

The Seeing "I"

Empowerment through storytelling

Vol 3 No 3

September 2006

LOOK AROUND! The human world is made up of stories. As the only animals to have language and speech, human beings are wordy creatures. We tell stories to each other and we even tell stories to ourselves. There are over 6 billion people in the world today. Would you believe that there are 6 billion storytellers? Look around!

Stories: A Survival Mechanism

A psychiatrist, a writer and a historian each found a story that helped them understand and survive in a world of dilemmas.

The psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, barely survived his concentration camp experience during the Nazi era. Realizing that he had no control at all over his fate, he took comfort in the following story.

The servant of a rich and mighty Persian came to him and cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. His master gave him his fastest horse so that the servant could flee to Teheran. Later that day, the master himself saw Death, and questioned him, "Why did you threaten my servant?"

"I did not threaten him," said Death, "I was just surprised to find him here because I plan to meet him tonight in Teheran."

Elie Wiesel, a writer, spends his adult life fighting against prejudice and intolerance. Asked how he can keep trying against such entrenched problems all over the world, he refers to the following story:

One of the Just Men walked the streets of Sodom protesting against murder, greed, falsehood and

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THE ALL-POWERFUL STORY

Let Me Tell You a Story! These magical words open the door to a world of imagination, of understanding and of insight. At StoriesWork, we use stories as a community springboard for adults to examine and understand critical issues affecting men, women and families in today's world.

Why are stories so powerful? Why do age-old folktales live on in Shakespeare's plays, in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in the Arabian Nights and even in soap operas in modern America? Perhaps we can find an answer in the following story.

Tongue Meat (An African folktale from Kenya)

Once there lived a very poor man whose wife was healthy and happy every day. Meanwhile, the Sultan's wife got thinner and sadder by the minute. The Sultan, who showered his wife with riches and brought her lavish gifts from his travels, could not understand. He sent for the poor man and asked to know the secret of the poor wife's happiness.

"Very simple," replied the poor man, "We feed on the meat of the tongue." So, before he left on an expedition, the Sultan gave orders to the staff to obtain

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“Survival”...continued from previous page

indifference. But to no avail. The killers went on killing, and the wise kept silent. One day a child said to him, “You shout and you scream. Don’t you see it is hopeless?” “Yes,” answered the Just Man. “In the beginning, I thought I could change people. Today, I know I cannot. Now I scream and shout to prevent people from changing me.”

The historian, Howard Zinn, highlights the damage inflicted on American Indian life and well being by such brutal American government decrees as President Andrew Jackson’s policy of removal:

A Creek man, more than a hundred years old, spoke to his American Indian nation, as follows:

“Brothers and Sisters. When the great white father first came over the wide waters, he was but a little man.. His legs were cramped by sitting long in his big boat, and he begged for a little land to light his fire on.... But when the white man had warmed himself before the Indians’ fire and filled himself with their hominy, he became very large. With a step he bestrode the mountains, and his feet covered the plains and the valleys. His hands grasped the eastern and the western sea, and his head rested on the moon. He claimed he loved us but he kept saying, ‘Get a little further lest I tread on thee.’ I have listened to a great many talks from our great father. But they always begin and end in this—‘Get a little further; you are too near to me’ ”

We would love to have the stories you reach for when faced with confusions and conflicts of modern life (info@storieswork.org or StoriesWork PO Box 51693, Durham, NC 27717). We will print your story in our next newsletter and send you the illustrated story, *The Cloth of the Dragon*, as a gift. Our heartfelt thanks!

*Some material for this article was selected from a course on Fable, Folktale and Parable at Northern Illinois University.

“All Powerful”...continued from previous page

tongue meat from the different animals in his domain and provide his wife with whatever she preferred. Yet when the Sultan returned, his wife was as haggard as ever.

Exasperated, the Sultan sent for the poor man again and suggested that they switch wives for a while and see what happens. Immediately, the Sultan’s wife began to thrive in the poor man’s home. Her eyes sparkled and she grew plumper. The poor man’s wife became thinner by the moment in the Sultan’s house. Her eyes dulled and she became listless.

At his wits’ end, the Sultan brought the poor man back once more. “I have given each woman tongue meat from all kinds of animals, yet they wither in my palace. But with you in a poor dilapidated hut, they thrive. I demand to know why!”

“Ah, you misunderstood me,” the poor man replied. “The meat of the tongue that I spoke of does not come from animals. It is that we tell each other stories talking and laughing together all day long. That is the best meat of the tongue.”

Please join us for the StoriesWork program, “Storytelling for Adults” (details on page 3). Six monthly “hear and discuss” sessions teach all of us to talk and laugh together and find wisdom in ancient stories that resonate in modern life.



StoriesWork

announces a series of programs entitled

Storytelling for Adults

co-sponsored by the Durham County Public Library



2006-2007 Themes

Sept 16 **Parenting the 21st Century Child**

Oct 14..... **Confronting Family Abuse**

Nov 18 **Exploring the Aging Experience**

Feb 17..... **Ethnicity and Race**

Mar 17 **Teens and Gender**

Apr 14..... **Issues with Addictive Behavior**

Saturday afternoons, 2:30-5 pm, Durham County Public Library,
300 North Roxboro Street, Durham

Please join us for adult storytelling and stimulating discussions inspired by characters in worldwide stories. Tell your friends and come to enjoy a unique experience.

These free public programs are supported in part by the North Carolina Humanities Council.

For more information, contact StoriesWork, 919-321-8969
info@storieswork.org, PO Box 51693, Durham, NC 27717

Therapeutic Storytelling and Personal Decision Making

Many of life's decisions occur in an atmosphere of uncertainty. When risks are involved, people reach for both rational and irrational assistance. Hence a reliance on how-to books, spiritual guidance, horoscopes, fortune telling and even coin flipping.

At StoriesWork, we use Therapeutic Storytelling,

a technique that inspires people to find resources within themselves to clarify conflicts, reduce confusion, understand motivations and ease the process of sound decision making. Come to our Storytelling for Adults series and explore with us the insights and understandings that old folk stories offer for today's common problems.

Why Stories Work

StoriesWork has very little difficulty finding stories for our database that highlight all aspects of adult relationships. Regardless of era, place, language or unique cultural elements, the relationships described in these ancient stories reflect the same dilemmas that face modern North Carolinians (and others) today.

How can that be? What is the connection between stories from long ago and the modern age of space travel, i-pods and atom bombs?

Most folk tales – from ancient times to the present – are not children's stories. Rather, they are comments about the troubling world of everyday life: family relationships, community tensions, coming-of-age difficulties, addictions, conflict resolution, and cultural constraints. Stories, such as *Animal Talk and the Nosy Wife* or *The Pineapple Children*, cross national, racial and ethnic boundaries because human issues are universal. Stories don't just entertain: they teach, they illustrate and they make us think.

By focusing on the experiences of story characters, StoriesWork provides safe, comfortable, sometimes humorous ways of pinpointing the emotions, the ironies and the struggles that surround us all as we try to make sense of our own life challenges.

Sally Peterson



Mexico's Cultural Fabric Is Woven with Stories

After living in Mexico for two months, I have seen how folk stories play a greater part in modern life here than in the U.S. I am not talking about a place that has no modern diversions; the people I am staying with are watching an episode of the Sopranos on cable TV in the next room as I write.

But there remains a strong folk-story tradition that is passed on to young generations. When children here go to a sleepover party, visitors are expected to have at least one scary story to impress their host.

The folk story tradition continues in Mexican wrestling (Lucha Libre). As much about colorful masked characters as physical moves inside the ring, Lucha Libre is actually a new twist on traditional storytelling. The participants, luchadors, use the mask as a symbol, a cultural icon and a recognizable character identity that speaks of the wrestler's neighborhood and background. Sometimes wrestlers wear the same mask generation after generation to honor their predecessors. With names like The Blue Demon, the King of Mystery, and the Mad Gringo, these wrestlers live their characters in and out of the ring. They are a powerful draw to the young and working classes of Mexico. I have heard that it is getting popular in the U.S. too. Through it, we will see vibrant storytelling taking on the 21st century.

Lance Kozlowski

Happenings

Margie Rose and Lenora Ucko spoke at the Durham Domestic Violence Law Enforcement Team meeting on August 11, 2006.

Margie Rose will lead a StoriesWork workshop, *Let Me Tell You a Story: Empowerment Through Storytelling with Women Survivors*, at the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence annual meetings in Baton Rouge, LA, September 6, 2006.

StoriesWork art exhibit *Domestic Violence is a Global Concern* will be seen at the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence annual conference in Montpelier, VT, November 2-6, 2006.

The North Carolina state organization of Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. is exploring with us ways in which StoriesWork therapeutic storytelling can aid in working with students, teachers and counselors at all educational levels. We hope to set up a demonstration session with RFB and D soon.

We are discussing with the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce holding education and awareness sessions for members of the Chamber on domestic violence issues in the workplace.

The Seeing "I"

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*** Remember ***

Storytelling for Adults

First Session: Sept 16, 2006 2:30pm
Durham Public Library, Main Branch

Parenting the 21st Century Child

Other sessions in 2006:

Oct. 14, ***Confronting Family Abuse***

Nov. 18, ***Exploring the Aging Experience***



Personnel Additions

Younger Ye, Web manager for UNC Hospitals and the UNC Lineberger Cancer Care Center, will oversee maintenance of the StoriesWork website. We are very fortunate to have Younger work with us. Welcome, Younger!

Three new volunteers:

Jane Armstrong, specialist in aging issues, substance abuse and publicity/public relations.

Jo Taylor, special education specialist, high school teacher, newsletter editor and radio broadcaster.

Eileen Abramson, volunteer with the aging population, public speaker, project organizer and skilled crafts person.

Welcome Jane, Jo and Eileen! Your many talents will be most helpful at StoriesWork.

Thank you

Our heartfelt thanks to Capitol Broadcasting Company for their generous 2006 contribution.