

The Use of Folktales in Healing

Carol Farkas

The telling of life stories in a support group is often used as a tool for healing. Listening to another tell their story about their illness or situation has been shown to be beneficially therapeutic for both the teller and the listener. However, this may or may not open channels for talk and discussion.

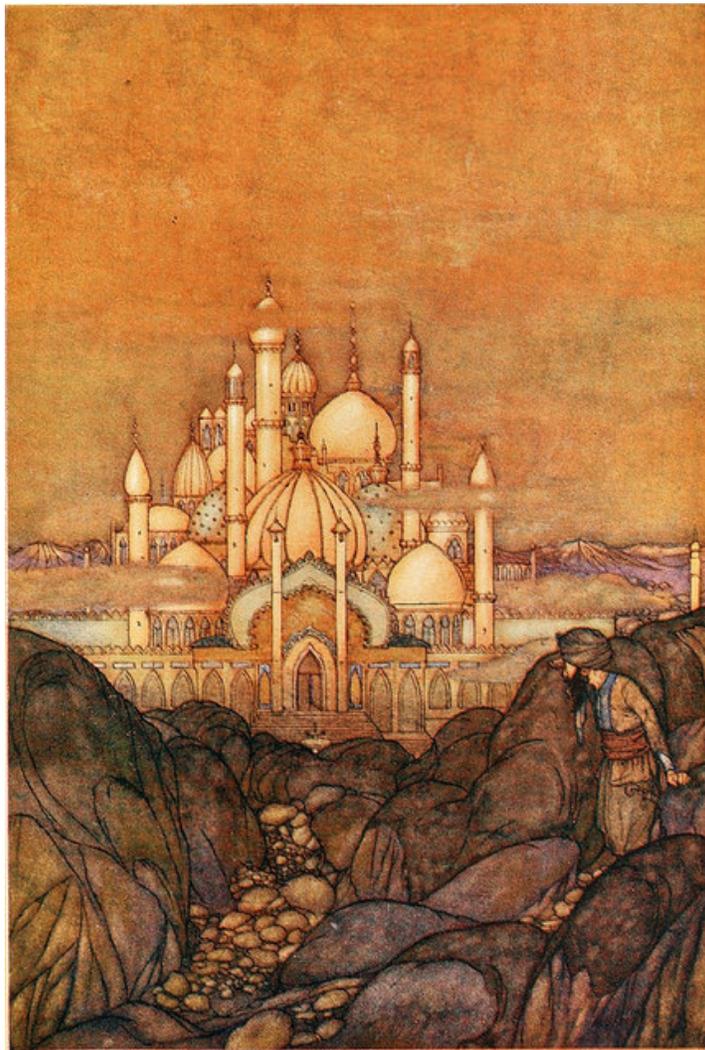
The use of folktales in a support group is an activity which is able to convey information in ways that few other forms of communication can. Folk tales have the ability to open the door to healing as they allow listeners to project into the story and identify and incorporate the characters and theme into their personal narrative. For some listeners, this allows for a safe, slower paced, receptive environment in which to reveal their feelings, respond to questions, and express concerns and needs.

Folktales carry timeless messages of ill-fated beginnings, mistakes that are survivable, obstacles that are overcome, and help that usually comes despite worst circumstances. Inherent in many tales is the listener's new understanding of their own situation.

The metaphors present in folktales have been used to give insight to personal stories related to sexual abuse, death and grieving, substance abuse, addiction, and to help cancer patients make meaning out of their illness experience.

For example, in the tale of Beauty and Beast, cancer can be identified as the beast. As if forced upon a person, it becomes a change agent which the patient can learn to accept and name, a prince in disguise that can help one realize the importance of living one day at a time and realizing what is important in life.

Hansel and Gretel, Cap of Rushes and Red Riding Hood have been used for reflecting what occurred in child and sexual abuse situations. The Nepalese tale of The Woodcutter and Death, Godfather Death (Grimm), and Papa God and General Death (Wolkstein's The Magic Orange Tree), can stimulate discussions of death and grieving.



In a group setting, after a tale is told a facilitator can pose such questions as; "what images stood out for you, did you identify with any of the characters or situations, and did the story relate to your experience?"

This spring, as a cancer patient, I will be offering a program at Gilda's Club in Toronto where fellow patients can hear the spoken word of folktales for just their general enjoyment and/or through discussion to allow them to identify and incorporate the characters and theme into their personal narrative. Members of the Toronto storytelling community will also share folktales with this "Telling of Tales" program. Pippin will be kept apprised as this program progresses.

Become involved by checking out these sources:

- The National Storytelling Network Healing Story Alliance
- Healing Change and Storytelling, Steve Banhegy (2013)
- **Journey Down the Healing Path Through Story**, Alison Cox (2000)
- **Healing Tales**, William Noonan (2002)
- **The Mystery and Magic of Metaphor**, Susan Perrow (2013)
- **Grief tales: The Therapeutic Power of Folktales to Heal**, Sunwolf (2003)
- The National Storytelling Network Healing Story Alliance: Diving in the Moon-Honoring Story Facilitating Healing
- **Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology**, Arthur Frank (2010)
- **Spinning Gold Out of Straw; How Stories Heal**, Diane Rooks (2001)
- **Dying, Grieving, Healing: A Manual for Storytelling**, contact ottawastorytellers.com
- **The Healing Heart, Families** (storytelling to encourage caring and healthy families), Allison Cox and David Albert ed. (2003) (there are 5 copies in the Toronto Public Library)