a bad wife.” It feels like a release to hear and say those words, a simple acknowledgment sounding like the most romantic declaration.

Our hands lace together. Both are wrinkled and stiff, but mine still fits in his the way it used to. He looks at me with a boyish grin, and for a second, I hope he kisses me.

A murmur runs through the ground. My heart jumps, and I brace myself against the bench as the sidewalk shifts below us. An earthquake! I've never felt one before, and I immediately feel seasick.

“What's happening?” My voice sounds distant in my ears. I hold onto Nick's shoulder, dizzy from the roiling ground. The horizon transforms, swallowed by dark clouds. Lightning, wind, and rain approach us in a furious storm.

The noise of the shaking ground and the falling sky is indescribably abominable.

Nick gathers me in his arms and says in my ear. “Don't watch!”

I feel his sweater against my cheek but can't look away from the approaching storm and the hailing stars. The shaking intensifies and the ground opens up beneath the town, swallowing it whole. He holds me with his entire body against a scalding wind. I bury my face in his chest and feel the sensation of falling.

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



About the Author- Sophia Lewis is about the graduate college with a creative writing degree. She lives in Oregon with her boyfriend and his black lab and runs a TikTok account for writers. She can often be found hiking, baking or playing Minecraft (all methods to procrastinate writing.)

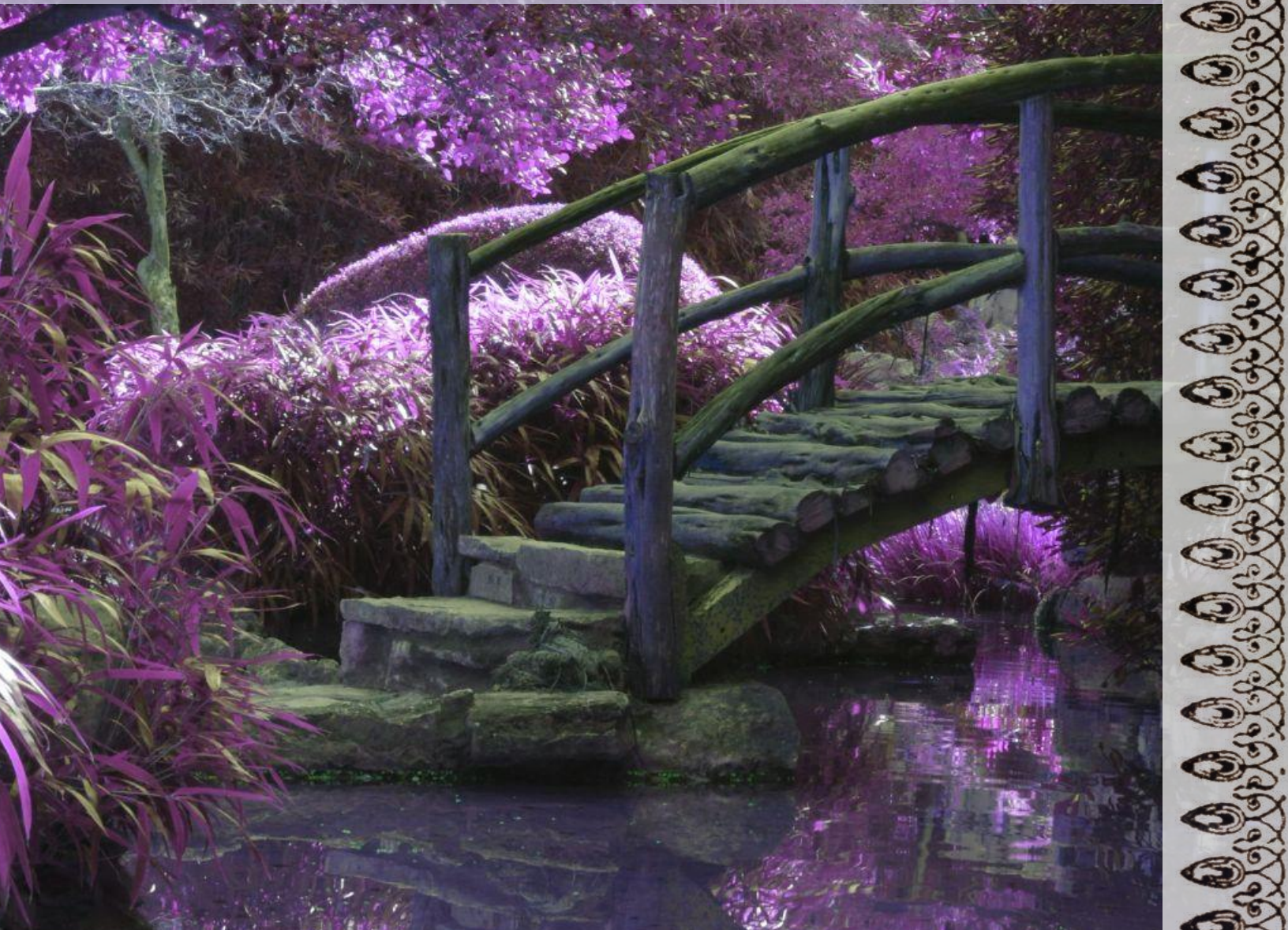
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-FUSIONS-

That which brings us together



An Altar from a Distant Shore: Bringing the Scholarship of Ronald Takaki to bear on Eth-Noh-Tec's seminal work, "The Red Altar"

by Brandon Spars, edited by Nancy Wang

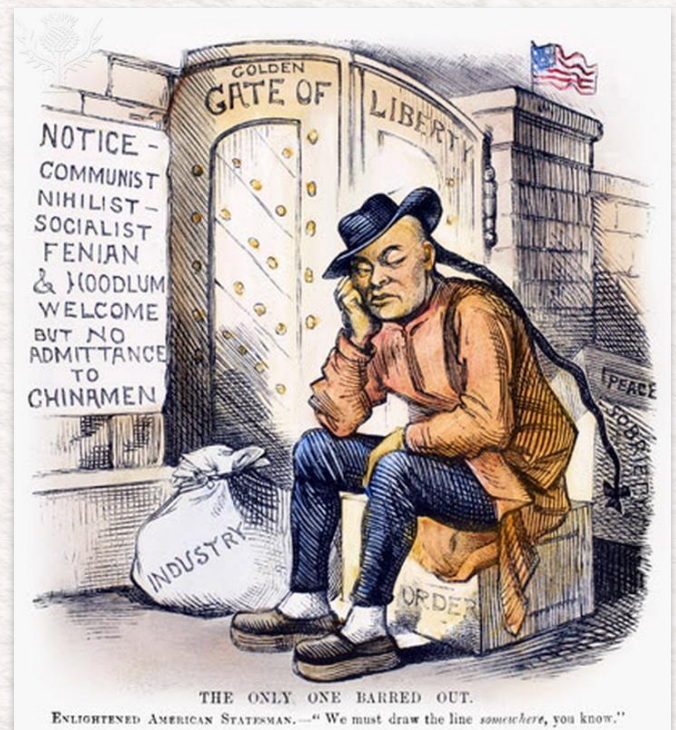
CONTINUED FROM THE DECEMBER
ISSUE

Not a Paradise

In addition to being the targets of local bigotry, as you read in Part 1 of this article, the Chinese faced real, legal discrimination as the Monterey lawmakers spurred on by the locals, continue to undermine the Chinese making a living.

Over the course of the narration, Nancy and Robert mention various national laws and local practices in which the Chinese could not become citizens, could not own property, could not marry whites, and could not testify in court, and then in 1882, they could no longer enter the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act prevented any laborer from entering from China, and was a direct response to the "Yellow Peril" stirred up by white workers who had seen Chinese laborers deployed by employers as "wedges" to break strikes (New England shoe factories), work jobs that had traditionally been assigned to women (laundries and restaurants), and work for lower wages (building the transcontinental railroad during the 1860s).

White workers, among whom the Irish were especially vocal, chanted slogans such as the one used by Robert and Nancy as a repeated refrain through "Red Altar": "The Chinese must go! The Chinese must go!" Strong racist sentiment bolstered by legal measures would lead to the climax of the story when the Point Alones village was burned. In an eerie echo of the shipwreck scene when Quock Bo and So May were first shipwrecked in Monterey, Robert and Nancy shout "No!" and the scene fades to black, this time the black of smoke and burned buildings.



'The Only One Barred Out.' American cartoon, 1882, on the Chinese Exclusion Act. The Granger Collection.

Ronald Takaki's book captures the darkness of these times, looking not only at some of the same propaganda that is featured in "Red Altar," but also looking at literary voices such as Bret Harte, which described Chinese "as unfortunate victims of white working-class hatred and cruel racism... yet... also mice-eaters, 'pagan,' 'dark,' 'impish,' 'superstitious,' 'yellow,' and subversive to white labor and white racial purity" (107) not to mention "... clandestine and clannish" (108). Takaki delves beneath the ugly surface to reveal the bitter irony that the anti-Chinese labor laws and riots were actually stemming from a problem buried deep within white labor. About the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Takaki writes:

During the congressional debate on the proposed legislation, the editor of *The Nation* noted that the law would appeal to white workers, particularly the "hard working" "Bill Nyes" of the Pacific Coast. But actually the action of Congress reflected a broader concern and anxiety than simply the Chinese presence. In fact there was very little objective basis for the Congress to be worried about Chinese immigrants as a threat to white labor. The Chinese constituted a mere .002 percent of the U.S. population in 1880. Behind the exclusion act were fears and forces that had little or no relationship to the Chinese. Congress was responding to the stressful reality of class tensions and conflict within white society during an era of economic crisis... something had gone wrong and an age of opportunity seemed to be coming to an end. America had been a place where abundance of land and jobs had always been available. The problem for employers had always been the need for more labor. But suddenly, during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, society experienced what historian John A. Garraty called "the discovery of unemployment." Unemployment had become a national crisis... Within this context of economic crisis and social strife, congress voted to make it unlawful for Chinese laborers to enter the United States for the next ten years and denied naturalized citizenship to the Chinese already here. Support for the law was overwhelming. The House vote was 201 yeas, thirty-seven nays, and fifty-one absent. While congressmen from the West and South gave it unanimous support, a large majority from the East (fifty-three out of seventy-seven) and Midwest (fifty-nine out of seventy-two) also voted for the prohibition. Significantly, support for the anti-Chinese legislation was national, coming not only from the western states, but also from states where there were few or no Chinese. In the debate, congressmen revealed fears that were much deeper than race. The exclusionists warned that the presence of an "industrial army of Asiatic laborers" was exacerbating the class conflict between white labor and white capital. White workers had been "forced to the wall" by Chinese labor. The struggle between labor unions and the industrial 'nabobs" and "grandees" was erupting into "disorder, strikes, riot and bloodshed" in the industrial cities of America... The Chinese Exclusion Act was in actuality symptomatic of a larger conflict between white labor and white capital: removal of the Chinese was designed not only to defuse an issue agitating white workers but also to alleviate class tensions within white society.

The terrible loss when the Point Alones fishing village was burned down is made even more poignant when it is pointed out in "The Red Altar" that the water towers had been emptied before the fire was started so that the Chinese fishermen and the Monterey fire fighters could not even fight the fire that consumed everything they had worked for. The village was briefly rebuilt on the land of a benefactor named JB McAbee, but, as Nancy narrates, "McAbee would be the last fishing village in the Monterey area. Only one Chinese fisherman lived there by 1935. It had been 85 years since the Chinese started the fishing industry... today overfished... but not by the Chinese." Robert would add, "The Chinese settlements all over the west were systematically destroyed, and the last remaining ones would be gone by the 1930s." More than two hundred Chinese villages were destroyed and the Chinese driven out.



Eth-Noh-Tec: Nancy Wang and Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo.

The Red Altar

Throughout Robert and Nancy's story, "The Red Altar" is a unifying force, symbolizing hope, assurance, and faith in the Quock family's Chinese heritage. This single, humble yet elegant shrine certainly embodied the source of strength of Quock Mui's family's resilience and resistance, but it also symbolized the intact, sophisticated tradition that was arriving with the first wave of immigrants. The red altar, which survives both shipwreck and fire, is the link back to China, and is indicative of the means by which the Chinese were able to build thriving communities wherever they went, whether it was the fishing villages of Monterey or the mining camps of Downieville. Takaki describes the communities of which Quock Mui and her family are an example:

They built altars to honor their gods – Kwan Kung, god of literature and war; Bak Ti, god of the north; Hou Wang, the monkey god; Kwan Yin, goddess of mercy. They also celebrated traditional holidays. During Chinese New Year in January or February, they first did their Dah Faw Hom Mui, or housecleaning." Everything is cleansed to prepare for welcoming the coming year," A.W. Loomis reported in 1869. "The house is almost turned inside out; ceiling, floors and furniture are scrubbed." The house could not be cleaned again until after the celebration, or else the good fortune arriving with the new year would be swept away... Then the Chinese ushered in the New Year with lion dances and firecrackers. During the celebration, white also joined the festive throngs in Chinatown.... In the spring, the Chinese held their "Pure Brightness Festival," or Qing Ming. This was memorial day for the Chinese in America. Unable to visit the family graves in China, they went to local Chinese cemeteries where they prayed before "spirit" shrines. In the fall, the Chinese celebrated the Moon Festival to thank the gods for the good harvests. During this celebration, they enjoyed moon cakes, a pastry shaped like a moon filled with delicacies like salted duck egg yolks and sweetened soybean paste... For recreation, the Chinese attended the Chinese theater. The first Chinese play in America was presented in 1852 when 123 actors of the Hong Fook Tong performed at the American Theater in San Francisco. In 1879, a Chinese theater was erected in the city....

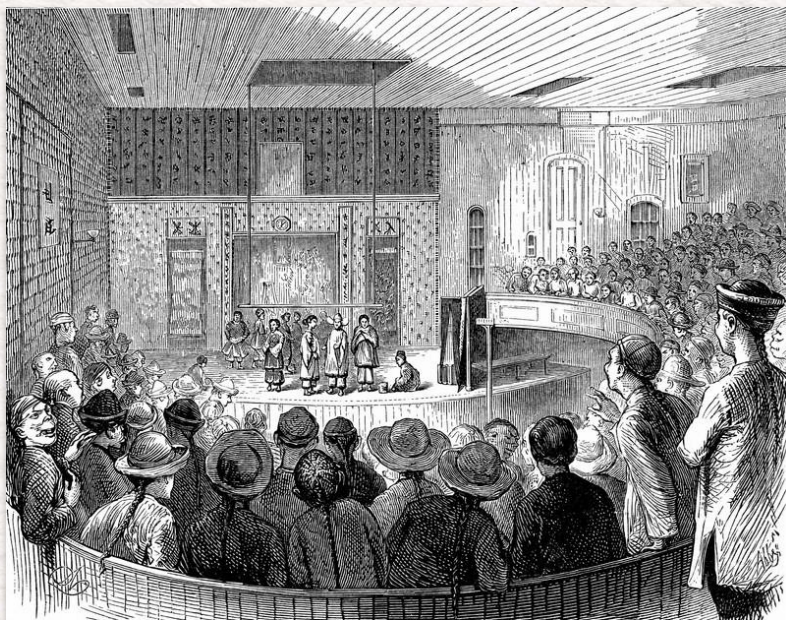
The creation of Chinese communities within California paints both a familiar and unfamiliar picture of the Chinese immigrants. In many ways, both “The Red Altar” and Ronald Takaki’s scholarship demonstrate that like the African Americans and the Native Americans, the Chinese would be exploited, persecuted, discriminated against, and even lynched. And yet, in both works, Eth-Noh-Tec’s and Takaki’s, there is the sense that the discrimination by whites is coming from a deep sense of threat due to how the nineteenth century whites perceived the Chinese differently than they perceived either Blacks or Indigenous People. Africans were wrenched from their culture and language and brought to North America as slaves, and Native Americans were fragmented by genocide, disease, invasion, and dislocation. In contrast, the Chinese were arriving with an intact language and culture, and perceived by the whites as, by comparison to the “primitive” religions of both African and Indigenous North America, a very sophisticated, literate and literary tradition of both religion and philosophy. In many ways, the red altar in Eth-Noh-Tec’s story comes not only to stand for the resilient and courageous character of the Quock family, but for the very real, material culture that the Chinese brought with them and established here in California. The discrimination, therefore, always came from a place of “punishment for being too good at what they did.” The Chinese outfished everyone in Monterey, they did methods of mining that were considered too painstaking for white miners, and whenever the Chinese joined the workforces of factories, the production increase was very noticeable while the decrease in wages allowed even higher profits. And all of this came without the drinking and debauchery associated with camps of white workers. Much of this came in the face of laws and practices, such as not allowing the Chinese to fish during daylight hours or the levying of additional taxes on Chinese gold miners, which placed the Chinese workers at a tremendous disadvantage. The slogans such as “The Chinese must go,” in both Takaki’s scholarship and Eth-Noh-Tec’s drama, take on a pathetically resentful nature as Chinese labor surpassed white labor wherever the two should meet. No wonder the Chinese Exclusion Act was directed specifically at Chinese labor.

Ultimately, Robert and Nancy’s piece sums up the struggle for Chinese immigrants in the touching dialog between Quock Mui and her first born son. She is reiterating how the Chinese adapted and rebounded at every curve thrown at them by a white society that had long given themselves advantages and privileges through court systems and law enforcement channels. Ultimately the heart of the struggle of being a Chinese immigrant revolves around one’s identity in nineteenth century America as Chinese. Quock Mui tells her son, “Never forget you are Chinese... they won’t let you forget anyway, but remember you are also American.” We see the paradox of inner pride while shame is heaped from without, in practicing one’s faith with family and community with whom you share a language while dividing oneself from the larger national community, and in making a home where you know you will continue to be treated as a stranger by most of society.

Finally, the red altar for which the play is named after, was passed through five generations: 1. from Quock Bo and So May who first arrived in Monterey, to 2. Sing Hing, sister of Tuck Lee and Quock Mui, who married and moved to San Francisco, to 3. her oldest daughter, Nancy’s grandmother, Yokelund Wong, who was born in San Francisco and moved to Chicago, to 4. her second daughter, Nancy’s mother, Gladys Chin, who was born in Chicago, married and moved to New Orleans, to 5. her second daughter, Nancy Wang, born in New Orleans and now is San Francisco, one of the two forces behind Eth-Noh-Tec.

The red altar becomes less the small wooden shelf featured on the stage. It becomes more of an ethereal presence floating above the Pacific Ocean, bridging the tremendous distance between California and the distant shores of China from which these “strangers” sojourned.

Every year the Quock family gathers its seven generations, and counting, keeping their story alive. An annual Walk of Remembrance is held in Pacific Grove and Monterey to honor the Chinese fisherman, a history that has been absent and ignored in the Monterey Bay Area but now being honored.



Chinese theater, San Francisco, CA 1870s. Drawn With Pen And Pencil by Rev Samuel Manning circa 1880. Design Pics Historical Collection.

To be told in educational settings with attribution



About the Author

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

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-THE HALL of the BARD-

“Music and storytelling are sisters and have always been close; where you find one, you can be sure the other isn’t far away.”



Manapua Man II China

by John Shockley

The water from the stream that ran through the small farm came from a stone cave that ran deep into the bare granite mountain, above the flat lands near the town of Shidong, where the Chan family lived. The land in Guangdong Province was good, when there was rain. It had been dry for two years.

Hui Ping Chan and his wife, Ming, had only one son. His birth almost killed Ming. Zho-li was now 13 years old...even as a child he was called "Ping." In times of drought, there was enough water for the Chans to grow food to live. The Chans came from a large family, whose patriarch had wisely divided the land equally between his seven sons. The largest plots were farthest from the stream. The smallest one, at the source of the river, was Hui Ping Chan's.

Time and fortune changed and many of the sons sold their land to their half-brother, Dong Kwai, who ended up holding all the family land except Hui Ping's, where the water flowed. He wanted the water.

Dong approached Hui's house to the roar of their family dog. He kicked him away and left him whining as he limped off. For being a young man, barely thirty, Dong was bald and heavy and had a broad smile whenever he wanted something.

"Hui, I come to help you and Ming," he announced. "I hear you have bad crop this year...maybe need money?"

"Yes, we have bad crop this year. Locusts come, but we OK. How you doing?" Hui asked his half-brother as he beckoned him to enter his small farm house. "I hope I send enough water to your lands?"

"Plenty water!...but you know? I want to own your land so I don't have to beg all the time for water."

"It's not begging, my brother. I always give you water freely, no?"

"That is why I always want to help you," Hui said with a dower followed by a sweet smile. "I hear you need money to send Ping to America? They say there is plenty work and lots of money to be made over there. He could make you rich!"

"We want to send Ping to a better life. We have only our small farm here, but there might be a good future for Ping in the United States. Going to Hawaii will not cost much money"

"I could set him up with papers to enter San Francisco, where he could make real money. I have influence!" Dong crowed. "I have money!"

"Thank you for your generous offer, but if Ping wants to go, we can send him to Hawaii legally," Hui said meekly. "Maybe he can go school there and start a business."

Dong's eyes lit on the large plate of char-siu bao on the kitchen table. He had already bitten into one as he muffled: "May I?"

Ming looked at Ping, who had worked all morning on the dinner treat with her, and smiled shyly at Dong. "We hope you like it."

"Oh sure! Oh sure! You make the best bao. My compliments!" He had already reached for another one.

In the darkness of the evening after Dong had left, Hui and Ming talked quietly about the future of their son. The farm was good, but limited. They knew Ping was reasonably smart and wanted desperately to start a brand new life.

“If Zho-li leaves us for Hawaii, we will miss him—almost as if he would have died,” Hui whispered seriously. Ping had cleaned the dinner bowls and was reading next to a dim candle in the distance.

“I know,” Ming said. “He is young and excited to see all of the things he reads about. He has never gone more than ten miles from our farm. I see him burning to explore a new world. One that we cannot offer him here.”

Ping looked up and said, “Don’t worry about me. I will be here to take care of you. I won’t leave you alone. Don’t worry. Don’t worry.”

The morning sun was bright, as Hui and Ping turned the soil preparing the ground for the winter crop. In the distance, Ping could see his friend Zhang-li marching down the dusty summer road. Zhang-li was a skinny kid, the same age as Ping. They had met in a fight. Some bigger kids wanted to steal Ping’s wooden toy top and Zhang-li helped Ping fight them off in a bloody scuffle—the ruffians got Ping’s top anyway.

“It’s my blood-brother!” Ping announced as he dropped his hoe in the dirt. Zhang-li was actually Ping’s half-cousin, the first son of Dong. Dong hated Zhang-li from the time he was an infant because he was suspicious of his wife, who once smiled at one of his enemies. Zhang-li didn’t look quite like all of his brothers. The truth was that Zhang-li really was Dong’s son, but Dong beat his wife for years until she falsely admitted to infidelity before she died. Another truth was that Dong had a torrid affair with a singer from the city whom he wanted to replace his wife.

Zhang-li was forced to sleep in the corner of an out-building away from Dong’s family. His brothers found it easy to side with their father, both out of jealousy of Zhang-li’s intelligence, and fear of their father’s wrath.

Zhang-li picked up a hoe and began digging along with Hui and Ping. “Hey, when it gets to sunset, can Ping and I go swimming down at the stream?” Hui smiled.

At the swimming hole, Zhang-li and Ping would talk about all kinds of things they had read. Locomotives, automobiles, and even airplanes! The other kids talked about non-sense while Zhang-li and Ping talked about secret societies, how the country was changing after the Boxer Rebellion, and the world beyond their isolated valley. Zhang-li was smarter than Ping. Ping’s eyes widened, when Zhang-li talked.

“I distrust my father,” Zhang-li leaned close to Ping. “He is lost in a rage to become wealthy and powerful. Such a foolish illusion—money and power. You know, he wants your family land...”

“Yes...my father has a bad feeling whenever Dong Kwai comes to ‘offer help.’ There are sometimes that we need help, but my father will not take it from Dong.”


“I should not be disrespectful of my father, but I can’t forget how mother died,” a tear welled up in Zhang-li’s eyes. “I was going to leave home, but I’ll stay to help your mother and father if you leave for Hawaii. That way, you won’t have to worry about them.”

“I can’t let you make that kind of sacrifice!”

“Yes you can, and you will...you have a chance to go, then go. If I leave I want to have a plan. I don’t have a one—yet.”

Ping had mixed feelings about what he wanted. He felt terrible that his best friend would make a sacrifice so great for him. He felt like if he left home, he couldn’t return for years. He would miss his parents. All of this was balanced with his parents approval and support for his adventure—and his driving desire to see the world.

Zhang-li marked a map that led to Zhongshan city where they were hiring contract laborers for the plantations in Hawaii. He put it in Ping’s hand. “Follow it closely. You are young so be cautious always, OK?”



The sky was gray and thunder rolled in the distance. Rain fell lightly as Ping kissed his mother and hugged his father and Zhang-li. “Perhaps you should wait until this rain passes,” Ming sighed. She knew the date was close to the ship’s departure and touched her son for the last time. She put a small bag with coins in Ping’s hand. The next group of laborers were leaving from Zhongshon for Hawaii the next day.

“I’ll send money as soon as they pay us, I promise.”

“Save your money for yourself, my son,” Hui said. “You will need it for school or to start a business...that would make us happy.”

The ship rocked fiercely in the winter ocean and when everyone landed at the dock in Honolulu, they were seasick and glad to be touching solid ground once again. It was chaos with cargo and passengers piled onto the shore. A loud voice boomed out, “Chinamen for hire, come this way!” Ping followed the crowd to the wagons.

They gave him a brass “bango tag” with numbers engraved. “NO LOSE ‘EM! Az how we know you and how we pay you. Remember—NO LOSE!” He gripped it tightly and they moved the group to the bunk house.

The work in the sugar cane fields was hard and bitter. The husky Portuguese bosses would beat anyone who worked too slowly or didn’t understand what they wanted. The air was hot and muggy and mosquitoes filled the evening air. Ping sighed at night wondering if he had made a terrible mistake leaving home.

“I will be back home in two years,” he wrote in his first letter home. He sent one silver dollar home with the letter. He hoped the people at the society building would deliver the letter. Ping struggled to learn the new language. There was no school to attend. All his lessons were learned in the red mud with sweat and hardship.

The months went by and Ping continued to send unanswered letters home. He wondered if any of the letters reached his parents. They couldn’t read but Zhang-li would read anything he sent and write back to him. No letter came for him at the society house. He was alone. He wondered what was happening in Shidong.

In China, the Boxer Rebellion had long been crushed and the country was strangled by Western powers. Chinese order administered through the Chi’ng Dynasty had fallen to shambles and the new republic had no power or order. It was amazing that the letters from the society house reached their destination.

Serious trouble clouded all of China, even to the smallest towns in remote areas. The new government demanded taxes that were unheard of. The new tax collector? Dong Kwai Chan.

It was a profitable business. Collectors kept half of what they brought in through license from the government. Farmers who had no hard currency lost their land.

“I have bad news to deliver again,” Dong announced to Hui and Ming as he burst through their door unannounced. “Your taxes have been raised and you must pay with currency, not crops.”

Ming recoiled and left the room. Hui looked blankly at Dong. “You have taken all the money we have. Why won’t you accept crops?”

“Sorry,” he smiled politely. “The new government only takes hard currency. Not to worry, I can help you, my brother...”

“Help?”

“Sell your land! I can give you enough money to buy a house in the city.”

“We are farmers...what would we do in the city?”

“Whatever you like, but if you don’t pay your taxes, you will lose your land anyway...let me help you.”

Dong said he would return with force at the end of the month if the annual tax was not paid in cash. He left in a huff. “Some people are ungrateful for help!”

Zhang-li had been thrown out of his father’s house and was hiding at Hui and Ming’s farm helping with the hard work.

“Your father will probably get our land as he has always wanted,” Hui said darkly as he stared into the flickering candle in the farm room that evening. “It’s been a year since Ping left...”

“I don’t know why we haven’t heard from Ping, maybe some ill has befallen him,” Zhang-li mused. “I am going to Zhongshon tomorrow to find out what has happened.”

Zhang-li left in the night to reach Zhongshon early the next morning. He ran along the dirt road in the moonlit night. In the city, he searched for the labor office. He found it crowded with people. Many were looking for work in Hawaii. Some were there asking about their friends and relatives who were there.

“Go to the society house down the block,” the clerk responded gruffly once he knew Zhang-li was not signing up for work.

Zhang-li returned to Hui and Ming late that night. He had a stack full of letters each weighed down by silver coin.

“Ping has written a lot of letters and sent money with each one,” he smiled. “Would you like me to read them?” Hui and Ming sat down as Zhang-li opened each letter in chronological order.

They laughed and cried at the news that Ping had written. They stayed up until the morning sky turned blue. A stack of twenty-four silver dollars was placed on the bare wooden table next to the bowl of char-siu bao. Everyone was more happy than tired as the rooster crowed.

Dong and two policemen returned at the end of the month. BANG! BANG! BANG! “Open the door, Hui!”

Hui was pushed aside as the door swung open. Dong placed a paper down on the rough wooden table as he helped himself to the char-siu bao from the bowl.

“I told you to let me help you but you stubborn mule, now you will lose your land to taxes! You need to pay 1,000 yuan or ten ounces of silver...where’s the money?”

“I have the silver.”

“WHAT? Where did you get the silver coin? Officers, it may have been stolen!”

“NO! It was not stolen.”

Dong caught a glimpse of his son, Zhang-li, peering out from the side room.

“Grab him! He’s the thief!” He ordered the police to drag Zhang-li into the room. Zhang-li, broke free and ran out the door with the police chasing him. “Don’t let him get away—the thief!”

The police returned out of breath without Zhang-li. Dong looked at the ten silver coins on the wooden table. “Stolen money!”

“Not stolen...I have the letters from my son, Ping, that prove the money is earned, not stolen,” Hui said as he produced the letters.

Dong looked at the letters and scattered them on the floor. "OK, sign the form."

"I want a government receipt please," Hui requested.

"Do you think I'M a thief? Of course you get a receipt. He scribbled a note on some paper and said, "Sign!" He knew Hui couldn't write. "Make a mark!" The police led the way and Dong snatched up the silver from the table.

Zhang-li returned to the farmhouse through the small back window when it was dark. "Are the police after me?"

"I don't think so," Hui said. "I wouldn't put much past Dong in the future. You must be careful...maybe you should leave this valley. We'll be OK, our crops have been good."

Ming placed four silver coins in Zhang-li's hand. "You'll need it."

"I can't leave now. There is too much trouble." Zhang-li looked on the table..."What's this?"

"It's the receipt for our land tax."

"No it isn't! It says here you are paying Dong the silver for a past debt."

Hui and Ming were stunned. "It's not a receipt?"

When Dong and the police officers left, Dong gave each officer a silver coin and they swore to keep quiet that the Chan's had actually paid their land tax.

Zhang-li hid in the ceiling that night. In the morning the three of them went to Shidong to the tax office. Zhang-li hid in the crowd that gathered.

"SO! Have you come to pay your land tax?" Dong said with a smile.

"I paid my land tax yesterday and you wrote a receipt in front of two police officers." Hui's voice was raised as the crowd thickened. Dong's reputation had been tainted with the death of his first wife but no proof had been found. Now, this accusation!

"You know what the note says?" Dong smiled broadly. "You have finally repaid your debt to me."

The crowd moaned because they knew Hui would never accept any help from Dong.

"You signed it! Can't you read?" Dong laughed out loud as the two officers behind him smiled.

"It was supposed to be a tax receipt! Your policemen saw that I paid you in silver!"

"You paid a DEBT! ...not your taxes. You still owe the government payment or you lose your land!" Dong was not smiling. The crowd hushed.

"I knew you would not be truthful so this time, before this group, I'm going to pay you the land tax again." Hui produced another ten silver coins. "Don't say this money was stolen like yesterday, I still have letters from my son proving the money was earned!"

Dong snatched the money and wrote a true receipt. The crowd cheered and began to dissipate when...

"Grab Zhang-li! He's a thief! Get him!" Zhang-li ran as the crowd blocked the police from the chase. He was gone.

In Hawaii, Ping, made his trip to the society house to send yet another letter home. He placed the letter on the table.

"Ping! We have a letter for you...from Shidong!"

Ping's heart stopped. He raced outside the building and sat down under a mango tree to read the letter:

Dear Son,

Zhang-li retrieved all your letters from the Guangdong society house in Zhongshon. You were a life-saver! Your uncle, Dong, has become the new government tax collector and has demanded land tax payment in silver instead of crops. Your money saved our land.

Zhang-li has read all your letters to your mother and I. We cried, We laughed, we were so happy as he read each new letter. We thought something bad happened to you but we're glad to see you are working through your contract at the plantation.

We love and miss you. Zhang-li has been a great help to us but he is being chased away by his father. We regret we cannot read or write but we will find someone to read all your new letters to us. If you don't get a reply from Zhang-li's hand we will have someone send you letters from Zhongshon.

*Salutations,
Hui and Ming*

Ping's heart soared as he marched happily back to the plantation bunk house. His letters continued with even more money sent from the society house. The society house charged a fee but was honest delivering his letters.

The letters piled up at Guangdong. Hui made the rugged trip there and collected the letters each month. He couldn't read them but brought them home and saved them hoping that Zhang-li or someone else they could trust would come to read them.

The contract years ended and it was time for Ping to make a decision. Stay on at the plantation or take a chance living and working in town. Ping had saved a little money and bought a plot of land at the end of the Kalihi Valley in the last ten years. All of the dreams of traveling the world or going to school had faded and the last dream—the one of starting a business—was the last to shine.

Ping was afraid that he would not be able to send a steady stream of money back to China. The Hawaii society house moved to Nu'uaniu so it would be difficult to come to town on the train from Wailua. He sent another letter to his parents in China written with red ink on the envelope asking for advice.

Shidong: Each passing year, Hui and Ming went to town to pay their land tax. Each year, Dong received the money without a smile, but with a real receipt. A drought had come again. Dong was never embarrassed to take water from the canal through Hui's land. Inside he burned darkly for that key piece of land. His four younger sons were now with families on Dong's land. War with Japan had come and gone. Zhang-li had long disappeared.

Hui saw the red ink on the envelope and knew his son had sent an important message. Ming and Hui were afraid to trust anyone but Zhang-li to read the note. The country was desperate and people would do anything to survive.

"Let's go to the school-master in Shidong with just this one letter," Ming suggested. The school master was young and ambitious. Hui didn't trust him. "We have to trust someone," Ming said.

"Excuse us master Ching!" Hui and Ming stood outside the opened office door at the school. "Could we ask a favor?"

"I'm busy, please shut the door and leave."

"We have silver. We need to have you read a letter to us..."

"Silver?" master Ching smiled. "Come in...COME IN!"

Ming followed Hui into the room. Hui passed the letter to the school master. "I can give you one silver coin if you would read for us."

"Of course I can help you!" Ching took the letter and opened it.

"It says: 'Hello mother and father...I have spent ten years on the plantation and all my contract time is up. They say I can continue to work in the sugar cane fields but I need your advice. I have saved money and bought a small plot of land near the city of Honolulu in the Kalihi district. Should I start a business? The only thing I know is how to make char-siu bao, shui mai, and pork dumplings. The Hawaiians call it "Manapua, Pepe 'au, and pork hash." If I start the business I am afraid I will not be able to send money regularly. How are you doing? Are you healthy. Do you hear from Zhang-li? Your son, Ping.'"

"Could you write a reply letter for us?"

"Of course!...but paper and ink and my time..."

"We can give you one more silver coin."

"What do you want me to write?"

Ming and Hui dictated a long letter telling Ping about the absence of reply letters because Zhang-li had disappeared. They talked about the crops. They said they had not read any of Ping's letters but thanked him for the money that allowed them to hold their farm. They talked about Dong who had become a Communist government agent now in charge of the police—a cruel and powerful man with sinister connections and strict control of the entire region. They finally begged Ping to send no further money and to start his life before it was too late.

"Don't worry! I will send this letter for you. Where do you receive the letters?" The school master's mind was racing...an opportunity had finally come his way!

"We will take the letter ourselves, thank you sir!" Hui bowed. The smile disappeared from Ching's face. "Really! I insist. I will send it for you. Let me help you."

Hui looked carefully at Ching and then quickly to Ming. "We'll take the letter."

"All right!" Ching was gruff. "I will finish the last line and you can take it." He scribbled a line at the end of letter. "Hui and Ming Ping Chan, right? Mark here..."

Ching watched Hui and Ming scurry off. His hands were on his hips but his mind was on their silver supply from Hawaii. With some help from Dong, maybe something was possible. Hui and Ming worried that Ching didn't write down what they dictated but...they had to take a chance.

When Hui got to the society house at Zhongshon with the letter, two policemen watched from the distance.

Ching and Dong became kindred businessmen in the new Communist China. They had found a way to profit from the Cultural Revolution. Dong's police told Ching where to pick up and receive Ping's letters. Ching had changed the last line of the letter to Ping to ask for MORE money rather than no money.

Things got bad in the valley for Hui and Ming. The locusts came at harvest time and cleaned everyone out. Ming fell ill and then Hui. It was just the flu, but at a very bad time.

"Hello my brother!" Dong announced. "I come to help once again! You must forget the past. Please to trust me now that you are sick. I don't even want your land. All is forgiven."

Hui raised an eye from the cot he and Ming lay on. Dong was smiling again looking more sincere than ever.

"I make special soup for you and Ming. You drink! You get well soon." Dong left a kettle on the fire pit.

There was no food in the house except Dong's soup. Hui gave some to Ming and drank some himself. The soup was sweet and went down smoothly but after a few hours, both Hui and Ming were vomiting uncontrollably.

From the dark, Zhang-li appeared. He smelled the soup and dumped it out the back door. He rushed to get water and quickly mixed herbs and tried to get Hui and Ming to drink. They drank in spasms and were soon stable.

"Poison...I'm glad I wasn't too late!"

Zhang-li had run to the north and became an herb doctor. He learned the trade from some of the wisest herbists in the country. He never used his real name for fear that word would reach his father. He was sure his father wanted him dead. He knew too much—especially now that he discovered his father's murder plot. Ching would continue writing letters to Ping requesting money. Dong would eliminate Hui and Ming and finally take over their land.

A crowd gathered around Zhang-li as he approached Shidong to confront his father. With the crowd behind him, he burst into the Communist Party office.

"I came back to find Hui and Ming sick and ready to die at their farm. They said YOU brought them poisoned soup to help them cure their colds. I came in time to save their lives with special herbs. I want this town to know what you have done!"

Dong stepped out to greet his son with a smile. "Zhang-li, my oldest, and smartest son. HOW COULD YOU ACCUSE ME! You are a thief come back to steal money from Hui and Ming, just like you did in the past. Now, you blame me for killing them?"

Zhang-li was a little confused. "They are still alive!"

"Really? Let's all go out to the farm to see."

When the crowd reached the farm, the door was closed and Hui and Ming lay doubled over in their cot. Ching, the school-master, was in the room holding a pitcher of green water. "I found this on the table. It's poison! Zhang-li has killed them!" The crowd turned but Zhang-li was gone.

In Hawaii, Ping worked hard raising a few pigs in the back of his lot to make the char-siu for his daily round selling manapua in Kalihi. He sent letters to China but now he received reply-letters regularly. Each with a heart-rending story and a plea for more money. The letters seemed odd, unlike what his parents would write, but he couldn't ignore the plea for help.

Zhang-li was wanted by the People's Democratic Party for murder but was never found. Not in this story...

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



About the Author

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

The Three Spinners

by Mary Jo Maichack



Long ago in Bohemia, a widow had a daughter who was pretty and polite, but lazy as a fattened goose. The daughter, Lidka, hated one task more than any—spinning. But with no other way to earn their keep, spin, she must. But spin, she wouldn't! Time and time again, her mother pressed her, but the disobedient girl only cried.

One day, sick of her daughter's dawdling, she whacked her on the ear. Lidka howled so loudly, even the deaf heard it, far across the long and winding Vltava.

Just then, who should be passing by their cottage, but the queen. Startled by the shriek, she entered their home to find its cause.

"What was that scream?" she demanded.

"My mother hit me!" said Lidka.

"Why?"

The mother was too embarrassed to admit that her daughter was lazy, disobedient and wouldn't spin, so she told the queen, "I got angry because my daughter is always spinning! Spin, spin, spin! She can't get enough of it! All her spinning makes my head spin!"

"What luck! We have rooms full of lovely flax that need spinning. She will be happy," said the queen. "Come with me to the palace and spin the merry days away. On top of the pleasure you'll have in the sheer joy of your favorite occupation, I will reward you with something special."

So the girl went to the palace and was shown one, two, three rooms full of flax—shimmering and soft, from floor to ceiling.

"I'll come back in the morning to see your work," said the queen, and she closed the door.

"Aye!" The girl took one look at the pile of flax and the spinning wheel and slumped. She blubbered all day. She blubbered all night, and in the morning when the queen returned, she was shocked to find no flax spun.

"Why have you not done your spinning?"

"I was so homesick, I just cried and stared out the window."

"Tomorrow will be better, my dear. And when you finish your work, you may marry my handsome son and you will become queen. Spinning and becoming a princess—you'll double your delight!" She closed the door.

Once more, the girl looked at that tower of flax and imagined spinning. Sobbing, she stared out the window. The following morning, the queen scowled. “Still nothing?”

“I had a headache.”

“If you hope to marry my son, Lidka, get to work.”

But Lidka did nothing. Lazy is as lazy doesn't.

On the third day, the queen raged, “If you do not spin this flax, I will throw you into a tower to live with rats. You will starve!” She slammed the door.

Now, with trembling fingers, the girl wound her distaff with flax and sat down to spin. But still, she could not bring herself to do it.

Tap, tap, tap.

Lidka turned and saw three homely women standing outside, tapping on the window. One had a thumb as broad as a dumpling. The second had a lower lip dangling down, droopy as a bell clapper. The third had a foot as wide and flat as a burial stone. Lidka shrank from them but noticed that the three were smiling warmly and beckoning her to open the window. She cracked it open and heard them speak.

“Don't be afraid. Why are you crying?” they asked.

“I must spin three rooms of flax to spin! I could marry the queen's son, if only I could bring myself to do it! I despise spinning!”

“Well, young one, we will spin all of it for you, on one condition. You must invite us to your wedding and let us sit next to you without shame in front of your guests.”

“Certainly, yes, ano!” promised Lidka.

The three women climbed in through the window. Thumka with the broad thumb pulled the thread, Lapka with the long lip licked the thread, and Futka with the flat foot trod the treadle to turn the spinning wheel.

Three nights passed in this way and the queen was overjoyed to see the pile of perfect work. “Ah, so beautiful—krásny! My stunning spinner! This is staggering, stupendous, sublime! Now for the royal wedding!”

The old women attended and the guests wanted to snicker at their odd features, but Lidka's look made sure that her kind old “aunts” attended with the dignity they deserved. She gave them good goulash and grog.

Her new husband, the king, asked the first woman, “Pardon my asking, but how did you get that big, flat thumb?”

“From spinning, my lord.”

“And you, Auntie, how did you get that long lip?”

“From spinning, my lord.”

“And you—how did you get that huge, flat foot?”

“From spinning, my lord.”

The king turned to his bride, Lidka, and said, “You are so precious to me, please promise me one thing.”

“What?”

“Promise me you will never even touch a spinning wheel.”

“Of course, my husband...since you insist.”

If you follow the long and winding Vltava, you will never find a wife more delighted and eager to obey.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



About the Author- Since 1989, Mary Jo Maichack has made musical storytelling her livelihood. Featured at the Connecticut Storytelling Festival, Laughs, MFA Boston, NSN, PBS, for an estimated half a million participants, from Vienna to Venice; Prague to Paris, on hay bales to glorious stages. Former NSN Mass. Liaison and Northeast Regional Director. singingstories.info
Email: singingstories2000@yahoo.com

Stepping Stones into Story: An Afternoon Ritual

by Julia M. Morris

It is 2:15PM, and this is the time the children and I look forward to all day. No more attempts at math, pre-planned lessons on 'kindness,' or literacy activities centered around descriptive words. These things can wait until tomorrow.

Instead, small warm fingers clench my left hand as Ariella squeezes her message to me: we really ought to leave now. Doron, a five-year-old with the job of 'story path-maker' for the week, picks up a pile of carpet squares and carefully lays them down in a zigzag pattern from our meeting area towards the green rug in the block center. "Today these are walking stones!" Doron announces proudly. "And underneath is water."

Ariella stands up and puts her right foot on the first 'stone.' Her left foot then meets the right one and we watch as she bravely leaps onto the next jagged rock. "Be careful," I say, "there could be alligators in the water!" This warning ignites a collective sense of excitement and soon, others follow Ariella.

As a class, we have traveled into Story before. We've made the journey by mud-marching, mountain climbing, and even a rocket ship voyage. But, somehow, Doron's choice today of concrete stepping stones, floating as they do above a mysterious waterway, feels especially dangerous and delightful.

The mythologist Joseph Campbell reminds us in his classic text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (a wonderful map for any storyteller!), that regardless of the mode of movement, we must always begin by crossing a threshold of sorts. In our case, we say 'Yes' to the "call to adventure" — what Campbell identifies as the first stage of any mythological journey (58) and are making our way, albeit with obstacles, into the terrain of deep story. The moment we agree to depart — when we take our first step on Doron's crooked path of stones — we enter what Campbell refers to as the "yonder zone of elsewhere" (97). In this sphere, the profane and practical routines of life are left far behind. In its place, a sacred space awaits where anything can happen.

Once my kindergarten students and I land in the "block area-turned forest," we attempt to make a place for ourselves. Bodies overlap and layer-in, blanketing the crowded carpeted grass with elbows and bellies. In this rite of passage — this ritual of arrival — we are shoulder to shoulder, leaning in gently against one another. There are 17 of us but somehow we all fit! We slink down, gradually, into our quieter, storied selves. Faces relax and shoulders lower. The children look up at me, expecting something.

Once upon a time, I whisper, there was a box. It was filled with All the stories in All the World. This magical box belonged to Nyame, the sky god, and he DID NOT want to share it with the world. But one day...

My fellow-travelers lean in closer. They have come from far away, and they want to catch every word.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



About the Author- Julia M. Morris, Ph.D. is both a professional storyteller and an instructor in early childhood education at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, NY. She conducts workshops on active storytelling, imaginative play, and literacy through the arts. Her storytelling program, 'Stories that Move and Sing.' has been implemented throughout New York City and beyond.

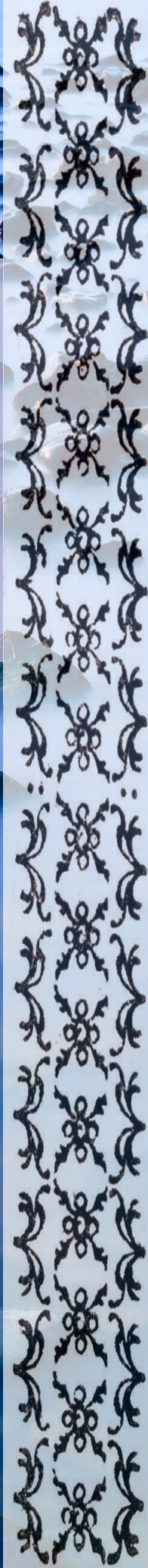
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-HEALING SPRINGS-



Nighttime Dreams Become Stepping Stones for Healing

by Adair W. Heitmann

It's 2003 and I'm vacationing on Cape Cod. One night I have a nighttime dream. *In it, I'm holding our four-year-old son at the water's edge. A tidal wave approaches. The ocean's undertow violently threatens to tear us apart. The wave crashes into us. With seaweed dangling from my hair and salt water in my eyes I realize, we've survived, we're still holding each other tight.*

A few months later, that nighttime dream offers me a metaphorical steppingstone. In waking life, I'm diagnosed with breast cancer. After my mastectomy, I'm lying on the starched sheets of the metal hospital bed. I desperately feel the absence of my right breast. I miss its weight.

I'm a natural woman and reconstructive surgery isn't my way. I want to feel my husband's touch. I won't be able to with a reconstructed breast. Plus, no plastic surgeon can duplicate my fine and fabulous former breast.

My dream's symbolic wisdom predicted I'd survive something life-threatening. Yet, I'm in despair, missing my breast. I'm attempting to balance my energies by listening to soothing music through headphones.

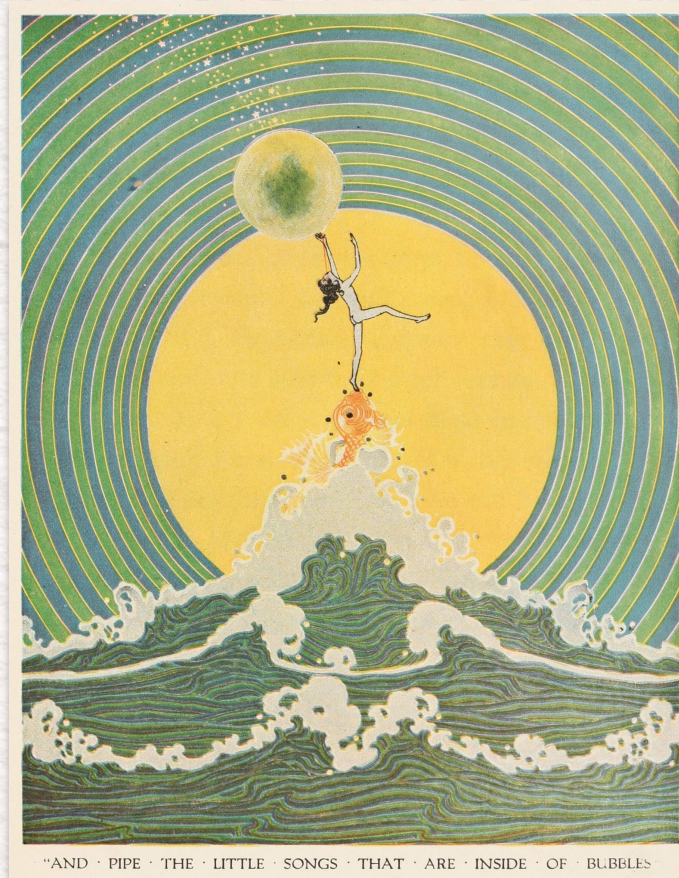
In walks my husband and our preschooler. My husband warned our son as to what to expect. He said, "Mommy will be sore on her chest, so you won't be able to hug her right away, but she'll want to see you."

Our son walks up the side of my bed, with his eyes never leaving mine. He stops midway and hinges at his waist. He gently lays his head on top of my right thigh; his eyes never lose contact with me.

I reach down and pat his soft, corn silk hair. Taking off my headphones I silently place them over his ears. He lets out a long, comforted sigh and closes his eyes.

My husband walks up the left side of my bed and tenderly lays his hand on my forehead. None of us says a word. As my dream foretold, we survived something colossal and we're still together.

After surgery I start wearing prosthetics. Daily, I insert a temporary soft plastic breast replacement the size and weight of a football, into my specially-made prosthetic bra. I take it in and out morning and night. Wearing the prosthesis is supposed to fool the public into thinking I have two breasts.



Following months of excruciating physical therapy to regain my range of motion, to celebrate, I dive off my husband’s boat into the deep water off Connecticut’s coast. I’m wearing a different prosthesis, one made for swimming, it’s called a swim form breast replacement. It slips inside a specially made pouch sewn into my bathing suit.

In the gray-green water, I’m doing the breaststroke. Immediately, my fake breast, still in its customized pouch sewn into my custom-fit prosthetic bathing suit, floats up and embeds itself under my chin.

I repeatedly push the prosthesis back down in alignment with my real breast and each time it rises back up, slapping my chin. Treading water, with my swim form now firmly lodged under my chin, I tilt my head back and I surrender. I laugh out-loud.

Then, seventeen years later it isn’t a laughing matter when I’m diagnosed with a new breast cancer. This time I relinquish my left breast in the operating room. Again, I don’t want reconstructive surgery and I’m done with prosthetics.

This time I survive 14 months of multi-agent aggressive chemotherapy with severe side effects. To recover, I become like a wounded animal staying safe in my lair, in solitude, recuperating, until I’m strong enough to be out in public.

In 2020, before my second breast cancer diagnosis, I have a nighttime dream. *In it, there are hundreds of sperm whales rising in the water in straight vertical lines directly under the boat I’m in. In my dream, I survive their intense rocking of the boat. When I get back on land, still in my nighttime dream, I say out-loud to friends, “Let me go change and when I come back I’ll have a story to tell.”*

Before that dream, I’d never created or performed personal stories onstage. Now, I do. In my dream I said, “Let me go change.” In waking life I undergo a sea change taking over 14 months. The force of my dream encourages me to heal. It motivates me to come back transformed. Insights from my nighttime dreams ground me and they pave the way for enlightenment as I travel on this journey of being human.

Contributor to be contacted regarding permission to tell this work



About the Author- Adair W. Heitmann, BFA is a Storytelling World Resource Award and National Federation of Press Women awards recipient. A storyteller, published author, educator, and artist she is a Poet-in-Residence in schools and a Guest Lecturer in universities. Her award-winning fine art is exhibited worldwide and online.

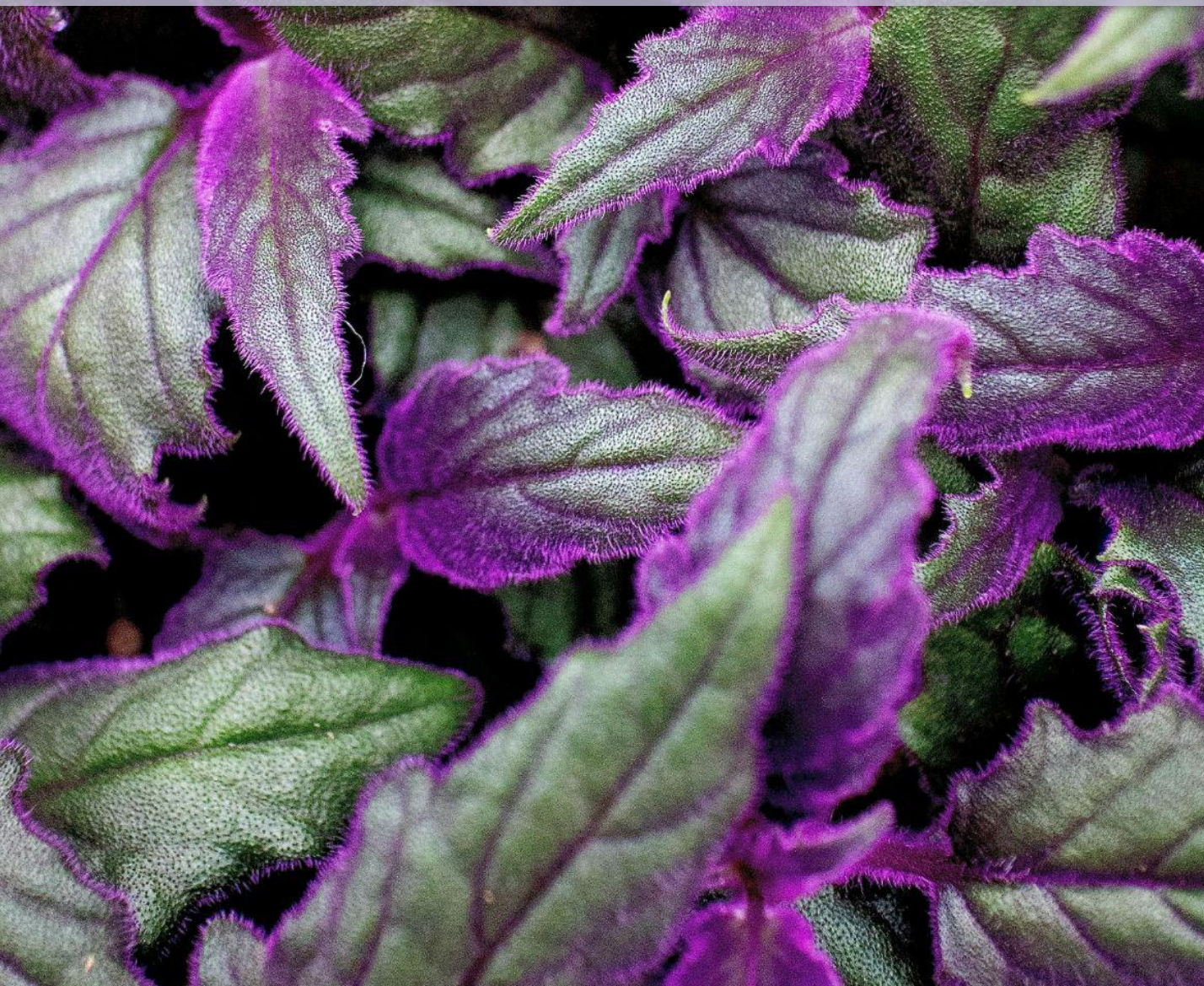
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-THAT'S AMAZING!-

Behind the scenes of great performers.





The Malaga

by Antonio Rocha



The Malaga: A story of Maine and the Middle Passage is a compelling and gripping performance about a 183-ton brig that was built in Maine in 1832. Given the high demand for the trafficking of humans from Africa to Brazil during the 1800s, Malaga was taken to Brazil in the 1840s as a vessel to supply enslaved Africans to “work” in Brazil’s number one crop industry, coffee.

As I was researching the story, I started to notice the connections between myself and the ship. The ship was made in Maine and sent to Brazil and Africa. I am from Brazil of African descent and had moved to Maine to learn about performance. The ship went to Rio de Janeiro, the city where I grew up. Fonseca, the last name of the trafficker who chartered

Malaga, was also the name of a neighborhood I had lived in as a child across the bay from Rio. Manoel, the trafficker’s first name, was also the first name of my maternal grandfather. Suddenly I saw that if there was a person to tell this story, then that person was me.

This first connection, although very important to me, was not enough. I needed to connect the audience emotionally to the story, to tell them the not-so-well-known shocking details of the middle passage. I needed to keep the audience rigged to the show.

But how to tell such a horrific story and keep the audience engaged? I did not want the audience to feel guilty or uncomfortable. I wanted them to lean forward and surrender to the suffering. I needed to protect the audience so that they could feel the emotions without guilt. Anger that is directed towards the audience, an experience I have felt before, switches off their listening. I needed a strategy. Suddenly, the answer came as if delivered by the ancestors themselves. I would engage in dialogue with the ship as the storyteller.

I had already decided, from the very beginning, that I would tell a good portion of the story from the point of view of the ship. But I realized now that if I engaged in dialogue with the ship, then I could tell the ship what was going on, and the audience would lean in. The sad and angry energy was not being aimed directly at the audience, but instead, it would mostly remain on stage between myself and the ship during the darkest moments of the dialogue. I had also created a way to make the ship notice me through time. When I tested this before a live audience, it worked like a gem, with a positive and audible reaction from them. People would approach me after the show and tell me how much they liked my interaction with the ship. One elderly man raised his hand from the audience after a show at the Maine Maritime Museum and said with a tender smile on his face: “I also talk to my boat.”

When Malaga was in the middle passage for the first time, she was not aware why people were chained together in her hull. Malaga had been sold into this trafficking blindly and needed answers. I would provide Malaga with all the horrific details. Once I wrote the opening of the show to give Malaga a voice, the audience never questioned that Malaga could talk and have feelings. As a matter of fact, the audience became Malaga, sailing into uncharted historical bloody waters alongside her.

During the research for the story I had to come to terms with my own ancestral trauma. My African ancestry is due to the enslavement of my ancestors. Rocha Vieira (my official last name) is not my real African name: it is the name of the Portuguese slave owners who bought my ancestors. My family had no idea where we came from in Africa. But during the research for this piece I started an amazing healing process. I purged a lot of anger during the rehearsals; I faced my past and joined hands with Malaga to tell such an important story of revelation and healing. Malaga landed me a Maine Arts Commission Performing Arts Fellowship for 2024. She also took me back to Africa in an incredible way. Because of her influence in my life, I did my African Ancestry DNA test and now know that I come from the Benga and Kota people living in Gabon. I feel blessed.

Special thanks to Daniel and Marcia Minter from Indigo Arts Alliance, to Dr. Kate McMahon from the Smithsonian Institution, to Laurentino Gomes for writing three unparalleled volumes on slavery called *Escravidão*, and to the Maine Arts Commission and the New England Foundation for the Arts for their financial support.



Antonio Rocha, originally from Brazil, began his career in the performing arts in 1985. Mr. Rocha's unique and award winning fusion of mime and spoken word has been performed from Singapore to South Africa and many places in between including 20 countries on 6 continents as well as 44 US states. Some of the venues include The Singapore Festival of the Arts, Wolf Trap, The National Storytelling Festival, The Kennedy Center, The Smithsonian Institution, The National Geographic, The Tales of Graz in Austria, Dunya Festival in Holland as well as many other storytelling festivals and educational institutions around the USA and abroad. A two time TEDx speaker, Antonio Rocha is a recipient, amongst other awards, of the coveted Circle of Excellence Award by the National Storytelling Network, and the 2024 Maine Arts Commission Performing Arts Fellowship. For more information about this unique performer, please visit: storyinmotion.com

This work is not to be retold or preformed

Editor's Note: Antonio Rocha will be performing THE MALAGA SHIP at the 2024 NSN Conference on Saturday, July 13, 2024. Virtual tickets are available at storynet.org/events/nsn-2024-conference/.



-PUZZLES and GAMES-

"Curiouser and curiouser!"

A Riddle For You

Does it fear the sun, or why
Does it behave so very shy? It
always right behind me goes
When sunshine falls upon my
nose, 'Tis mine, as any one
can see, It looks, sometimes,
so much like me.

What am I?

 SB

Last Month's Answer: A soap bubble.

LOST WORD SOCIETY

by Carmen Agra Deedy

As we head into Spring, March is roaring in like a lion with a split personality. It has been wild and woolly with record heat and cold, fires and blizzards, and tornadoes and flooding. It seems as if Spring was less chaotic and more orderly in the past.

Speaking of the past, it's time once again, to head to the Way Back Machine and trundle backwards to a time long before this to find yet another rarely used word in modern English. Once again it's time again to play along with Carmen Agra Deedy's LOST WORD SOCIETY.

Each month 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 another definition, a haiku, a story, or even a five person play about the lost word. The challenge, should you decide to accept it, is for you to use your new creation in a story, just for fun. Next month we will publish the true definition of the "lost" word and provide you with another one. Have fun!

TARADIDDLE (n.) ('ter-ə-, di-dl)

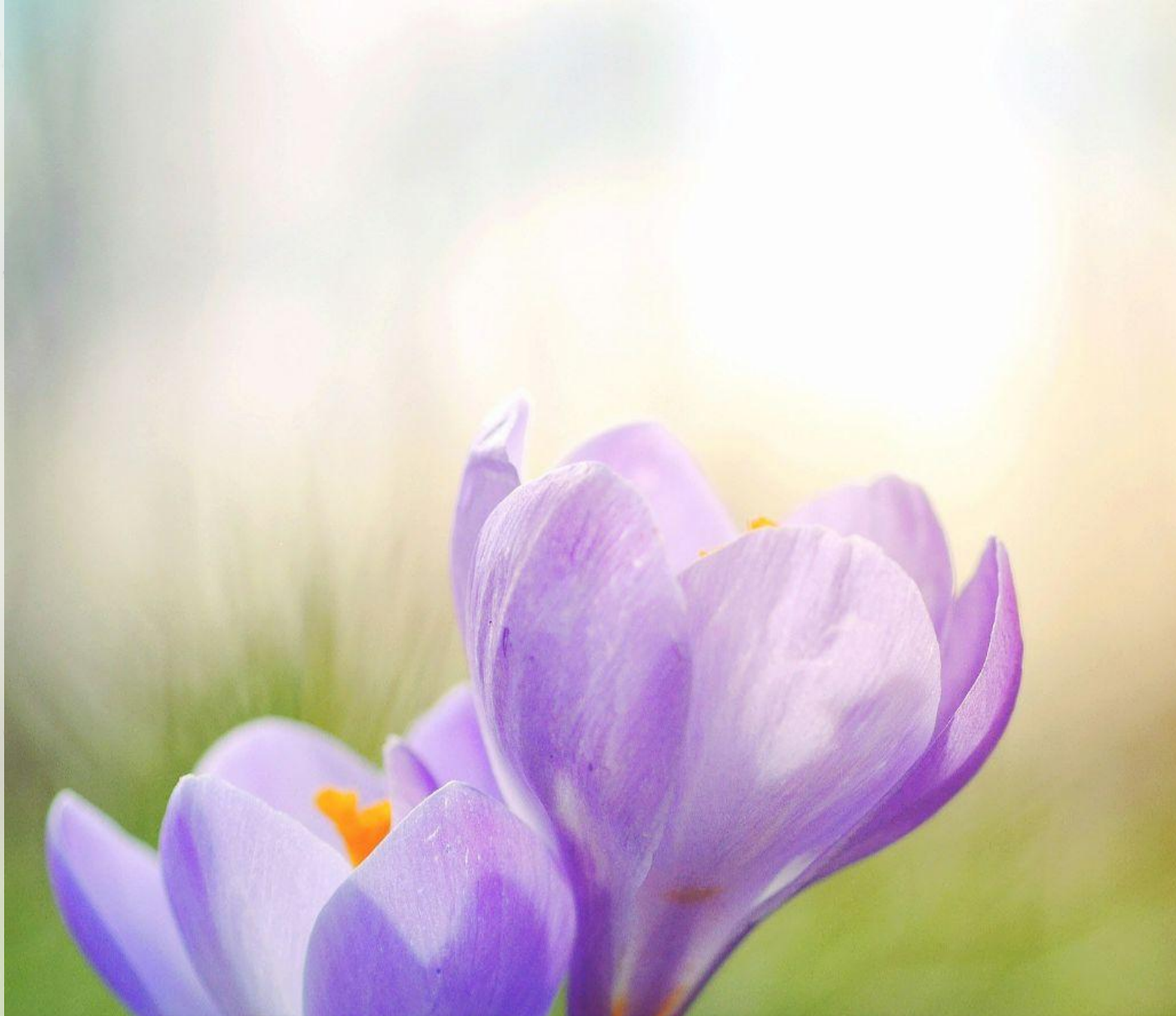
- 1) A series of increasingly hurtful insults and jabs referring to a person's blatant disregard for the planet.
- 2) A commercial novelty waffle iron designed to create waffles in the shape of tarantula spiders for Halloween events.
- 3) Not so successful alternative to "Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay," the vaudeville and music hall song first performed in the 1880s.

Last Month's Lost Word:

KICKSHAW (n.) Archaic. - a fancy, but insubstantial, cooked dish.



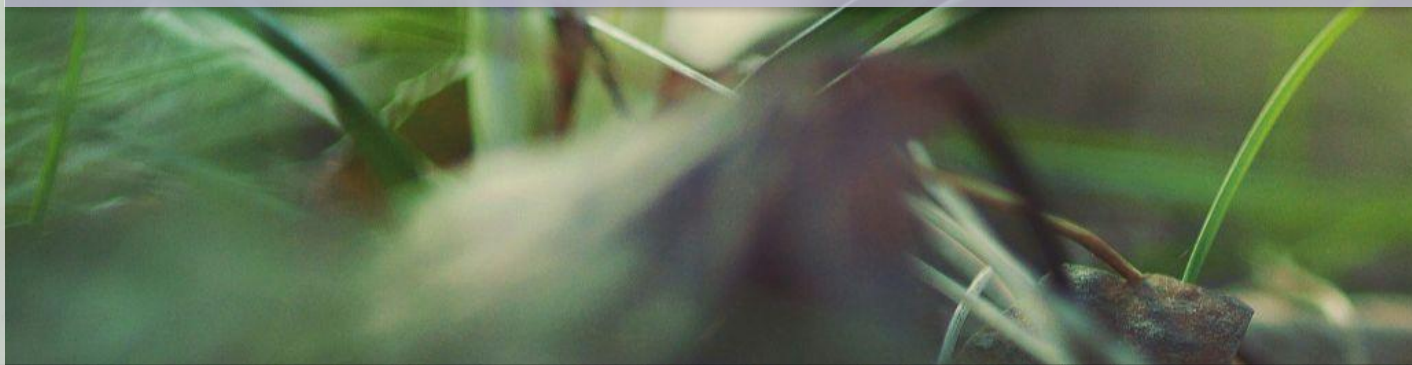
For more fun explore:
Carmen Agra Deedy's LOST WORD SOCIETY
at [facebook.com/carmenagradeedy](https://www.facebook.com/carmenagradeedy)
for new words every weekend!



-STORY SIGHTINGS-

What's going on?

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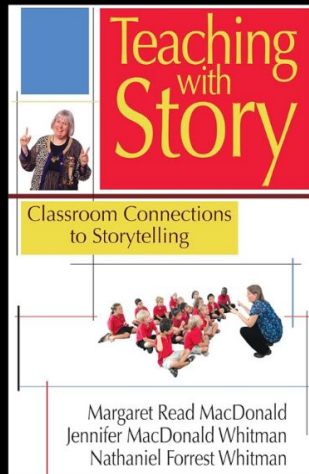
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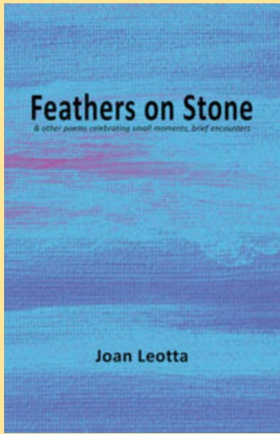


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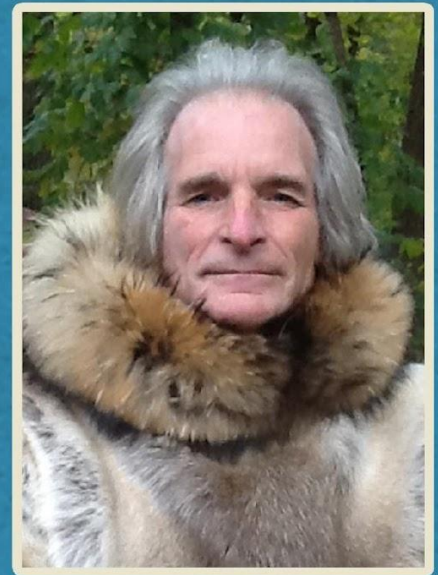


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Working with Robin was the best thing I could do as a first time, self-publishing author. He made editing my novel a collaborative experience, he took away the intimidation factor, and was a conscientious partner throughout the whole project from beginning edits to final, print-ready novel. Always clear on what worked well and what needed more attention, he kindly walked me through the editing process, which could have been miserable, but became a joy as I saw my work get better and better. An experienced and successful novelist, Robin had the wherewithal to answer all my questions, address my concerns and helped build my confidence as a novelist.

James Omar Hansen
Actor, Storyteller, Playwright and Retired Professor

I did my first book on my own, the second with a small publishing company. When I found Robin, the third time was a charm. He is approachable, encouraging, accessible and the most knowledgeable person I have worked with to get my words quickly from manuscript to book. And, he shares his wisdom in a kind, patient manner so that I learn every step of the way. Robin's advice made my book better than I had imagined. And he has the priceless perspective of being an author himself. He is absolutely my go-to guy for my next book projects. Simply a joy to work with.

Mary Clista Dahl
Author, Storyteller and Writing Instructor

Robin looked at my manuscript and gave me an honest assessment of the quality of my material, which was very encouraging to me. He took the time to explain the self-publishing steps. I engaged with Robin and his team and within a few weeks, my first print book and e-book were a published reality. Any aspiring author who, like me, feels frustrated with the laborious and unpredictable process of traditional publishing needs to get in touch with Robin. He made all of the difference for me.

Jim Kissane
Author and Storyteller

Navigating the world of self-publishing is no easy task. With an eagle eye and a steady hand, Robin guided me each step of the way. Thanks to his professional and patient guidance, I successfully published my first book in paperback, hardback and e-book formats. From the initial layout to the final cover design, I couldn't be happier with the end product. Robin is a terrific collaborative partner who listens well, makes thoughtful suggestions and lends his enormous expertise to make the self-publishing process easy and successful.

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PUBLISHING

Storytelling

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

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

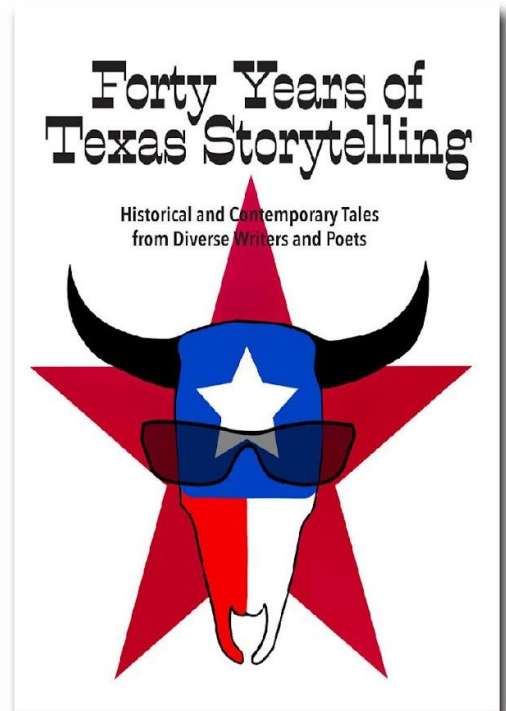
—**Alton Takiyama-Chung**, Storyteller (altonchung.com) and Editor-In-Chief of *The Story Beast*, a quarterly e-Publication dedicated to the art of storytelling (storybeast.org)

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

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

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

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



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March 2024



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

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

—**Geraldine Buckley**, storyteller and author



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

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



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Storytelling

In these stories of fondly remembered people ...

... each exemplifying an enduring virtue—Donald Davis both entertains and inspires. As a frequent featured performer at the National Storytelling Festival (USA), he has revealed himself to be a deeply caring, wondrously talented storyteller. This book encapsulates his gentle wisdom and understanding of human nature.



"The wonderful Celtic scholar John O'Donahue once said, 'Beauty is a homecoming.' **Donald Davis is a homecoming.** There is nothing, I mean nothing, like witnessing Donald Davis tell a story. This collection takes me closer to that experience than I thought possible. His voice jumps from the page."

—Kevin Kling, storyteller and author of *The Dog Says How*.

"A powerful collection of stories of people you may have otherwise mistaken as ordinary."

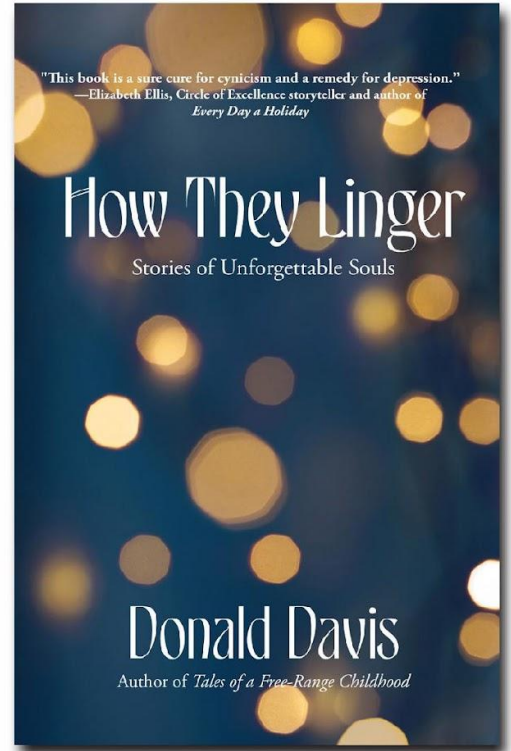
—Bil Lepp, storyteller and author

"In *How They Linger*, **Donald Davis** looks across the years and remembers the wonderfully quirky, warm-hearted people who make for a rich, full life. Without a doubt, this book will have you recalling people in your own life who deserve to be remembered and kept alive by having their stories told.

—David Holt, Four-time Grammy Award Winner

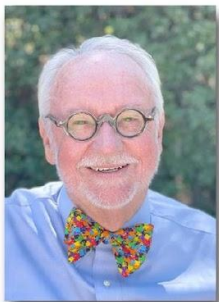
"*How They Linger* takes readers on a delightful dive into kind and vividly varied times, into a world of beloved, quirky relatives and neighbors, childhood friends reclaimed and rediscovered, even wise and preternaturally forgiving animals. These stories can inspire us all to find our own treasured memories—and to tell them."

—Jo Radner, past president of the American Folklore Society and the National Storytelling Network



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Donald Davis, a native of Waynesville, North Carolina, was educated at Davidson College and Duke Divinity School. A retired Methodist Minister, Davis tours the country, telling stories and conducting workshops. He is a regular headliner at the National Storytelling Festival and has been a featured storyteller at the Smithsonian Institution and the World's Fair. He lives with his wife, Trish, on Ocracoke Island.

Photo by Trish Davis

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*May you always wonder,
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-Asia Starr
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