

# Pippin

Vol.17, No.1

The Newsletter of Storytelling Toronto

An Interview with Gail Fricker

## The Passion Within the Story

*Gail Fricker is engaging artist of the spoken word that I have known from afar for many years, going back to the days when we were both leading workshops for the Council of Drama In Education. In this interview Gail shares her insight in making the leap from theatre to storytelling and what it is that continues to inspire her on her telling journeys around the world. - Deborah Dunleavy*

**How long have you been working in the arts? What got you started?**

As a child I had a passion for the arts and was always making up plays. I took drama throughout High School and then studied Theatre Arts at University in UK. At 21, I became a high school drama teacher in the heart of London (England). I soon left that though to found my own Theatre-In-Education company (Theatre for Young People). I called it Apple Theatre. It was very small at first - just 3 of us touring elementary schools in SE London. After 3 years it had become so successful that it had grown to 5 full time actors, a part time director, an administrator and a board of directors. We were a charitable company depending on arts council grants and other funding. We were also an equity company with the prestige of giving two equity cards per year.

The style of our work was participatory - working with one class at a time we took our students on a journey and put them in role - from peasant farmers in South America deciding to grow tobacco or food crops - to oil workers drilling on native land - there was always an issue for them to

solve!

It was Apple Theatre that brought me to Canada. Funded by the Canada Council and the British Arts Council we were asked to come and tour Ontario. We came in 1989, and then again in 1990. At that time we had just had some of our funding cut due to the Thatcher Conservative government, so I decided to stay for a while - and the rest is history!

**What was it that made you take the leap to storytelling? When was that?**

We always used storytelling in our theatre work so it wasn't that big of a leap. I hadn't considered it as a career however un-

til I was at a CODE conference (Council of Drama in Education) back in 1990 - I had been asked to give a workshop on participatory theatre in education and how to get students

in and out of role. There was a storytelling cabaret at the conference hosted by Cathy Miyata. My friends encouraged me to get up and tell a story - so I did. I told one that we had used in one of Apple Theatre's plays. I didn't think much of it, until a teacher came up to me afterwards and asked me to come into her school to tell stories - and offered to pay me! I think that was the beginning of my storytelling career.

**How is storytelling similar to theatre?**

I think it is a fine line, and when I began as

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*A Note From the Editor*

## Swept Up by the Moment

**A Festival memory**



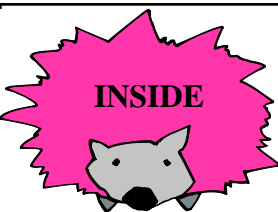
About forty years ago I found a book in the attic of an old house on the south east corner of Keele Street and Major Mackenzie. You might know of this building as it was the birth place of Lord Beaverbrook but when I lived there it

was home to half a dozen York University students who needed affordable off campus accommodations.

Published in MDCCCLXXIV, the book offers sage advice on everything from diminishing freckles to the manners a wife should possess when greeting her husband at the end of his work day. As well there are "Hints for Husbands: If your wife complains that young ladies nowadays are quite forward don't accuse her of jealousy...."

The book entitled "Enquire Within Upon Everything" is quite entertaining.

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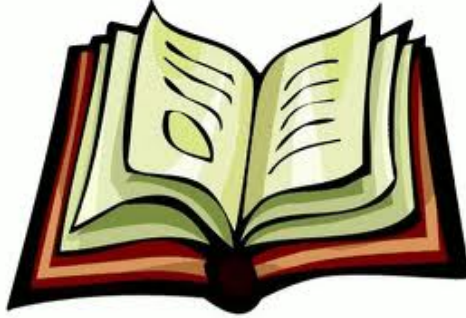


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## *Swept Up by the Moment — cont'd*

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Printed at the top of each page is a proverb for the reader to ponder. A few years back I revisited this text and used the old sayings to come up with a series of fables. One quote: "Pride costs more than hunger thirst and cold" inspired me to write a story called, *The Ice Swan*. (Printed within this edition.)



What may seem old can become new again. As storytellers we continually put a new spin on old tales. It is a part of the oral tradition process and a part of being in the "now" with what came from before. Proverbs, fables, legends and the lore of yesteryears still hold meaning for today. Let us enjoy our role as the conduit for keeping these stories



**\*\*NOTA BENE\*\***

*Every Friday night since 1978 storytellers and listeners have been gathering in downtown Toronto. Each evening is hosted by an accomplished storyteller. Anyone is welcome to tell a story. Every Friday night is unique.*

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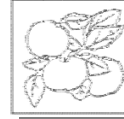
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PIPPIN is the newsletter of  
Storytelling Toronto



**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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a storyteller my style was very theatrical. I would tell stories in role, in character, drawing on my theatre background - and sometimes I would use costume and props. As I have grown as a storyteller, I have found other styles that are less theatrical. As a storyteller, I now use my words to paint the pictures of the characters and the set, rather than use costume and props. I think however, we can sometimes get too theoretical about the difference. Essentially both storytelling and theatre are the same: they tell a story, engage a listener, and take you on a journey. It is a matter of knowing which style is best for the audience, the venue and the story.

**How is it dissimilar?**

In theatre there is generally a conscious decision regarding the staging - the set, costume, lights, blocking, etc. Even when the piece of theatre is one person monologue, these elements are still all important. In storytelling, the words of the story are the main focus. Having said that, however, I think many storytellers do make conscious decisions as to actions, vocal inflections, maybe the use of music etc. As I said before, it is a very fine line and both traditions borrow from each other. One thing to consider though - can an actor be a storyteller? Absolutely. Can a storyteller be an actor? Not necessarily.

**What kind of story most inspires you?**

A story has to move me to make me want to tell it. It can move me because it is funny, or inspiring, or just speaks to me somehow. I do like stories that teach something - I guess that is the teacher in me, and I do like folktales rather than personal narratives.

**What was your focus when working on your Masters from ETSU?**

ETSU is a very practical program. It makes you broaden your repertoire by telling more and more stories. There is the opportunity to take electives, and most of mine where storytelling in education, or

storytelling performance. I actually did my thesis in Kronberg Castle (Hamlet's Castle) in Denmark - I created a large scale piece of promenade theatre, using storytelling and story drama techniques. It was an arts education thesis in theory and in practice; I had over 100 students involved in the performance, and another 300 walk through. It was truly an amazing experience and I remember standing in the courtyard of the castle one early misty morning, holding a large bunch of keys on a wrought iron ring, thinking to myself - "how did I get here?"

**You are a well travelled teller of tales. How were you received in places like Thailand and Japan where there is a lan-**



**guage barrier?**

I think it is very important to understand the cultural differences when telling stories overseas. This can really make a difference to your choice of story and the way in which you tell it. In Japan, for example, I once told to an entire primary school of very quiet and well behaved students who really had no concept of how to participate. It was a challenge, and I had to change my style of telling. Likewise in Kenya when I told a story that had a Canadian goose in it, my listeners had no idea what that was. So content of the story has to be one that the audience can identify with.

And, yes there are of course language barriers. I find that telling in a more theatrical ways helps overcome those language barriers. The audience understands better when they get a sense of the story from your actions and tone. In many of the countries that I have worked, my translator would give a synopsis of the story first, then the audience would be able to follow the story through the way in which it was told. I think however that we are bound by the golden threads of storytelling.

When I was in a Luo village in Kenya, I was working with a group of women. I would tell part of my story in English, it was then translated into Swahili, then into Luo (the local language) - the women then told me their stories through the three way translation process. The energy was amazing and I can honestly say that the stories were not "lost in translation". It was a magical reminder of how stories can be a common thread between cultures.

**Is there a new place where you would like to take your stories?**

Actually there are two. I have never been to the Yukon Festival and would love to go there, as well as to Australia. Maybe one day now that my son is getting older!

**What tellers have inspired you on your journey?**

There are many tellers, but I have to say that Grace Hallworth stands out the most. She is from Trinidad/Tobago, but has spent much of her storytel-

ling life in the UK. I met her in Denmark at the International Festival. She is truly a griot of storytelling; a wise gentle spirit that just shines when she tells stories to any age. I think that the most important thing that she taught me was to always read your audience. She would never know what she would tell until she stepped in front of her audience. I have tried to follow this wise advice and I have often changed what I thought I would tell once I stepped up on stage. This does, however, require you to have a wide repertoire.

More locally I am inspired by Bob Barton. He and I are both from drama back-

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# A Traveller in Two Worlds

*Review by Jim Gilchrist as first published in The Scotsman*

At Duncan Williamson's funeral at Strathmiglo in 2007, fellow storyteller Hugh Lupton gave a eulogy in which he suggested that, as well as the assembled mourners, filling the kirk were the many and motley characters who peopled Williamson's immense repertoire of travellers' folk tales - kings and tinkers, fairies and seal folk, and, of course, the ever-wandering Jack.

Lupton reminded his listeners that Williamson, widely regarded as the prince of Scotland's tradition-bearing storytellers, used to say that when you told a story or sang a song, the person you learned it from was standing behind you, the previous teller behind him and so on. It was this extraordinary legacy of tales and balladry from time out of mind, combined with a charismatic ability to charm his listeners, which prompted the late Hamish Henderson to describe Williamson as "the Scottish folk tradition in one man".

Williamson was born in 1928 in a traveller's camp "under a tree", as he liked to put it, on the banks of Loch Fyne, one of 15 children, and in later life ended up beguiling audiences as far removed as Canada and Israel as well as becoming a fount of oral tradition for folklorists. Now the man who accompanied him on countless storytelling trips in Scotland and beyond, fellow storyteller and former BBC producer David Campbell, has written the first volume of a two-part account not only of Williamson's life, but of their unlikely but intense and sometimes fractious friendship.

Williamson was married twice, but in his introduction to *Traveller in Two Worlds*, Campbell also recalls a moment during Williamson's funeral, when a friend joked that "not everyone knew of Duncan's third marriage, to David Campbell". They were an odd

couple, the tinker storyteller and the radio producer; and a tricky "marriage" it could be at times, as Campbell tells me. "Duncan was a storm force. We had a tremendously close relationship. He was very physically demonstrative, although if anything he was slightly homophobic, but he would hug you in this very strong fashion, and we had these playful flytings all the time."

On the other hand, as Campbell writes in the book, "his joys (were) transparent

parable for our acquisitive and greedy times".

I had the pleasure of meeting Williamson myself once, a few years before his death, interviewing him at his cottage at Balmullo in Fife. I remember a wiry, forceful-looking man with a wicked twinkle in his eye. Horses and heather were once the lifeblood of Scotland, he told me, before delivering an impressive litany of the uses to which the purple stuff was once put -

ropes, besoms, pot scrubbers, bedding, "even the Picts made their ale from heather". Hi-tech tended not to get much of a look-in, while television, he reckoned, should carry a government health warning, although he knew all about tape recorders. Not only had his vast store of tales and ballads been extensively recorded, transcribed and published by his second wife, Linda,



*Duncan Williamson telling to children*

and fiery, his glooms dense and dampening as bleakest November... Equally, his anger could simmer and erupt like Hekla, into clouds that lingered long and darkly over months."

Once, during a falling out over payment for a storytelling session, Williamson walked out of Campbell's Edinburgh New Town flat in which he was a frequent guest. When Campbell followed him to Waverley station and remonstrated with him "he raised his fist and said f\*\*\* off, or I'll hit you".

But he never did hit Campbell, although he was a physically strong individual who by his own admission had been a scrapper in his youth, once serving 30 days in Perth Prison for breaking a man's jaw. At the same time, he maintained a day-to-day approach to life and a lack of regard for possessions which, says Campbell, "make him a

the American student folklorist who arrived at his camp to interview him and ended up marrying him; back in the Sixties, he told me, he bought an ancient reel-to-reel with which he used to record the old traveller pipers. "I'd play them the tape in reverse," he chuckled, recalling the consternation of the horrified musicians.

Listening to him in full, captivating flight as a tale teller, or even reading one of the many books of his stories published by Linda, it was easy to imagine him padding the roads of Scotland with his entourage of - quite literally - fabulous and archetypal characters. He had been absorbing them, almost subconsciously, since a childhood spent in a bow tent, and after leaving his family at the age of 13, absorbing further lore as he worked variously as horseman, drystone dyker, farm worker and even

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a bizarre episode as a boxing instructor in a boys' club run by an unorthodox Aberdeen minister.

This first volume, told largely in Williamson's own words, extracted from some 30 hours of recordings Campbell made over a decade, tells the story of that early life and his first marriage, to Jeannie Townsley, with whom he "jumped the broomstick," eloping when she was just 16, and by whom he had seven children. It became an increasingly tense marriage as Townsley, who died of a heart attack in 1971, found it difficult to deal with the increasing demands for her husband's performance skills.

Of course, approaching someone like Williamson with anything resembling biographical intent can have its pitfalls, for as he himself put it, "Never let the truth stand in the way of a good story," and some of his claims, such as playing shinty for a team at Furnace during the Second World War and his extraordinary allegation that a grief-stricken woman tried to poison him with diphtheria-tainted apples, didn't always appear to hold water when Campbell followed them up. "But he was so persuasive," says Campbell. "And the thing about the nature of a story is that when you've told it sufficiently often, you come to believe it is true. But whether or not that was the case with Duncan, I don't know."

But if the title *Traveller in Two Worlds* sums up Williamson's double life as traveller and internationally acclaimed storyteller, it can apply equally to his chronicler's own career switch from media man to following in his old friend's footsteps as a traditional storyteller. Campbell was a still a producer for BBC radio when he first met Williamson in 1987, visiting him at his then home outside Auchtermuchty to discuss using one of his tales, *Mary and the Seal*, for a schools programme. It was going to require a cut, and Williamson didn't approve. The book takes up the encounter...

"He stood, John Wayne, at the back door scrutinising my approach with his vivid blue eyes, lacking only a holster and a six shooter..."

" 'You want to broadcast my story *Mary and the Seal* on the radio?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'But you don't like it the way it is!'

" 'I love the story. I just don't think it

will fit into my 20-minute radio programme, but I love it.'

Stepping forward, he seized me in one of the hugs I came to know so well.

" 'David Campbell, youse and me are going to be great friends. Come in.'"

Not only did they become great friends, but when Campbell left the BBC, originally intending to write, he became instead Williamson's apprentice, as it were, learning his craft as a storyteller and visiting schools and touring abroad with him.

It is, of course, far more than just Campbell who have fallen under the glamour of this most ancient of arts. A widespread revival of interest in traditional storytelling is underway, with Scotland playing a salient part, thanks in no small way to the likes of Williamson and other storytellers, many of them also travellers such as Stanley Robertson, Jeannie Robertson and Betsy Whyte, folk from an often derided sector of society revealing themselves as bearers of a priceless heritage.

None of them could have imagined that the nation whose roads they travelled and whose lore they carried would start the 21st century with a purpose-built Scottish Storytelling Centre at the heart of Edinburgh, currently celebrating its fifth anni-

versary, and some 125 professional storytellers plying their craft in festivals, schools, health centres and even in corporate personnel development sessions.

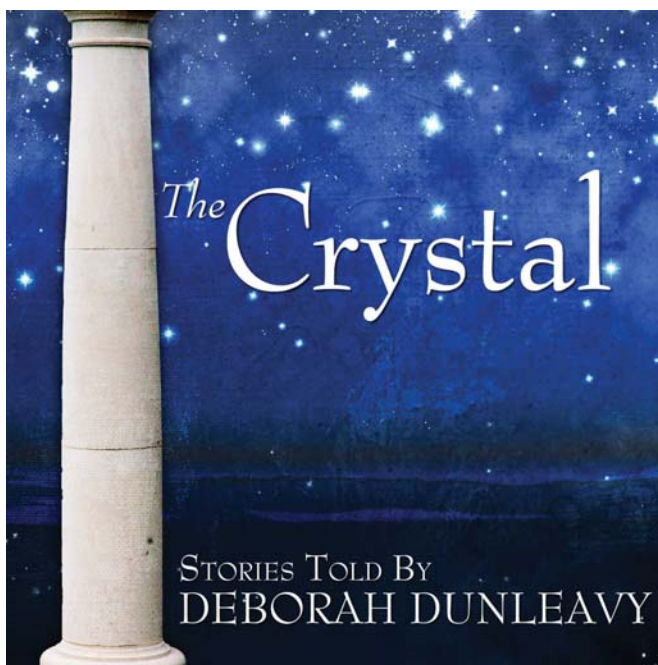
Storytelling Centre founding director Donald Smith, who regarded Williamson as "head and shoulders above anyone else in his field", has described the art as "a core cultural activity, without which we cannot function". Campbell says he came increasingly to regard the academic knowledge, exposition and analysis in which he'd been schooled as "not proper knowledge. But when you tell a story about something, it's experiential; its life replicating in the imagination, and its power is fantastic"

Williamson would probably have dismissed such theorizing with one of his favorite ripostes to Campbell - "classical shit", and put it rather more succinctly: "Stories was wir education".

*A Traveller in Two Worlds is published next week by Luath Press, £14.99. David Campbell talks about it at 6.15pm on Thursday at the Borders Book Festival in Melrose. [www.bordersbookfestival.org](http://www.bordersbookfestival.org)*

## The Crystal - Stories Told by Deborah

**Dunleavy** features 106 minutes of tales spun on NCPR, North Country Public Radio in Canton, New York. Deborah was host of *The Crystal* from September 2010 to June 2011. Deborah magically leads the listener into the whimsical world of storytelling where all things are possible - a hippopotamus falls in love with a princess, a woman goes to live with the maker of moonlight and a ghost comes



back to claim his bride. The two CD set is available for \$20 plus shipping. Contact Deborah at [kqp@ripnet.com](mailto:kqp@ripnet.com).

## Ken Chisholm: *Storyteller in Residence*

Cape Breton Regional Library Board is very pleased to announce the appointment of Ken Chisholm as the first ever Storyteller-in-Residence for the Library. Ken is an accomplished singer, songwriter, musician, actor, director and writer who has been telling stories in many different ways for the past thirty-plus years in Cape Breton. During his two-year term, he will participate at library and community events to promote storytelling to residents of all ages.

Ken is well known in theatre circles in the area. He has won numerous awards and accolades from the One Act Play festival held yearly at CBU, including awards for directing, multiple awards for acting, and the Boardmore Prize for best original script on three occasions for his triumvirate of plays dealing with the lives of Italian women from Whitney Pier. His casts

have won awards for ensemble work for these productions. He has also written a number of children's plays including the recent CBU revival of Robin Hood, as well as plays requested by various community groups on subjects such as the Canadian Navy, the Newfoundland ferry and Johnny Miles.

Ken has mentored dozens of budding actors, writers and directors and musicians and worked with many seasoned professionals throughout Cape Breton. He writes about the arts in Cape Breton in his weekly column in the Cape Breton Post, and is a member of the local CBC Book Panel. Ken has written many original songs including *Brothers In the Saddle* and *Company Town* which are now considered Cape Breton Classics.

The Storyteller-in-Residence program is the first in Atlantic Canada, and will rec-

ognize and promote Cape Breton's rich storytelling heritage. The Library Board is very excited by this opportunity to bring many of these stories to a wider audience. While some stories have been reflected in print, a great deal of local knowledge continues to be transmitted orally through stories passed down from generation to generation. A committee comprising library and community representatives reviewed and recommended the candidate to the Board.

"Through the telling and sharing of stories, we learn, preserve history, and develop an understanding of our heritage," said Faye MacDougall, Regional Librarian. "The Library recognizes the value and importance of this rich oral tradition, and looks forward to working with Ken as he researches and imparts many wonderful, inspiring, and memorable stories."



# On the Road with Bernice

The roads to schools near Stratford, Clinton & Goderich seemed flawless - at least compared to the broken down asphalt that I drive across in 416 & 905 Toronto area schools. The countryside was refreshingly green and a few schools had daffodils at their entranceways. It was the first week of May which is education week in Ontario and I had mapped out 10 schools to visit.

Various office staff had patiently helped me program my GPS to a nearby gas station, golf club or OPP so I could find my way to their rural location. For this tour, I was toting a microphone and speaker. As only one presentation was in a library, I wanted to amplify my voice for the gym audiences. It was an opportunity to learn about sound systems. Generally the bigger the speaker the better, but I wanted a light portable one. As microphones costs varied from \$70 to \$700, I decided it was best to try out a system through the rental service of local musical supply store.

I arrive early as my set-up also includes a display of books and artifacts. School staff had the table and chart board on

hand, but the world map that I requested was harder to locate. Is a paper map going the way of the dodo bird? Millennium children are learning with electronic tools, the latest is the SMART board. Because SMART boards are costly, they are not yet in every school. When some of the schools found it easier to project a map then locate a paper one, I was catching a glimpse of the future.

May is Asian Heritage month in Canada. The stories have a universal appeal. Primary students hollered at my farmer's hat of broad bamboo. Junior students touched the silk cloth and cocoons that I brought. To intermediates, I presented my family as pioneers for the gold rush of the 1850's brought Pacific immigrants to Canada.

"Were you picked on at school?" queried a 7th grader.

"Do you know any stories with a panda?" asked a small child.

It was a memorable week. I had close



to 1000 km on my odometer. The voice amplification worked, but lugging the speaker was cumbersome. Since then, I have used whatever speaker is available at the school, library or festival center. These venues are equipped with a stand or handheld microphone. I bring my own head worn set, so I can move and gesture.

It was a wonderful opportunity to visit the Avon-Maitland area schools, thanks to the support of the Ontario Arts Council and Storytelling Toronto. - Bernice Gei-Ying Hune

## Interview with Gail Fricker: The Passion Within the Story — cont'd

(Continued from page 3)

grounds and I am inspired by the way that Bob brings out the drama in stories, stepping into characters and encouraging students to do the same. I also love to listen to Ron Baker; I think he can so beautifully and effortlessly paint a picture through his stories.

**Is there an author or book that you think shares your personal philosophy on storytelling?**

No. I think storytelling is an oral tradition. Not to say that we shouldn't write about it, but I hate it when we theorize over it too much. The only books that I like are the stories themselves - and do like Jane Yolen's collections. In terms of "how to" books, I have found David Holt and Bill Mooney's "Tell Aloud" ..... useful, especially for beginning storytellers.

**We know storytelling is magical so why is it that we storytellers struggle to educate the listening public to the art form?**

I don't think we do. We just need to tell them a good story at every opportu-

nity. Every time you are at a campfire, at a pub, or at a kitchen table - tell a story. Don't do a 'performance', just tell the story and let the stories themselves educate the public. Maybe that is why storytelling is so much more alive in places like Newfoundland, or Kenya!

**Do you have any advice for keeping the stories fresh and vibrant?**

I don't think it is the story that gets 'stale' more the storyteller! I think the danger is to always tell the same stories. Sure we have our favorites that we like to tell, but as a storyteller - stretch yourself to broaden your repertoire. Try to learn and craft at least five new stories each year. And when you tell the same story, don't always tell it in the same way word for word; add a song, participation, maybe some new inflection. It should be a living story, not a recording.

**What are you looking forward to in the next while?**

I am happy to be returning to Kenya in September for three months with my family. I

will partly be working in an orphanage, but I know that I will get to hear and learn more stories. I am also hoping to improve my drumming and Marimba playing techniques to incorporate them into storytelling.

**Do you have a favorite storytelling saying or quote?**

There is the Celtic saying:

"May the wind be always at your back  
May the road rise gently before you  
May the sun shine on your face  
And the rain fall softly on your fields  
And until we meet again  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand."

And this one which is Anon:

"If you are a charmer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, come in.  
A hopper, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer,  
If you're a pretender, come sit by the fire  
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin,  
Come in, come in!"

# THE ICE SWAN

by Deborah Dunleavy

Swan leaned over her reflection in the smooth surface of the pond. "My, what beautiful white feathers," she said to herself, "they're so soft and delicate."

A little wren landed on the branch of the willow, "Chilly, chilly," she chirped. "We are getting ready to go south for the winter. Are you coming?"

"It's too soon," said Swan floating away. "Aren't my wings wonderful? Look how long they are." She spread them as wide as she could but by then the little wren had already flown away.

"Get ready! Get ready!" Kingfisher sat on a stump. "Feel that north wind? It will bring the rain and the snow. Are you ready for the journey?"

"I'm happy here where I can see myself in the pond," sighed Swan. "Isn't my neck long? See how far I can reach." Swan lowered her head in the water and pulled up a root from the bottom of the pond. When she came up, the kingfisher was gone.

"Quick! Quick! Quick!" called the woodpecker. "Summer is over and winter is on its way. Do you want to fly with us?"

"Not yet," said Swan preening and fluffing herself. "How do you like my tail feathers?" She looked at them as she wagged them from side to side.

"Got to go," said the woodpecker as he flew away.

Swan hummed to herself as she looked at her reflection. She swam one way looking at one side. She swam the other way looking at the other side. All she saw in the water was her own image. She did not see the ducks flying overhead. And she missed the geese as they took flight. All the while Swan admired her own beauty.

Soon the woods grew quiet and the air blew crisp and sharp. Food was scarce and even though she was hungry, Swan didn't notice at first. She was content with the company of her own reflection. After all, it was as lovely as she was.

One evening under the light of the last full moon of autumn Swan began to shiver. "I guess we had better go in the morning," she told her reflection. She dipped her beak into the pond and kissed her watery companion before falling asleep.

The harsh wind blew all that night. The snow swirled around Swan and she tucked her beak under her wing to try to keep warm. In the morning the brilliant sun rose

above a freshly frozen world. Everything glittered. The white snow-covered branches sparkled and the pond was as smooth as glass. It was the chickadees that found her. There she was, as still as a statue. Over night Swan had turned to ice. And though the winter birds were sad, they could not help but admire her, for she was beautiful.

*Pride costs more than hunger, thirst or cold.*





# STORYTELLING: From Folk to Fine Art?

*This article was first published in La Racconteur for SC/CC.*

Anyone involved in storytelling, as a listener or teller, will have no difficulty in acknowledging it as an art form but there are still many members of the public who have no concept of what is involved when they hear of a storytelling event. Many assume we read our stories, others are sure our audiences are made up of toddlers and small children. I've even heard people say that they wouldn't attend an adult program because they'd fall asleep if all they had to do was sit and listen to one story after another!

We can preach to the converted and we can work at making ourselves more visible as performers but don't we also need to define and qualify storytelling as an accepted art form with its many styles, approaches and beliefs? This question has been in my mind for some time especially with my recent experiences in training volunteer storytellers for small communities. Have any of you noticed that it is always those newest to storytelling that have the strongest opinions about what is involved? The more experienced and skilled we become the more aware we are of the diversity in skill levels, presentation and expectations.

Coming home from a local studio tour following a recent visit to a friend's show at a well known gallery I began to compare the competent visual artist to a master storyteller. They both approach their subject (whether it is a story, landscape, portrait or idea) as a creative challenge. Through personal interpretation and technical skill, using their chosen medium they create a finished product to be experienced by those exposed to it. The visual artist uses materials to create the visual and the storyteller

uses voice, vocabulary and phrase to create sensory images in the mind of the listener. A gallery shows the accumulated work of a visual artist whereas a well planned program can showcase the work of the storyteller. In both instances monetary value varies according to experience and talent.

I am aware, however, that not everyone wants to be a master storyteller. I am also aware that identifying the many skills required to reach that stage could be off-putting to those just learning to 'tell'. As



Micki Beck

we refine and define this art form it is important to keep in mind that most of us are quite happy to stay within the realms of 'folk' rather than 'fine' art.

Here is a quote from [www.storyarts.org/classroom/index.html](http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/index.html)

"As a folk art storytelling is accessible to all ages and abilities. No special equipment beyond the imagination and power of listening and speaking is needed to create images .....(stories)

support daily life skills in our fast paced, media driven world .... Storytelling can be a nurturing way to remind children that their spoken word is powerful, that listening is important and that clear communication is an art."

I run a folk farm and give courses in several of the folk crafts which have evolved over time into creative and sophisticated forms now shown in galleries and on studio tours. The basic skills are still the same just as the folk tales of the world contain the wisdom of the past and the thread of humanity that joins us all. They are the stories of the ordinary people and those basic skills have evolved into the performance storytelling of today's world.

So, when taking the first step in this quest to define today's storytelling as an art form we have to ask "What is art?" The dictionary defines art (briefly) as **'human skill as opposed to natural agency' 'skill acquired by study and practice' 'learning as opposed to natural ability'**. This, then, directs us to identify a series of skills required by our art form. Next we need to look at the other accepted and recognized fine arts to see how storytelling relates to music, dance and theatre as well as visual art and it is interesting to note that they all use story as the basis or as a component of their work. Investigating the history of these art forms we find primitive cave paintings, stone carvings, chants, percussion and rhythmic movement with reed and string accompaniment so let's make it clear that we've been telling stories ever since humans first used words to communicate!

Just as other art forms have evolved so has storytelling. We, too, have a history. I often use it in brief outline on family literacy nights or for events such as 'Where the Words Are' just to show our place in the literary hierarchy.

So as the folk tale evolved and changed around a basic plot as it traveled from place to place and journeyed through generations, in the same way storytelling and

*(Continued on page 10)*

# Stories Going Round

Storytellers **Jack**

**Howard and Mariella Bertelli** did a demonstration of a Japanese paper theatre art called Kamishibai on May 18 at the Spadina Road Branch of the Public Library.

On June 12 **Mariella Bertelli** and **Mary Ann Cree** joined forces to do a Toy Theatre Presentation of *Boccaccio's Tale of Alibech or How a Woman Conquers the Devil, Saves her Soul and Takes her Pleasure*. The performance was in support of the Story Save Project with **Lorne Brown**. Later on June 17 the

Brant Taletellers presented Lorne Brown in a concert of Canadian Tales & Tunes.

The Gananoque Chapter of the 1000 Islands Yarnspinnners hosted "Hands On" an evening of storytelling and songs at the Arthur Child Heritage Museum on July 21. The evening was a celebration of the installation "Telling Hands" by storyteller **Deborah Dunleavy**.

**Mary-Eileen McClear** presented *Once Upon, Twice Upon* at the Storybook gardens in London on August 21.



Christine Gibson, member of 1000 Islands Yarnspinnners

Photo by Lorraine Payette

## STORYTELLING: From Folk to Fine Art? - cont'd

(Continued from page 9)

other art forms have evolved and changed over the millennia. First books then film brought the oral tradition of story into our media driven world yet the old ways remain as long as human beings use words to communicate. "You'll never guess what ....." or "Did you hear about ...?" are part of everyday life and those of us who practice the skills required will carry the storytelling torch to the level of any of today's performing arts. Just think about it and you'll realize that as we recognize the various approaches to music (classical, folk, rock, jazz etc) so we can identify genres in storytelling (classical, folk, ballad, cultural, historical) and so on. Styles vary from the

casual to the formal and can include the ballad and theatrical monologue.

Hopefully this preamble will start some thought and discussion as it is the lead in to a more comprehensive study designed to be sent out in monthly segments for criticism, suggestion, comment and/or general feedback so that the final product, including skill requirements will be representative of our group.

If you are interested in receiving these segments please e-mail Micki at [bumbleberry@sympatico.ca](mailto:bumbleberry@sympatico.ca) with your e-mail or postal address. Unfortunately mailed material will require a basic cost for postage. All who provide feedback will be acknowledged in the final publication. Group work-

shops to examine this subject matter will also be available.

**Micki Beck** is a storyteller of some 55 years experience and has been a professional for 25 years. A mother, grandmother and, soon to be, great grandmother, she has 30 years experience in education as a teacher and resource librarian. She claims to have 'told' in just about any venue you can think of from the haunted orchard to the theatre stage, her least favorite being the middle of a busy shopping centre and telling to a camera while taping in a TV studio. She is a trainer for Spellbinders of North America and presently serves as jury chair and coordinator for the TD/CCBC annual book week tours.

# Listings — Fall 2011

## GATHERINGS



**Dan Yashinsky**, Storytelling Toronto's storyteller-in-residence hosts **Bread and Stories** most Saturday mornings 10-12am at the Artscape Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie St. Look for the red tent on the west side of the Barns. Open to storytellers, listeners and those who like to "talk" story. Come and be mentored as you try out new or familiar stories. Info: dan\_yashinsky@hotmail.com

**Storytelling Circle** every Tuesday at 2:15-3:15pm, 6 St. Joseph St., led by **Molly Suttaitis**. Open to all. (416) 239-1345 mollysutkaitis@hotmail.com

**1,000 Friday Nights of Storytelling** continues every Friday evening at 8pm at the Innis College Café, Sussex Ave. and St. George St., Toronto. Suggested donation \$5. Open to all who wish to listen or tell. (416) 656-2445, www.1001fridays.org

**Stories Aloud** meets the 1st Friday of the month, September through June, 8:00pm, at The Story Barn, in Baden, 89 Snyders Rd. W. <http://thestorybarn.ca>. Mary-Eileen McClear, [maryeileen@thestorybarn.ca](mailto:maryeileen@thestorybarn.ca). Suggested donation: \$5

**The Baden Storytelling Guild** meets on the third Friday of the month, 7:30-10pm at The Story Barn, 89 Snyders Rd W. Info: Mary-Eileen McClear, [maryeileen@thestorybarn.ca](mailto:maryeileen@thestorybarn.ca)

**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 Ottawa Storytellers** also sponsor Stories and Tea every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month at The Tea Party, 119 York St., Ottawa, 7pm. Suggested donation: \$8 or pay what you can. Info:

info@ottawastorytellers.ca

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

**The Brant Taletellers Guild**, welcomes tellers and listeners to its monthly gatherings September to June, 7 - 8:45pm, on the first Wednesday at the Station Coffee House and

Gallery beside the Brantford VIA Station. Visitors welcome. Info: Barbara Sisson, email [taletellers@bizbrant.com](mailto:taletellers@bizbrant.com) or phone (519) 756-0727.

**The Durham Folklore Society** meets every 3rd Thursday, 7:30-9:30pm in the Seniors Day Activity Room, Northview Community Centre, 150 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa. Info: Dianne Chandler, (905) 985-3424, [storyteller@explornet.com](mailto:storyteller@explornet.com)

**Cercle de conteurs de l'Est de l'Ontario (CCEO)** se réunit aux soirées de contes libres une fois par mois dans diverses communautés de l'Est ontarien. Renseignements: Guy Thibodeau, [gythibodeau@rogers.com](mailto:gythibodeau@rogers.com), [www.cceo.ca](http://www.cceo.ca)

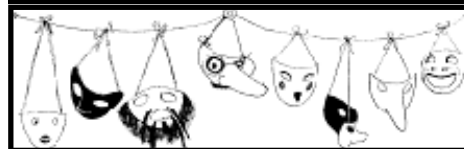
**The Hamilton Storytelling Circle** meets Thursday June 30, 7:30-9pm at Temple Anshe Shalom, 215 Cline Ave N., Hamilton. Info: Barry Rosen, [barrythestoryteller@gmail.com](mailto:barrythestoryteller@gmail.com)

**The Guelph Guild of Storytellers** meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 7:30pm at the Cooperators Building, MacDonnell St., and the 2nd Wednesday at 8pm for Stories at the Boathouse, a tea room on the river, Gordon St. Info: Sandy, (519) 767-0017

**The Montreal Storytellers Guild** meets the 4th Tuesday of the month at the Westmount Library. Info: Christine Mayr, [christine-mayr36@yahoo.ca](mailto:christine-mayr36@yahoo.ca)

**The 1000 Islands Yarnspinnings** Meet the third Monday of the month from October to June at 7pm at the Brockville Museum, 5 Henry Street. Information: Deborah Dunleavy (613)342-3463 or [kgp@ripnet.com](mailto:kgp@ripnet.com)

## PERFORMANCES



The 2nd annual **Historical Storytelling Series** presented by the Friends of the Waterloo Region Museum in partnership with The Story Barn of Baden offers six concerts on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, September through March (excluding December). Tellers include Evalyn Parry, Deborah Dunleavy, Bruce Carmody, Garry Sault, Adwoa Badoe, and Mary-Eileen McClear. Topics range from aviation stories to bicycles, from the war of 1812 to the ways of Scottish settlers. Series tickets are now on sale. Phone 519-748-1914. BUY NOW & SAVE. Series ticket: \$75 for all six concerts. Advance tickets \$15. At the door, \$18. The Waterloo Region Museum is located at 10 Huron Rd, only a few blocks from the 401 in Kitchener. Concerts start at 7:30. <http://www.waterlooregionmuseum.com/museum/storytelling-series.aspx>

**Baden Storytellers' Guild** members perform at the **Heart & Hand Festival** at Joseph Schneider Haus on Queen Street, Saturday, September 24, 11:00 am - 5:00 pm. Free admission.

## STORYTELLING TORONTO EVENTS



Info: (416) 656-2445  
[www.storytellingtoronto.org](http://www.storytellingtoronto.org),  
[admin@storytellingtoronto.org](mailto:admin@storytellingtoronto.org)

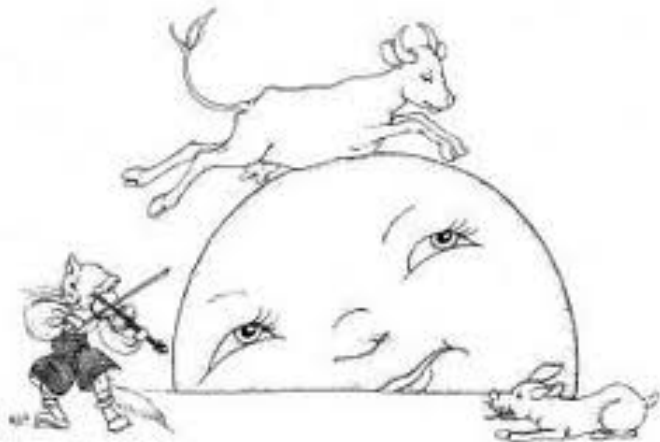
**Storytelling I: First Steps Into the Art**, a weekend led by Ruth Danziger. Discover your talent for story listening and storytelling. Designed for newcomers to the art, this course focuses on traditional stories, tales as relevant today as they were hundreds of years ago. Beginning Friday evening, you will choose a story, learn it through a series of enjoyable non-stressful activities, and tell it on Sunday afternoon. You will also learn how to ask for and to give feedback. Friday November 18, 7-10pm; Saturday and Sunday November 19-20, 10am-4:30pm. Venue: TBA. Fee: \$232. Info: (416) 656-2445

**NOTE:** At publication time the courses for 2011 -2012 were still being organized. Please visit the web site later this month for current information.

## FESTIVALS

**FOS FESTIVAL OF STORYTELLING** takes place in historic downtown Brockville on September 23 -24. **Kelly Russell** of Newfoundland presents "Tales from Pigeon Inlet" and tunes up his fiddle for a toe tapping evening. Also joining in with a concert and workshop is Story Enchantress **Sally Jaeger**. Members of the 1000 Islands Yarnspinnners host

"Ghosts, Ghouls & Goblins" a costumed event for youth. All events are at the Brockville Museum, 5 Henry Street. For information contact Deborah Dunleavy at (613) 342-3463 or [kgp@ripnet.com](mailto:kgp@ripnet.com). More information about the Festival of Storytelling can be found on facebook.



## WORKSHOPS



The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is sponsoring a two-day training workshop Friday September 30, 9:30-4:30 and Saturday October 1, 9:30-3:30 at the CSI Annex, 720 Bathurst Street, Toronto, with instructor Sandra Carpenter-Davis. Course includes philosophy and objectives, program material with examples of rhymes, songs and stories, and logistics of how to run a PCMG program. Cost \$320 (\$280 if registered by Aug. 30).

Info and registration: [mgoose@webnet](mailto:mgoose@webnet), [www.nald.ca/mothergooseprogramworkshop.htm#on](http://www.nald.ca/mothergooseprogramworkshop.htm#on) or (416) 588-5234, x 21.

A one-day Parent-Child Mother Goose workshop takes place October 21, 9:30am-4:30pm, led by Ruth Danziger, at the CSI Annex, 720 Bathurst Street. Build skills, acquire confidence and develop a deeper understanding of the role of storytelling in the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. Cost: \$160 (\$145 before September 21). Cost includes a copy of *You Can Tell a Story, A Handbook for New Storytellers* by Celia Barker Lottridge. Info and registration:

[www.nald.ca/mothergooseprogram/workshop.htm#on](http://www.nald.ca/mothergooseprogram/workshop.htm#on) or [mgoose@web.net](mailto:mgoose@web.net)

## WHATS UP?

What's new with you? Where are you telling stories? What new books have you read? Whoe did you hear telling stories? Send your submissions to Deborah at

[kgp@ripnet.com](mailto:kgp@ripnet.com) before November 01, 2011.



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The Canada Council  
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THE ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION  
LA FONDATION TRILLIUM DE L'ONTARIO



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