

The Seeing "I"

Empowerment through Interactive Storytelling

Vol 4 No 3

September 2007

This year StoriesWork will do interactive storytelling with young adults in trouble with the law; retirees returning to classroom learning; men working to prevent domestic violence; and staff working with drug addicted prisoners. Clearly, storytelling works with everyone!

Something for Everyone

One of the beauties of StoriesWork, both the organization and the technique we practice, is its complete openness. Anyone can tell stories. Anyone can benefit. Whether we are adolescent or aging, simple or sophisticated, no matter our level of education or experience, the stories tell us something about ourselves and the people in our lives.

Elizabeth Jeter, a 2007 UNC summer volunteer for StoriesWork, felt the lure immediately when a friend pointed her to the StoriesWork website. A communications major, Elizabeth was struck by the organization's use of folktales to break down communication barriers and foster better group relations.

She was also attracted by the diverse application of the organization's philosophies. "Last year, I spent nine months living and traveling in South America while working for women's rights," says Elizabeth, who will be starting work on her Master's Degree in Communication this fall at UNC Greensboro. "The StoriesWork's philosophies fit perfectly into my lesson plans for the communications course that I will be teaching, providing examples on group cooperation and transmitting cultural lessons through stories."

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A Reader Reminds Us

How uplifting to receive a tribute in our mailbag that not only builds our morale, but recognizes once again the scope of what we do!

To The Editor: StoriesWork is a most unusual organization which has kept my interest for many years. What has impressed me most is the method of learning through storytelling, appropriate to so many subjects.

I look forward to receiving The Seeing 'I' which brings new and exciting information – and especially fascinating stories.

May you continue with this program and newsletter for many more years! Lots of luck!

Lee Ward Parkinson – New York City

Lee reminds us how layered with meaning the stories can be and how much we learn from them. Each deceptively simple story bursts with a myriad of issues. Take, for example, the following short story from Mexico.

The Miraculous Mesquite Tree

A habitual drinker beat his wife every day and left her black and blue. Often she prayed that he would die. One day, he fell into a drunken stupor and seemed

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As a volunteer, Elizabeth has been working with StoriesWork database manager, Marnie Steeves, to enlarge the folk story database by reviewing stories and creating lists of keywords for each story, based on the story's content.

Her work was no simple administrative project. Tackling each story, one at a time, Elizabeth allowed the specifics of the story to dictate themes that could be described in one or two words. Then, she stepped back to look at the big picture, finding themes that connected different stories.

“Through StoriesWork, I have gotten the chance to read a large variety of interesting folktales representing cultures from all over the world. I came to appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of folktales, and their ability to efficiently reflect various characteristics of cultures that have persisted over generations – for example, the treatment of women.”

Asked to name her favorite, Elizabeth chooses an African tale, *Tongue Meat*, a Kenyan story of a poor man who teaches a sultan that storytelling and laughter are the richest food of all. “The overall message of the story is one of respect and happiness in marriage through communication.”



Would she recommend StoriesWork to other student volunteers?

“Of course!” says Elizabeth, who will continue to work

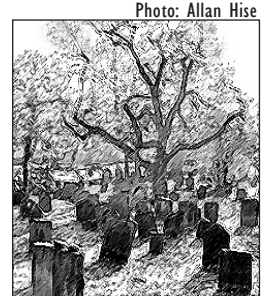
with StoriesWork as she pursues her graduate studies in Greensboro.

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“Mesquite Tree”...continued from previous page

to be dead. When local neighbors carried him to the cemetery in an open coffin, his wife screamed and tore her hair, as is fitting for a wife when a husband dies. However, the “dead” man woke up under the mesquite tree and shouted that he was alive. They immediately carried him home where he continued to drink and beat his wife. After a few days, he again fell into a “dead” stupor. Once again, on the way to the cemetery, he “woke up” under the mesquite tree.

Finally a month later, the man really died. As they carried him to the cemetery a third time, the wife sobbed and moaned, as she had before. But every few moments she also cried, “Don’t take him under the mesquite tree! Don’t take him under the mesquite tree!”



What is this story about? Alcohol addiction? Domestic violence? Cultural expectations? Marriage? Community influence? Communication? Re-read the story and you will find even more themes. Like this one, other stories we tell also generate deep and relevant insights on countless topics.

Let’s look at some examples of how we might adapt *The Miraculous Mesquite Tree* to different topics.

On the topic of **marriage**, we might ask:

Who had the power in this relationship?

Why did the wife stay with the husband?

What could the wife have done?

On the topic of **cultural traditions**, we might ask

Why did the wife accept the husband back each time?

Why did the neighbors take him back home?

Why didn’t anyone notice the wife was black and blue?

This is an example of what StoriesWork does. We develop carefully guided discussion questions based on the topic at hand. And the resulting insights and understandings often amaze our participating audiences.

2007-2008 Calendar

THIS YEAR, we are addressing an amazingly varied range of topics with our interactive storytelling technique. It is a tribute to the versatility of the StoriesWork method.

September 28, 2007 – *Addiction treatment for convicted persons in the Durham County Detention Facility.*

Interactive Storytelling Session at the professional development retreat, Substance Treatment and Recidivism Reduction (STARR) Program, Durham County Criminal Justice Resource Center

November 13, 2007 – *Modern Aging is Different!*

Interactive Storytelling Session at the newly organized seniors group, Chapel Hill Chaverim, cosponsored by the Jewish Family Service, Jewish Community Federation

Winter 2008 – *Living in the Expanding World of "Others"*

Four-session storytelling course at the Duke

University Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Topics include: age/youth, women/men, African American/Euro-American, Latino/Anglo

November 2007 to April 2008 – *Intergenerational Understanding*

Five-session interactive storytelling sessions with a combined group of young adults in trouble with the law and senior citizens, to foster understanding and mutual support. Cosponsored by Last Hope program, Criminal Justice Resource Center and Durham Center for Senior Life

December 2007 to June 2008 – *Male Leadership in Domestic Violence Prevention*

Four-session interactive storytelling to explore strategies for men recruiting other men to prevent domestic violence before it begins. Cosponsored by Family Violence and Rape Crisis Center of Chatham County.

Welcome New Board Members!

We are extremely pleased to introduce our newest board members, who bring to StoriesWork an expanding set of valuable skills and experience.

Kristie Evans, StoriesWork Treasurer. President, HR Logistics, LLC, a human resources management consulting firm.

Jacklyn McClamb, StoriesWork Secretary. President and CEO, Earthly Blessings, a Cary, NC-based firm manufacturing the finest handcrafted candles and beauty products.

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A publication of StoriesWork

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The Seeing "I" is published by StoriesWork, PO Box 51693, Durham, NC 27717.

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919-321-8969

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Durham, NC 27717

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Dated Material

StoriesWork



Our Mission: To increase empowerment, self-esteem, insight and understanding among members of the community through the power of interactive storytelling.



Our Vision: An ever-increasing global movement to restore and revitalize disempowered members of society through safe, non-intrusive, non-threatening storytelling techniques.

