A Grandmother's Tale: the story of Dorothea Viehmann

by Ruth Danziger

If you ever get a chance to follow the fairy tale road in and around Kassel Germany, I recommend you do it. This article is a result of research I carried out during my recent trip to the area of Hesse-Kassel where the Grimms Brothers lived and worked in the early 18th century and where they met the storyteller Dorothea Viehmann who lived there from 1755 to 1816. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel in the area and research her life, facilitated by the Anne Smythe Travel Grant awarded by Storytelling Toronto in 2016.

"What you receive from your ancestors, use it, treasure it, enjoy it, and then pass it on to those who come after."
- House inscription, 1685

In a Hessian village near Kassel Germany, I came across a frame house with the above words inscribed upon it in old German. The writer must have meant the house but I thought to myself, "What a great description of storytelling!" It is in the nature of oral storytelling that tales are passed from one person to another over the generations and we seldom know much about the tellers who gave us the stories we enjoy today.

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Pippin Editorial—Spring 2017

The air has been sweetened with the fragrance of purple lilac, pale pink apple blossoms, and cascades of honey locust. Sandy country roadsides dotted with white strawberry blossoms are now harbouring tiny green berries, and woodlands adorned with trillium are now carpeted with green. Bursts of warmth have been tempered with long cool stretches, inviting the blossoms to linger. The palette of tender and vibrant greens is more splendid than an impressionist painter could mix. Water there has been in such abundance that many have had to seek higher ground, a stark contrast to the drought of last year. All the snow the winter clouds held back has been released it seems. The days are long, our shoulders softer, and spring is unfolding beautifully into summer. Storytelling will move outdoors, under the shade of trees and the sparkle of summer nights. This editorial looks forward, while this issue reflects back on our Toronto Storytelling Festival feast. Enjoy.

PIPPIN is the newsletter of Storytelling Toronto

The Storytellers School of Toronto is a registered, non-profit organization that provides a creative home for a community of storytellers, listeners, and story-explorers. Our mission is to inspire, encourage and support storytelling for listeners, tellers and those who have not yet heard. Since 1979 we have been providing courses and workshops; holding gatherings, festivals and events to celebrate and present the art of storytelling; supporting the creative work of storytellers; and producing publications about storytelling and storytellers.

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Festival Reflections

by Dawne McFarlane
Though snow swirled around us before and after the festival, spring was surely heralded in with the great warmth generated at each festival gathering. Friends new and old and remembered were greeted with generous cheer. The richness of our own community is always illuminated for me as we welcome artists from afar. The diversity of local tellers and stories at the Gladstone Hotel made that clear, and many of us bemoaned not being able to attend each other’s events when simultaneously scheduled. Nonetheless, encouragement rather than competition filled the hallways, giving us all the opportunity to appreciate this supportive community. Hearts spilled open, sharing the unexpected catharsis and wonder that unfolded after stories were told.

The feast continued with an abundance of offerings from guests who had travelled far and wide to join us. For me it was difficult to choose the nourishment I most needed, so here are some delicious morsels from my experiences to add to yours. Reflections help me to digest and integrate these gifts. Charlotte Blake Alston (Philadelphia) spoke of the griot as diplomat between fighting factions. “When you personalize the experience, eyes are opened in a different way.” Not a dry eye in the room when she showed us how she does this with poetry and song. Charlotte brought the beatbox into Karima Amin’s (Buffalo) rap for social justice. “You see something that needs to be changed- stand up, speak out, and do something about it - even if it’s a little bitty something.” Karima’s storywork in prisons has emphasized for her the importance of intervention “on the front end,” in the early grades for children in traumatic situations. During her first prison storytelling gig she saw three of her former students (she was a school teacher) and neighbours. “To deny their humanity is to deny ours...all stories speak of our humanity and vulnerability.”

This theme continued to emerge throughout the week. Heidi Dahlsveen (Norway) said “telling stories is giving life skills...the Norse mythology is dependent on our lives for meaning.” She told us of the time when the gods wanted to build a wall around their realm of Asgard, and a stranger offered to build it for the price of “the sun and the moon and the goddess of love.” As the wall was being built, they realized not only would the wall keep others out- it would keep them in, without light or warmth or love. Dan Yashinsky said “the more stories you know, the more of a compass you have for navigating these times.”

Kung Jaadee, a Masset Haida, reminded us “the land knows us- the land loves us unconditionally.” Her language is dying. Her people were almost wiped out after first contact, from 10,000 to 500 people. She told us when she was seriously ill, she returned to Haida Gwaii and the land healed her. When I told my son about this, he said he had heard someone on the radio say that the epidemic of suicides among indigenous young people is not a mental health issue, it is a reconciliation issue.

Ron Evans, a Metis elder and honourary festival elder, said “the mythology is us.” He asked Jose Brown to sing an honouring song after his “workshop;” her voice and the drum filled the chapel of Trinity St.Paul’s church. Kung Jaadee’s singing and drumming filled the sanctuary with a welcoming song, and the rotunda at the Royal Ontario Museum with a song honouring salmon. The beauty with which they filled these grand religious and government edifices of colonization was profound, as we gathered together on the traditional land of the Mississauga people.

Scientist Katy Payne (Ithaca) and musician Michael Pestel (Connecticut) asked a different kind of listening of us, as they gave voice to the grand religious and government edifices of colonization was profound, as we gathered together on the traditional land of the Mississauga people.
to humpback whales, elephants, and extinct birds. “We live in a tiny box of our own perceptive abilities,” Katy said. As a girl she sang in a choir in front of a pipe organ. When the notes descended low enough she could no longer hear them but could feel their vibrations. This is how she “heard” the elephants calling, below the register of human hearing. How to address the constant threats to the whales, the elephants, the natural world? “Whatever you can do—do it!” was her hopeful response. Michael’s response seems to be becoming a bird, as he composes “Catalogue of Extinct Birds” and conjures the birds before us with his sounds and actions. “I didn’t think of them as birds,” said Michael, “I thought of them as voices—guiding me through the park, through life—ancestral voices.” He knew things as a boy that he had forgotten, and was remembering again. “The remembering and forgetting, along with listening and feeling, never ends.”

We celebrated beloved Toronto elders Celia Lottridge, Carol McGirr, and Marylyn Peringer. Celia spoke with unadorned clarity, Marylyn sang sweetly, and Carol brought the song of the world “wrapped in a cloud and pinned by a star.” Bardic performer Nick Hennessey brought the sun and moon down to listen in a sighing spruce and pointed pine, as “music shimmered from his fingers.” And then—there was more at Harbourfront the next day! A feast indeed.
By Michelle Tocher

I’m very glad I followed my instincts to drift into Alan Shain’s humour workshop at the Toronto Storytelling Festival Camp. Shain, a standup comedian and storyteller with cerebral palsy, has a serious gift for flipping heavy subjects on their backsides. As somebody who laboursto speak and has spent his life in a wheelchair, he finds material for comedy every day of his life. He gave us a few examples, like the time he went to a restaurant with his brother. The waiter came along, and, without even looking at Alan, asked his brother, “How many menus would you like?” Alan piped up, “Well there are two of us here so give us four!”

After he told the story, Alan confessed that he didn’t think of the line in the moment. It came to him later on, when he was thinking about what he would have liked to have said. That’s how you work with your material, he explained. Go back over the ugly stuff and think of what you would have liked to have said in that moment. Stretch it out. Exaggerate.

To give us a first-hand experience, he asked us to consider something that really bugs us. Stuff we tend to rant about. “Now,” he said, “Rant to one another on the subject for two minutes.” When we were done, he instructed us to do the rant again, only this time, to say it “as if the thing you hate is something you absolutely love.” Like, it’s the best thing in the world to be treated as if you don’t even exist. I mean, consider the possibilities of being invisible!

I expressed the joy of sitting for two hours in the doctor’s office pressed into a crowd of people coughing into the tiny airspace while the woman next to me is on her cell phone firing an employee. I mean, who wouldn’t want a front row seat to THAT?

Somewhere in the middle of the workshop it dawned on me that the heaviest stuff of life has the best comedic potential. And that, in a nutshell, is why I draw cartoons!
Telling True Stories

By Marsha Shandur and Sage Tyrtle

“I throw the life preserver into the water,” Cybelle tells us from the front of the room. “The little boy goes to catch it, but - it slips out of his hands!”

We’re all on the edge of our plastic seats. “I dove in, grabbed him, and swam towards the shore. Finally, he was safe.” We breathe out a collective sigh of relief, then applaud.

It’s amazing how scared you can get for the safety of a little boy who doesn’t even exist.

In the Tell True Stories workshop that we ran as part of Story Camp at the Toronto Storytelling Festival, Cybelle was doing one of the exercises. We’d given her the sentence “I saved them,” and asked her to create an imaginary scene.

While it may seem strange to have a made up story in a workshop devoted to telling true stories, Sage explained to the room: “Whether it’s Little Red Riding Hood or surviving a climb on Mount Everest, the storytelling rules are the same. A scene with details will ALWAYS be more interesting than narration.”

One of the wonderful and unique things about Toronto is its two thriving storytelling scenes: one traditional and one true. But, although both boast strong communities, until recently they have often run in parallel and rarely mingled.

Thanks to the efforts of Toronto Storytelling Festival director Dan Yashinsky, there are now a number of us working hard to bridge that gap.

Marsha runs the true storytelling show True Stories Toronto and is a storytelling coach. Sage runs High Stakes Storytelling and gives seven week storytelling workshops.

We were so thrilled to come and speak to an audience of mostly traditional storytellers, about what makes a powerful TRUE story. The busy workshop was energetic, full of laughs, and - according to Dan - got rave reviews!

In case you couldn’t make it, here are Marsha and Sage’s top five true storytelling tips.

1. Know your ending line: A meandering extra five minutes at the end of a story is a very common problem. Knowing exactly what you’re going to say at the end means you’re much more likely to head there directly.

2. Make sure you include action scenes: When you watch a movie, if it were all voiceover or montage, you’d be so bored. Think of your stories as being mostly made of action scenes. Get granular and specific in your descriptions.

3. Only include the information if it supports the climax and/or the end: Think of the story Little Red Riding Hood. Do we hear about her first day of school? Her dad? No. Because none of it matters to the climax or the ending. When you’re deciding what to include, always ask yourself this question.

4. Tell your story in chronological order: Only tell us what happened to you, when it happened to you. Otherwise, you’re throwing in spoilers and you lose the tension that keeps people engaged.

For example, if you say, “of course, at this point, I didn’t realize they’d given the job to someone else” - we stop caring about how the interview is going, because we know it won’t make a difference.

5. Tell us how you FEEL: I know, I know. We’re Canadians. We don’t do feelings.

But in storytelling? They’re essential. Emotions are the way that we can relate to ANY story. You could be telling a story about running away from a rhino. While we might not have had that experience, if you can talk about the fear you felt, we’ll be able to relate - and be more engaged with the story and you.

Want to learn more? Sage and Marsha both email regular storytelling tips out for free! You can also find out more about how to work with us, here:

Sage Tyrtle: www.tyrtle.com
Marsha Shandur: www.yesyesmarsha.com
And find our live shows, here: www.storieswithstakes.com www.truestoriesstoronto.com
Sage Tyrtle

"Mr. Sharda is very angry with me," says my partner Todd. "When I told him that you performed a story yesterday he scolded me for not letting him know beforehand."

Todd has been taking private Hindi lessons from Mr. Sharda for three years. His teacher, who is 96 years old, knows seven languages (Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Kiswahili, Gujarati, Punjabi, English), and he used to know Italian but he’s forgotten a lot of it because he’s NINETY SIX) and still teaches from his cozy Toronto apartment.

As much as I would love to see Mr. Sharda in the audience of one of my performances, I know it’s unrealistic. His mobility is limited, and travel is a challenge.

But I suddenly think - wait, what if the storytelling show could come to him? What if I invited another storyteller and we stood in his living room and gave him a private house concert?

Just last week I saw Moyo Mutamba perform for the first time. He told a folktale and held the audience spellbound. I take a deep breath and get in touch with Moyo and to my delight Moyo immediately agrees to come.

But as the day gets closer I’m more and more nervous. What if no one comes? What if it’s awkward and uncomfortable and no one can wait to leave? What if no one claps, what if people sit checking Facebook on their phones not two feet from the performers? I’ve never done a house concert, I have no idea what to expect and I’m terrified that even Mr. Sharda won’t like it.

It’s pouring rain the day of the house concert. Chilly and dreary, and I am late to the subway station where we’re all meeting. I run upstairs and find Todd, and then see Moyo standing waiting with his friend Natalie. I feel a little better. Even if no one else shows up at least Todd and Natalie will be there to watch with Mr. Sharda.

Todd leads us through the pouring rain through ever-narrowing alleyways until he opens a door and we trail him up the carpeted stairs. We take off our shoes at the top of the hallway, then go into the apartment.

A friend of Mr. Sharda’s, a man in his fifties, welcomes us warmly and ushers us into the small living room, where we find Mr. Sharda sitting alone in a comfy chair. My heart sinks. The house concert starts in five minutes and the room is empty.

I feel like such a jerk; I’ve asked a master storyteller to perform for an audience that now totals five whole people.

Mr. Sharda doesn’t look 96, he looks about fifty, and behind him a portrait photo of him in his mid-twenties gazes languidly down. "Now," he says, beaming at us, "we will go around the circle and everyone will introduce yourselves."

In the midst of the introductions an artist arrives, then a moment later a social worker, and fast on her heels a Hindi pandit (scholar) with one of his young students.

Mr. Sharda says to Moyo, "And you will start the performance, yes? Yes."

Moyo shows us the small round instrument in his lap, called an mbira, and says in his gentle voice that he will sing us a song from Zimbabwe called Muroro. A prayer for comfort in the midst of suffering.

The rain sheets against the windows as this motley crew from all parts of the world, ten languages between us (even if you don’t count Mr. Sharda), fall under the spell of Moyo’s voice, weaving around the notes of the mbira.

And suddenly we could be anywhere. In a small village, in a cozy dive bar, part of a crowd of two thousand people in Massey Hall, anywhere - the living room fades away and there’s just Moyo’s voice, soaring.

The nine of us applaud wildly when he finishes, and he has us in stitches with the folktale he tells next which features - among other miracles - master storyteller Moyo making the sounds of birds tweeting underwater using nothing but his voice.

Mr. Sharda turns to me. "And now, Sage tells us a story," which I do, and then he says to Natalie, "It is your turn."

Natalie is only here as Moyo’s friend, but she hops up cheerfully. "Can I sing a song, instead?"

Mr. Sharda nods.

She sits next to his chair and he turns to look at her. She begins to sing in Arabic, her pure contralto filling the room, and she and Mr. Sharda - sixty years separating them - gaze into each other’s eyes as she sings.

And I watch and listen, feeling so privileged to be there. Understanding the magic of a house concert, an intimacy that can never be replicated in a theatre, a shared moment between strangers who may never meet again.

I watch Natalie and Mr. Sharda, thinking that even though Mr. Sharda was a teenager on the eve of World War Two - an adult around the time people were buying televisions for the first time, his first memory is of his father coming home from work on a HORSE - even in his long and strange life, he has never experienced anything quite so entrancing as this moment.
My Kind of Storytelling

By Chana Mills, Israel
(chmills@bgu.ac.il)

I am an Israeli living in the south of the country in the city of Beer Sheva. I am retired from The Ben Gurion University where I served as an Internal Auditor. My son lived in Seattle for six years and that’s how I got involved with storytelling there. My volunteer work which I speak of in this article is here in Beer Sheva. I am a member of the Israeli storytelling guild and the Seattle storytelling guild. I started my storytelling career some ten years ago in Australia, and at that time I really had no idea what it was all about. I fell in love with it. When I returned home I studied storytelling in Tel Aviv. That by itself was a great experience, and a lot of fun.

Now I was certified as a storyteller. But what could I do with it? I just knew that the idea of being an entertainer was not really yet appealing to me. So I was listening to storytellers and "sitting on the fence" as we say in Hebrew, meaning not doing a thing really.

One day I met a woman I knew, Stephanie, while riding a bus together. We discovered we had both tired and started new interests, and both of us were encountering some problems.

Stephanie had become certified in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and she was really into it. In this method (Guided Imagination and NLP) the coach guides the client to change his behavior/feelings by connecting with his own subconscious mind. Just as an artist dreams his vision of his artwork and brings it to life, one can use imagination to dream and create a new reality for oneself.

Stephanie’s problem was similar to mine. She needed some twenty minutes per session for working with her audience, but nobody was working a twenty minute session. She said she was trying to give some explanation before and small talk after, just to make the time longer, and that’s where I jumped in! I wanted to tell stories, but I didn’t want to tell stories for a whole hour! I wanted a situation where one story would be enough!

I suggested we try to work together. I would tell a story, and she could carry on the thread from there, and give her Guided Imagination session. You wouldn’t believe it! This has become a great thing! We have been doing this now for three years. I believe we have found a great way of combining two good things, and helping people who need it while doing so.

We started as volunteers in a center for cancer patients. The people there were reluctant, but since it was volunteer work we got a “green light” and started. We needed to be innovative about how to do it. We began by meeting the day before a session. I would tell her a story, and she would think of how to match it to one of her structured sessions. It was quite exciting.

It took us a while and we had some ups and downs, but we were consistent. We changed venues and kept trying to find the right place and way to do it. We found out that after I told a story to the listener, it was easy for Stephanie to move from there into the relaxed position.

Image source: https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/three-customers/

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Once there was an old woman and a young woman who would walk each day through the shtetl. One day the old woman would carry turnips from the field and the young woman would carry two buckets of water. On another day, the old woman would carry grains to make kasha and the young woman would carry cucumbers to make pickles. On another day, the old woman would carry her grandchild and the young woman would carry the clean clothes from the drying line. One day the young woman asked the old woman, “what is life’s greatest burden?” The old woman answered, “to have nothing to carry.”

- a Jewish tale retold by chris cavanagh
Most people, even non-storytellers, have heard of the Brothers Grimm, who famously collected German folk and fairy tales in the early 1800’s. However, few people know about Dorothea Viehmann, the oral storyteller who contributed over 40 tales to the collection. For two years, from 1813 to 1814 she visited them at their apartment in the city of Kassel, telling them stories such as The Goose Girl, Ashenputl, The Devil’s Grandmother and Hans My Hedgehog. The Brothers scrupulously copied them down word for word - indeed they praised her storytelling highly, saying that there was little need for editing as her stories were already perfectly constructed. The brothers were in their twenties at the time, Dorothea in her late fifties.

When I first heard about Dorothea in the preface to a collection of Grimms fairy tales, I became intensely curious about her. I wanted to know who she was and to understand more about what her life might have been like as a storyteller and as a woman in those times. That is how my journey of discovery began.

Many people, myself included, imagine Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm traveling around the German countryside, collecting stories from remote cottages and village people. Nothing could be further from the truth however as they were actually very shy, and preferred that other people provide them with written versions of oral stories. Many of their friends and acquaintances were interested in their project and were happy to be involved by sending them stories. A large proportion of these friends were young, educated, unmarried girls and young women from middle class families in Kassel. They were not shy to ask their cooks and nurses to tell them stories, or to point them to local Hessian oral storytellers nearby, and then to write the stories down and send them to Jacob and Wilhelm. And that's how the brothers came to meet Dorothea.

At the time, Dorothea had fallen on hard times and was taking her produce, vegetables, potatoes and eggs, to sell in town. She lived about an hour's walk away in the nearby village of Niederzwehren. When she came to town, the household of the Hugenot minister in Kassel was one of her stops; and there the minister’s two daughters, friends...
of the Brothers Grimm, met Dorothea and heard her tell some stories. They enthusiastically recommended her to Jacob and Wilhelm and before long, Dorothea started to visit their apartment two or three times a week to tell them her stories. We hear that she would receive a few coins from them, and would enjoy a cup of coffee and a glass of wine while she was there, luxuries she could not otherwise have afforded.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm write about Dorothea Viehmann in the preface to their second edition. “This woman, still active and not much over fifty years old .... has a firmly set and pleasant face with bright, clear eyes and had probably been beautiful in her youth. She has retained these old stories firmly in her memory, a gift that she says is not granted to everyone. Indeed, many people can’t even retain any tales, while she narrates in a manner that is thoughtful, steady, and unusually lively. Moreover, she takes great pleasure in it.”

A third brother, Ludwig Grimm, was a professional artist who drew a portrait of Dorothea that featured on the cover of the second edition of their book of folk and fairy tales. The Brothers Grimm admired Dorothea but they also tended to romanticize her. They called her a peasant and a farmer’s wife because that image fit a certain ideal they had at the time of an oral storyteller. Dorothea was very poor, and she was a village woman, but she was neither a peasant nor a farmer’s wife. She came from an artisan family and was married to a tailor. She may have been able to read and write a little and certainly went to the district school for at least a year in her childhood.

So who was she, this prolific and skillful storyteller, or who might she have been? When I went to Germany last fall, I set out to learn whatever I could about her. I visited the inn where she grew up and the house she lived in as an adult. I walked in the local area as she would have done, and visited the Grimms Muse-
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um where I found a book all about her by the museum director Holger Ehrhardt.

Dorothea was born Dorothea Katherina Pierson in November 1755, the eldest of 13 siblings. Her parents were innkeepers on the road to Kassel in central Germany. Her father came from a Hugenot family, French protestants who arrived in Germany as refugees after 1685. Her mother was from a local Hessian family and had grown up in a neighbouring inn. Dorothea's maternal grandmother seems to have been an enterprising woman who was the owner of a local brewery.

The inn where Dorothea grew up is still a well known pub and brewery near the village of Rengershausen. It stands on top of a hill, with the road from Frankfurt to Kassel and to the north beyond running alongside it, and farmland all around. Standing in front of her home, a young Dorothea would have been able to see travelers approaching from several directions. Local farmers and farmers' wives on their way to sell goods in town, or to visit loved ones, would stop on their way for refreshment at the inn. Local people would congregate there on holidays or in the evenings to relax and hear the news. There would also be a few visitors from further afield such as tradespeople and messengers, soldiers and students. And in those times, while getting a bite to eat and drinking some beer or brandy, people would naturally have enjoyed a good exchange of stories. It is easy to imagine Dorothea, playing on the cobblestones at a young age, soaking it all up.

As the eldest of 13 children, it seems likely that Dorothea was soon enlisted to help take care of the younger ones. Perhaps this is when she began to share the stories she knew, to calm or entertain the little ones or to help them fall asleep at night. My guess is that her parents also knew stories for children that they would have told her and that she could retell to her siblings. In any case, she must have been a wonderful big sister!

Dorothea lived through some difficult years and saw two wars in her lifetime. One of them was the Seven Years War when she was a child and the other was the Napoleonic War much later on. It is said that when she was seven years old, a French officer was staying at the inn. Dorothea could speak French because of her Hugenot background. One day the officer came inside without closing the front door and a seven year old Dorothea told him in perfect French that he must remember to close the door so as not to let the cold air in! He was apparently enchanted by the polite but imperious little girl speaking to him in his own language, and offered her a coin from his moneybag. Some say she was given a gold coin, others suggest that a penny is more likely. No one knows if this story is true or not, but apparently Dorothea's grand daughter heard it from a local clergyman.

Dorothea was married in the local village church at the age of 22 to Nikolaus Viehmann, a tailor from Niederzwehren. They had two daughters almost right away. One baby died in infancy, but her daughter Anna Katharina thrived. For a long time this was her only child and Dorothea continued to live at the inn for the next 10 years, perhaps because she and her husband did not yet have the means to move into a place of their own. Dorothea must have been a big help around the inn. It is not too much of a leap to assume that, as a young woman in her twenties, she began to enjoy telling stories to the guests as she continued to hear new ones. It could well be here that she developed her identity as a storyteller; something that she was well aware was a gift, according to the Grimms portrayal of her.

By the age of 32, she and her husband Nikolaus moved to Niederzwehren, a village on the road to Kassel where Nikolaus' family lived. They rented a frame house there, and over the next 10 years had 5 more children. Two of these children died, including her only son which must have been very difficult. However, 4 of her 7 children grew to adulthood. Again it is not a stretch to imagine that, as she and the other village women went about their work doing laundry at the nearby spring or preparing food together, they would share stories to pass the time and that Dorothea, with all her stories, would have been a welcome addition to the group. Certainly, she will have told to her own and other village children. And probably, as a known storyteller, she would be asked to tell stories at the local inn on winter evenings, a setting she would feel very comfortable in.

The influence of the inn and an adult audience is evident in many of the stories Dorothea told. There is much in the way of social commentary; poor soldiers who are dealing with the reality of life in the army or discharged from it, highly untrustworthy kings, and misunderstood but independent women. Several of her stories were known in the area and were told by many tellers, but the majority of the stories she knew and told to the Grimms were only told once, by her.

It was when Dorothea was in her forties that the Napoleonic Wars arrived in the area of Hesse-Kassel. Local rebels fought against the
French occupation within sight of her parents' inn, just a couple of years before she met the Brothers Grimm. Napoleon's brother Jerome went to live in Kassel and he was determined to live off the fat of the land, which for the villagers meant new taxes, levies and seizures. For example, all the cows in the area were taken as Jerome's property, undermining a source of livelihood for many people. There was mass conscription, so the men were often not there to provide for their families. Women and children like Dorothea and her family were hard hit. Any possessions she and her family once had were slowly eroded. By the time she was in her fifties, Dorothea was selling eggs from her own chickens and produce from her garden in order to take care of herself and her surviving children. She did not have an easy life, but you can see from her stories that Dorothea was an optimist. It is always the character who remains hopeful and dwells not on what they have lost, but on what they can still do about it, who prevails in the end. Her female characters certainly don’t have fortune land in their laps, but they are resourceful and persistent and justice returns in the end.

One can see how important stories and storytellers would have been to people in such difficult times. The folktales must have been a welcome break from the hardship and unpredictability of life; a place of magic, wonder and beauty as well as a source of hope. Stories allowed people to express the hardships they could relate to and to see justice served, despite their poverty and lack of material power. Of course most of the stories gave them a good laugh as well, and in doing so put the universe back into balance. At the end of her life Dorothea was living in a very crowded house, shared with her husband’s parents who had lost their own house, and another family living downstairs. Her oldest daughter came back home too, along with her 6 children, when her own husband died. Dorothea herself became ill and died before the effects of the Napoleonic Wars were over. However, her daughters and grandchildren were able to thrive in more stable times and we know that there are many of her descendants alive today.

I like to think of Dorothea during the two years she visited the Brothers Grimm, sitting comfortably with her fine china cup of coffee and telling them stories. She would never have imagined that this would happen. Apart from the few coins she made, I think it must have been enormously gratifying to have these two earnest and erudite young men hanging on to every word she said, collecting material to be published in a book. She must have taught them by example much of what they came to know about oral storytelling. The Brothers Grimm would have lent the gravitas of their scholarship to her life’s calling, to the person she had become, and to the art that she had always loved. It must have been a highlight of her life and an experience which she richly deserved.

For us now, it is fascinating to reclaim her from history; to look at the stories she told in the light of her times, to celebrate her life, and let it stand in for all the multitude of oral storytellers who have enjoyed and told stories since time immemorial and passed them along the line to us. May we do the same.
and mood that she needed for her session. Usually my stories had some moral or general idea that Stephanie used to weave into her own session. Now we can really see how the story helps to move from daily consciousness to a relaxed position, so the conscious and unconscious can work together to enable a deeper change.

We have been involved for more than two years with two different types of audiences. Once a week we meet with a group at a rehabilitation center. These are mostly older people who are handicapped in different ways, often as a result of strokes. Most of them can’t walk, some can’t talk, and some have more problems. They love my stories and do wait to have the relaxation part, even though they can’t lay down and can’t do some of the physical things Stephanie suggests in order to relax better. But believe me- they try in their own way!

The other place we volunteer at is a home for girls. These are abused girls between the ages of thirteen to twenty three. They choose to go to this place, of their own will, and stay there up to three months and not more. During that time they are taken care of, physically and mentally. By the end of that period, they choose to go to a permanent home, or back to their own home. In this place our satisfaction and joy are greater as the girls express their enthusiasm and love to us. The girls are eager to hear stories and I include some of my personal stories! What a pleasure when I ask them to repeat my whole story, and they do it by heart! They can’t wait to get to the relaxation part. It is so impressive to see these girls just relax and even fall asleep sometimes, with Stephanie talking to their imagination and hopefully helping them find their own voices.

That is my experience and that is what I wanted you people to know about. I think storytelling is a powerful tool and could be used in a lot of ways. Stephanie and I volunteer, but I believe the same thing could be done for a fee. Just as you go to a counselor you could go to a session of NLP combined with storytelling! Maybe there are more combinations….why not?

(Continued from page 8)

Michelle Tocher

The Interview Series is Now Available! In April, Toronto storyteller Michelle Tocher joined Hannah Custis of the Immanence Journal to discuss the subject of spells. In three interviews, Michelle discusses three questions. What can fairy tales tell us about how we come under spells in life? How do we become aware that we’re under one? And how are spells broken?

The Immanence Journal was founded in 2015 by depth psychologist and graduate mythology teacher Craig Chalquist, PhD to provide a forum for exploring myth, legend, and folklore in modern life. The first program is freely available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IASY_Fr8dCg&feature=youtu.be

The other two programs can be accessed by subscribing to the Immanence Journal for a nominal fee. http://immanencejournal.com/subscribe-to-immanence/
The 1000 Islands Yarnspinners host Stories at the Spitfire Café on the second Tuesday of the month, 7pm, 10 Victoria Avenue, Brockville. Bring a story, song or poem. Excellent coffee and sweets. Info: Deborah Dunleavy, (613) 926-5510, or teller2go@gmail.com

Due to long-term renovations in their usual venue, The Peterborough Storytellers are presently an itinerant band who still gather to share stories in meetings, workshops and house concerts. www.facebook.com/peterboroughstorytellers

The Guelph Guild of Storytellers meets at 7pm on the second Wednesday of each month at the main branch of the Guelph Public Library, 100 Norfolk St. Open mike for 5-minute stories. Experienced tellers with longer stories are encouraged to contact us in advance for a spot on the program. Info: Sandy Schoen, (519) 767-0017, guelphstory@gmail.com, www.guelpharts.ca/storytellers

On Friday evenings from June 30 to September 7, Tea ‘N Tales at the Guelph Recycling Garden. On Friday evenings from June 30 to September 7, Tea ‘N Tales at the Guelph Recycling Garden. Info: briahols@yahoo.com

The 1000 Islands Yarnspinners host Stories at the Spitfire Café on the second Tuesday of the month, 7pm, 10 Victoria Avenue, Brockville. Bring a story, song or poem. Excellent coffee and sweets. Info: Deborah Dunleavy, (613) 926-5510, or teller2go@gmail.com

Stories Aloud meets on the 2nd Friday of the month at the Waterloo Community Arts Centre, 25 Regina St. S. Waterloo. 8pm. Info: Open storytelling, cost $5. Info: Derek Brisland, badenstorytellers1@gmail.com, (519) 634-9128

The Brant Taletellers Guild meets on the 4th Friday of the month, at the Waterloo Community Centre, 25 Regina St. S., Waterloo. Info: Derek Brisland, (519) 634-9128. badenstorytellers1@gmail.com

The Ottawa Storytellers meet for their Story Swap on the first Thursday of the month, 7pm at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St, Room 156, free admission.. Info: info@ottawastorytellers.ca

The Dufferin Circle of Storytellers meets at 7pm on the second Wednesday of each month at the Brantford VIA Station. Visitors welcome. Fair Trade coffee, Steam Whistle beer, wine and snacks can be purchased during meetings. Info: lmurtle@gamil.com

The Brant Taletellers Guild, meets on the 4th Friday of the month at the Waterloo Community Centre, 25 Regina St. S., Waterloo. Info: Derek Brisland, (519) 634-9128. badenstorytellers1@gmail.com

The Dufferin Circle of Storytellers meets the 1st Thursday of the month, 7:30pm. Info: Nancy Woods, (519) 925-0966

The Durham Storytellers will be sharing stories on July 5, 4 pm as part of the Weave-a-Story Wednesdays series, at the 4th Line Theatre, 779 Zion Line, Millbrook. Info: www.durhamfolklorestorytellers.ca

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The Baden Storytellers Guild meets on the 4th Friday of the month, at the Waterloo Community Centre, 25 Regina St. S., Waterloo. Info: Derek Brisland, (519) 634-9128. badenstorytellers1@gmail.com

The Ottawa Storytellers meet for their Story Swap on the first Thursday of the month, 7pm at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St, Room 156, free admission.. Info: info@ottawastorytellers.ca

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The Peterborough Storytellers are presently an itinerant band who still gather to share stories in meetings, workshops and house concerts. www.facebook.com/peterboroughstorytellers

On September 21 the Durham Folkkore Storytellers recommence their regular 3rd Thursday Day Activity Room, Northview Community Centre, 150 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa. Info: Kathleen Smyth, Kathleen.Smyth@durham.ca or www.durhamfolkkorestorytellers.ca


The Montreal Storytellers Guild meets the 1st Thursday of the month at the Westmount Library. Info: Christine Mayr, christine-mayr3@yahoo.ca

A roster of Toronto storytellers host Bread and Stories alternate Saturday mornings 11am - 1pm at the Artscape Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie St. In winter we’re indoors at the Storytelling Toronto office, Suite 173. Open to storytellers, listeners and those who like to “talk” story. Come and be mentored as you try out new or familiar stories. Info: Donna Dudinsky, ddudinsky2@gmail.com

On September 21 The Durham Folklore Storytellers recommence their regular 3rd Thursday Day Activity Room, Northview Community Centre, 150 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa. Info: Kathleen Smyth, Kathleen.Smyth@durham.ca or www.durhamfolkkorestorytellers.ca

Family Stories, October 20 and 21. Friday, 7 - 9:30 pm; Saturday, 9:30 am - 5 pm. At The
Story Room, Toronto. Instructor: Celia Lottridge.

First Steps Into the Art of Storytelling, November 17 - 19. Friday, 7 - 10 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 10 - 4:30 pm. At the Lillian H. Smith Branch of the Toronto Public Library, 239 College St., Toronto. Instructors: Lynda Howes, Marylyn Peringer.

Telling Stories Bilingually, Saturday October 14 and Saturday October 28, 1:30 - 4 pm. At the Storytelling Toronto office, Artscape Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie St. Instructor: Marylyn Peringer.


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