

Blethers

Issue 17 Autumn 2008

Festival Takes Centre Stage



Hjörleifur Helgi Stefánsson
from West Iceland

The Scottish International Storytelling Festival is within sight! Starting on Friday 24th October and running until Sunday 2nd November, the annual Festival offers a veritable feast of live storytelling performances, thought-provoking talks and discussions, interactive workshops and fun family activities.

This year the theme of the Festival moves north from central and southern Africa, to the chilly climes of Scandinavia and the Northlands and a treasure chest of sagas, songs, folktales and myths.

Among those appearing will be Heli Aaltonen, one of Finland's leading storytellers; Jack Dalton, a Yup'ik Inuit teller from Alaska; Jerker Fahlström from Sweden; Ingi Hans Jónsson, Sigurborg Kr. Hannesdóttir and Hjörleifur Helgi Stefánsson from West Iceland; leading Norwegian tellers and singers, Nina Næsheim and Maritha Nielsen; Mats Rehnman from Sweden and, back from Ireland to join the celebrations, John Hamilton.

Accompanying our guests will be some of Scotland's best-loved storytellers, ballad singers and yarnspinners including Lawrence Tulloch from Shetland, Ian Stephen from Lewis, and Tom Muir from Orkney, all joining forces with the finest tellers from the Highlands and Lowlands and Traveller traditions including Jess Smith, Sheila Stewart and Stanley Robertson.

Alongside a packed programme of events at the Centre is an exciting range of partner events at venues across

Edinburgh and the Lothians, including Filmhouse, the National Library of Scotland, the Scottish Seabird Centre and the Royal Botanic Gardens. And not forgetting the Festival outreach programme – guest and home storytellers will be visiting local schools, libraries and residential units between 28th October and 7th November, giving children and young people of all ages the chance to experience the magic of stories.

Visit the Centre website for the full Festival programme.

Puppets – Come Out To Play!

When Ugandan, Gailey Turyahebwa was our guest at the 2007 Storytelling Festival he made many friends and learned much about how we use storytelling here. He went home fired with enthusiasm and began a storytelling club in Kampala, then took his tales to schools and hospitals. Having seen how Ewan McVicar used glove puppets, Gailey made his own from old socks, and entranced sick kids. So Ewan gathered up some glove puppets from corners in his home and in charity shops, and posted them. They were sensational!

Now Ewan asks, have you any glove or finger puppets gathering dust? Please donate them to the Bird Exchange, 84 High St, Linlithgow EH49 7AQ. Some will go to Gailey, and some to Kids In Need, which rescues street kids throughout Uganda and uses songwriting and singing as part of counselling and healing. Organiser Robert Ekapu is now developing the use of stories and storytelling, and how puppets can help kids express themselves.



East of the Sun and West of the Moon

Last winter, whilst sharing stories from the reindeer peoples of Finmark and Siberia in my storytelling yurt in Highland Perthshire, I had a magical experience. I met eye to eye and heart to heart a beautiful reindeer who made my heart all shiny like the sun and moon combined. I whispered in his ear, "Hey, little one. I promise to travel to the land of your ancestors and bring back some stories." And so began an amazing journey. The Scottish Arts Council supported my dream with a professional development award to travel to the Arctic Circle in midsummer and midwinter, over land and sea, in dark and light.

I have just returned from the land of the midnight sun where mountains rise out of the ocean like great black ravens, and sun and moon share the heavens all summer long. The light changes constantly, as do all that are touched by it, and I found myself painting swift black and grey watercolours and singing the songlines of the landscape...my version of Sami joiking!

We travelled to Tromsø, and from there to Riddu Riddu, which is a festival of seventeen years standing organised by the Sami, and celebrates the arts of indigenous peoples of the world – Navajo hoop dancers; Nenet singers; Sami joikers; Mongolian throat singers and Taiwanese musicians. Lavu tents with reindeer skins



Sami performers at the Riddu Riddu Festival

and a central fire kept everyone cosy, and the beautiful sound of young and old chanting their traditional Sami joik (Europe's oldest form of music) wove through my sleeping and waking dreams.

And then, one hour before leaving for Tromsø to pick up a sailing passage round the Lofoten Islands, a Sami woman sat down next to me. We got talking. She had travelled to Scotland, she told me. Yes, she had been following the journey of her uncle, Mikel Utsi, who had brought the first reindeer back to Scotland!! A small world, so they say! So next

week I go walking with reindeer in the Cairngorms and continue developing this wonderful thread of connection, and when the nights draw in, and the northwind calls, I will again fly to a land in darkness, illuminated by northern lights, stars and moon.

I already feel the scent, sounds, colours and tastes of this land beginning to weave their patterns through my stories and songs. And what gives me so much joy is that all this can be shared through the telling of a tale...And all because of a beautiful reindeer!

Claire Hewitt

Storyboxes are launched!

The Scottish Storytelling Centre are soon to launch a new resource for teachers, librarians and others working with children – Storyboxes! Produced by Active Learning Resources Ltd. and designed by storyteller Judy Paterson, the Storyboxes enable adults to use storytelling proactively and imaginatively in a way that appeals to children.

What is the Storybox?

Quite simply the Storybox is a box filled with appropriate objects, toys and printed resources to stimulate children's imaginations and lead them into oral storytelling. Fun activities and games encourage storymaking, storytelling, talking and listening skills as well as creativity.

The Storybox came about following

the success of the Scottish Storytelling Centre's two-year Storymakers project. In all surveys after Storybox pilot studies there was overwhelmingly positive feedback and teachers recognised that use of the Storyboxes furthered aims and outcomes across the curriculum. In particular the Storybox was seen as an effective resource for achieving the aims of the Curriculum for Excellence: "My class has thoroughly enjoyed the



Storyboxes – it's been a joy to see how well they have worked together on their storytelling," said one teacher.

There are six themed boxes: Scottish, Animal Fun, Spooky, Sea & Shore, Magic & Mystery, Around the World, plus an Infant box. Each box contains cards giving ideas for circle and group games with children, hints and tips on how they can become a storyteller/role model, plus a set of simple stories to absorb and retell as the starting point for children creating oral stories for retelling.

For further information on the Storyboxes and CPD training to support their use, please contact Joanna at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on 0131 652 3272.

Creative Words at the Big Tent Festival

As part of the Big Tent Festival in Falkland, Fife, Lapidus Scotland hosted what came to be known as the Poetry Tent, although what emerged from within were all forms of creative words (and pictures). Over 250 people took part in ten events over two days in a quiet corner beside an orchard, away from the centre of the Festival. The tent was cosy and comforting and it was often mentioned during the weekend what a nice, tranquil, creative space it was. As one Festival-goer said, "I wandered into the Lapidus Tent – it felt like an oasis of peace away from the buzz and bustle."

The events held there included workshops, book launches, readings, music and storytelling for children. The storytelling was lead by Claire McNicol who provided, in the words of one of the participants, "a wonderful workshop for adults and children. Everyone was transfixed, even the little tinies! Excellent stories and songs, very well told with lots of enjoyable bits to join in."

Other workshops included 'Write Here' with Margot Henderson, in which the unfolding of the here and now was explored in a beautiful and

meditative workshop. There follows an excerpt from one of the poems created during this time.

We Are

We are all of this
an orchard full of ripening fruits

We are a meadow
gold and green
full of life's richness and diversity

The real gold of life
is not monetary
but this

Being together

Margot Henderson

Carol Wood travelled from Bradford to lead a creative expression group on the theme of grounding, which led to a deep and powerful sharing of personal writing. One of the other workshops explored listening to the 'Voices of Water'. The group led by Gerry Loose walked away from the tent to a nearby stream to write what the water was saying in its flowing gurgles

and murmers. 'A Taste of Nature' with Mandy Haggith also ventured out from the tent to explore what edible plants were nearby and to write from this experience. The result was a great big word salad, mixed and tasty.

Back in the tent Zimbabwean 'Seeds of Thought' performer Tawona Sithole explored the traditional lifestyle of ancient culture with the main morals and values being based on love and respect for the earth, and also love and respect for elders. The idea of Africa's past (timeless) as opposed to African history (approximately 400 years) was explored through beautiful music, singing and poetry. There was a packed tent and a lot of audience participation.

Another tent-filler was Alastair McIntosh who did a dramatic reading of one of the poems from his book *Love and Revolution*. He eloquently expressed his view that "the role of the poet, the role of the artist, is to help others to deepen their inner life." Through group participation and his performance he expressed how poetry helps us move "from the head to the heart, to the deep love that is the structure of reality." He was, as one audience member put it, "absolutely brilliant!"

The weekend ended with a final open session where some of the thoughts, stories, poems and songs of the weekend were performed. This was a coming together of a lot of very different events into a rich sense of having shared and created together. A fabulous weekend and lots of memories to treasure. Looking forward to seeing you there next year!

Anna Bambridge



Big Tent Festival-goers in the Lapidus Tent

Tell-a-Story Day!

Now in its 7th year, Tell-a-Story Day is the national celebration of storytelling, and the chance for people of all ages across the country to create their own event, and take part in the Scottish International Storytelling Festival's annual day of DIY storytelling.

This year's Tell-a-Story Day falls on Hallowe'en, Friday 31st October – the old Celtic New Year when the year turns from light to dark, the boundary between this world and the next dissolves, and spooks and spirits abound.

Like Hallowe'en, storytelling is for everyone, old and young, and both together. All over Scotland on 31st October, people will be telling stories in schools, libraries, community centres, churches, homes, gardens...as well as some more unusual venues!

Tell us about your Tell-a-Story Day plans! Register with the Scottish Storytelling Centre by Monday 15th October to have your event listed on the Centre's website and receive a special support pack to help you plan and promote your own Tell-a-Story Day celebration.

To register visit the Festival section of the website: www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk/festival.co.uk, email jill@scottishstorytellingcentre.com or ring us on 0131 652 3272.



Nancy and Hamish Turner Storytelling Bursary

This year's Nancy and Hamish Turner Storytelling Bursary has been awarded to Tim Porteous.

The Bursary is given annually in memory of our founder members, Nancy and Hamish Turner, by their daughter Elspeth Turner and her husband Stewart Asquith.

The purpose of the bursary is to support the development of someone who is doing innovative storytelling work. Tim Porteous is working with vulnerable young adults struggling with addiction and other health problems. Storytelling – often not described as storytelling! – becomes, in Tim's hands, a way of connecting with often troubled and chaotic experiences.

We all wish Tim Porteous well with this work, which is currently focused in Fife and supported by Bethany Christian Trust's community education programme.

Last year's bursary went to Kelone Khudu-Petersen who is now carrying forward her storytelling in education work in Botswana.

Survey will point way forward for storytelling in Scotland

Storytelling Forum Chairman, Russell McLarty, doesn't believe in letting the grass grow under his feet, so no surprise that he has used some of his professional study leave to take on some extensive fieldwork.

He has just completed a nationwide survey of 40 storytellers which will provide the Forum with vital information to strengthen the development of storytelling throughout Scotland.

A list of searching questions was put to storytellers in interviews and his findings will be reported to the Forum in September.

"All arts organisations recognise that this is a time where there will be even bigger pressures on funding. It is therefore even more important that we are well informed, forward looking and well focussed," says Russell.

"What is really important is that we

Storytelling for Social Change

Stories have always been told; to entertain, inform and create a sense of identity. Ancient tales cover a whole range of genres.

Stories continue to be told. The art of the storyteller has been somewhat eclipsed by technological advances. People now often get their stories from films, computer games and television.

Yet we still all tell stories. In the playground we tell stories when children, we tell stories of our weekend antics, of our holidays, or observations about people on the bus. Stories are being constantly told.

The young men who come to the drop-ins, they also have their stories – often violent, reflecting their unsettled and chaotic lifestyle, peppered with colourful language. But yet, they are telling stories of how life is for them. Their tales perform the same function as others; to entertain, inform and create a sense of identity.

Many are interested in stories of gangsters, drug runners and violent crimes. These tales in some ways mirror their own lives, but also create a fascination for learning something. This is our starting point. What if this fascination can be harnessed into a process where the young man starts to learn, become



Tim Porteous, this year's winner of the Nancy and Hamish Storytelling Bursary

interested in a story and achieve the ability to tell this to others in one way or another?

Even better if the young man can make the link with his own life tales, and develop an interest in telling them, making him feel he has a story of his own to tell, and maybe make it amusing, tragic, a moral tale or something uplifting. Then that young man is using stories to reflect on his life and society, linking them with other tales, and learning from them. And if he has the opportunity to tell his story to people who will truly listen to what he has to say, he will feel listened to for perhaps the first real time in his life. This, then, is storytelling for personal development and social change.

Tim Porteous

listen to people about where we put our resources in the future."

Russell, a full-time Church of Scotland minister, questioned storytellers about their experiences and projects, including international work. Relationships with local authorities and the Scottish Arts Council, training needs and practical work within the arts community were among the issues covered from the south west of Scotland to the far north. The interviews were carried out over a period of a month.

Now the Forum hopes to get funding for a complementary detailed study into storytellers' earnings. "This confidential piece of work will give us further understanding which should shape our forward planning," he says.

Russell's study time has been divided to allow him to take part in a course

on Cultural Planning at Strathclyde University. "Thirty students have taken part in this, and the idea behind it is to develop organisations in such a way that it listens to its grass roots."

Through his involvement in this scheme he has been able to raise the profile of storytelling nationwide and made a presentation at the Scottish Parliament attended by Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister and other politicians, artists and academics including the Principal of Strathclyde University. "It was an excellent opportunity for me to talk about storytelling and what is being achieved throughout the country," he says.

"We must listen to people and hear about their experiences and needs so that we can plan where we put the resources for the future."

Ann Davies

Storytelling for Health and Well-Being

Years ago, while working as a counsellor in Canada, I found myself struggling to help a young 14-year-old girl in distress. She'd come into the therapeutic programme having suffered years of sexual abuse. She was anorexic and suicidal. After months of counselling, I'd managed to establish a certain level of trust with her but increasingly I found myself at a loss as to how to help her out of her despair. My training seemed inadequate, unable to provide her with the answers for which she was desperate. How could I help her find some meaning in her life worth living for?

During one of our sessions an image came to mind, that of a dandelion which I had stepped over on my way to work that morning. The weed had sprouted and cracked the concrete pavement in its search for the sun and I had been struck by the ferocity of the life force in something so seemingly humble and derided by gardeners everywhere. I began to weave that image into a story of struggle and survival. To be honest, I didn't know what else to do.

Reunion

I'd forgotten that story until years later when I happened to be visiting family one summer near Toronto. I was out shopping with my wife when a young woman approached me and said hello. It took several minutes to recognise her as the young girl I'd worked with more than twenty years earlier. Before me was a healthy, handsome woman, confident in her looks and demeanour. We hugged

and laughed and caught up on each other's lives. She had graduated with a degree in Social Work and was now the director of a women's refuge centre. My eyes welled up with relief and admiration at her success as she told me her story of how she'd eventually confronted her father over the abuse and gone on to rebuild her shattered life. What touched me most was her revelation that she had never forgotten the story I'd told her about that dandelion. She'd recalled it often, she said, during her dark times. In fact, she went on, she re-told it often to the women with whom she worked. Never, I thought, underestimate the power of a story to transform and heal.

Since becoming a professional storyteller, I've taken a keen interest in the therapeutic or healing power of story. Increasingly, I've learned that stories and storytelling are a powerful force for positive change. Such stories often ask us to consider another's point of view or situation, evoking the 'walk in another's shoes' principle; others, like the Zen tale of how an angry warrior experiences heaven and hell, work through epiphany.

Healing Power of Stories

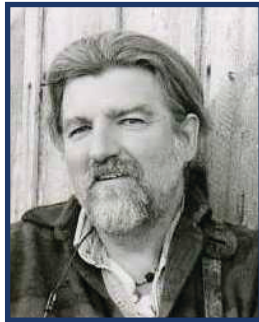
Enabling people to tell their stories and to listen to those of their enemies is often the first step to reconciliation and healing. In my work with the Juniper Peace Education Programme for Schools (www.unipaz.org.uk), I use storytelling as a means of encouraging children to share their own stories and to learn to listen to others. Stories help us make sense of the world and our place in it. Children readily take to

storytelling games and enjoy shaping their experiences into stories as well as listening to those of their peers. The results are entertaining, imaginative and conducive to community building. Teachers report improved behaviour, confidence, self-esteem and academic performance. Children report a greater sense of well-being and a more positive outlook.

I have no doubt that story and storytelling can heal and bring about reconciliation and well-being. I've experienced it first-hand in my work and encountered the evidence in the work of dozens of other storytellers around the world. Here in Scotland, a growing number of storytellers are meeting the challenges of working in therapeutic venues, bringing their storytelling and therapeutic skills to prisons, schools, old-age homes, youth clubs and care centres working with children, young people and adults in need. Whether you're an aspiring or experienced storyteller, stories and storytelling are powerful tools in our efforts to nurture well-being in ourselves and others.

Note: The Scottish Storytelling Centre offers training events to help storytellers use their skills in a therapeutic way, such as the upcoming 'Stories for Health and Well-Being: Working with Young People' on Saturday October 4th (for more info go to www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk).

Michael Williams, Ph.D.



Michael Williams

Duncan Williamson: Ceilidh Man

For one week at the end of August, the Scottish Storytelling Centre paid tribute in story, song and music to the great storyteller and tradition bearer Duncan Williamson, with a series of events at the Centre, led by Traveller tradition bearers Sheila Stewart, Stanley Robertson, Jimmy Williamson and Jess Smith.

In advance of the first event, a memorial chair, especially commissioned from the Workshop of Tim Stead, was unveiled in the Netherbow Theatre by Linda and Jimmy Williamson. Donald Smith then blessed the chair with whiskey, and Linda and Jimmy set the tone for the week with a beautifully moving story and song in a fitting collective tribute to the "father-of-all-stories".



Duncan's chair takes pride of place in the Storytelling Court

Peace, Potatoes and Playing it by Ear – a Programme for Progress

They call themselves the Tale-Blazers and they are really making inroads in Dumfries & Galloway.

In a year, Tony Bonning and Anne Errington set out to recruit 50 new storytellers in the area, holding workshops and liaising with schools.

The result was a festival representing all Primary Three pupils in the region, in which 60 adults and children had their first experience of working alongside professional storytellers like Anne, Tony and John Wheeler, all well known for their experience.

A small group of enthusiasts in the Glenkens raised sufficient funds six years ago to take over a disused school in New Galloway. They transformed it into an extraordinary community arts centre serving a large part of the region now one of the leading purpose-built arts centres in Scotland. They named it The CatStrand after the stream over which it stands. Now a home in the Glenkens for theatre, the visual arts, training, films, history and music, it has also taken storytelling to its heart in a big way.

Seeds of Success

A story cafe with guest tellers once a month attracts widespread interest. 'Play It By Ear', run by Tony,

involves telling with music while the Knockengoroch and other festivals include stories at the Green Shee yurt.

"The CatStrand looks like becoming a major centre for storytelling throughout the region, perhaps even for the whole of the south west," says John. The Glenkens Gazette and community bus service set up by the centre ensures that everyone knows what is going on.

John and Tony had been discussing possibilities of storytelling development for some years with Karen Donald of the Glenkens group and things really took off after the opening of the centre. They worked together to win a grant from the Scottish Arts Council for a combined storytelling project for 2008.

Finale Fun

So now Tony and Anne steer the Tale-Blazers training programme through its second year and John celebrates the UN International Year of The Potato by running phase two of the 'War, Peace, Justice & Potatoes' storytelling project that he started in 2005.

In this, children experience traditional farming at Barfil Farm, Crocketford,

meet the heavy horses, watch them work the potato field and sit in the straw of the byre and elsewhere for some crackin' good yarns and prepare for the project's finale schools fun day on 26th September at the CatStrand.

There too on Saturday 27th September – the first birthday of the centre – the public will be welcomed to celebrate world peace and the children's work at the War, Peace, Justice & Potatoes 2008 storytelling cafe project finale day.

"We are hoping for great celebrations on both days. The climax of each will involve everyone taking part in an international flag ceremony for peace courtesy of Allanton Sanctuary. That'll be after the hot potatoes," says John.

"The children have responded really well but we could not have done this without the enthusiasm, cooperation and sponsorship of farmers Bob and Maggy Gordon and ploughman David Broll."

In October the Tale-Blazers hold a two-day training course devoted to advanced techniques. It will be run by professional storytellers including Tony and Anne.

Ann Davies

Book Blethers

There is a Leith flavour to the book news this time. Millie Gray has just launched her novel *In A Class Of Their Own*. This tale of a family growing up in wartime Leith brings together hilarity and pathos as Millie weaves her memories and stories into a convincing family story in which tears and laughter are never far away.

Another Leith storyteller, Lari Don is also in print again with a collection for Floris' Kelpies series, *First Aid for Fairies, and other Fabled Beasts*, for older kids and old kids to enjoy.

Meanwhile Stuart McHardy has revised his *Edinburgh Pub Guide* – continuing to do all the things he does best – which IS a compliment! Through Stuart's self-designated 'grumpy old sod' persona, the pub guide becomes an artform.

The Perthshire Traveller team of Sheila Stewart and Jess Smith are

also in action with new books – *Sookin' Berries* by Jess and *Pilgrims of the Mist* by Sheila. The latter draws together Travellers stories from across Scotland, reflecting journeys undertaken by these two great 'friends and companions' together. It is also good to see two of Duncan Williamson's books in print – *The Horsieman* and *The King and the Lamp*, which is an invaluable selection of stories from across Duncan's repertoire. There are only a limited number of these left but you can get them from the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

Finally, we are very grateful to have received for the library Ramsay Wood's beautiful retelling of the ancient Islamic Bidpai fables of the beasts and the birds. It is titled *Kalila and Dimna: Fables of Friendship and Betrayal*. It comes with an introduction by Doris Lessing.

Donald Smith

In A Class of Their Own, Millie Gray
The Bellfield Press, tel: 0131 657 3869

Sookin' Berries, Jess Smith
ISBN: 1841587788
Birlinn, tel: 0131 668 4371

Pilgrims of the Mist, Sheila Stewart
ISBN: 1841587524
Birlinn, tel: 0131 668 4371

The Horsieman, Duncan Williamson
ISBN: 1841586927
Birlinn, tel: 0131 668 4371

The King and the Lamp, Duncan Williamson
ISBN: 1841950637
Birlinn, tel: 0131 668 4371

Kalila and Dimna: Fables of Friendship and Betrayal, Ramsay Wood
ISBN: 0863566618



Edinburgh's Storytelling Champions

Following an initiative by Edinburgh City Libraries Reading Champion, Colm Linanne, there was an idea to introduce storytelling to adolescents in residential units in Edinburgh. A good idea? Many of the staff were sceptical. As if young people would buy into that! I was told by one that she thought the young people would only enjoy historical or horror stories. Surely we'll need DVDs, Nintendos and Wiis to grab their attention? I approached these young people toting baseball caps and mobile phones armed with only my best riddles and stories. I knew I had songs up my sleeve if things got really tough. The overall aim was to foster a love of story and reading which has been shown to bring many personal and educational benefits. I had previously worked in the residential units of South Lanarkshire with Claire McNicol with great results.

I visited all of the units and received an uncertain welcome. Who was this 'storyteller' creature and what would she do? Gradually the peaks of the caps were raised and eye contact was achieved using a currency of traditional Scottish stories which the kids loved. I told them that being a good storyteller involved being a good liar so this led to a competition. The settings of stories change but it seems to me that the issues within them – the struggles, joys, loneliness, fear, love, battles and death – are timeless.



Ruth Kirkpatrick has introduced storytelling to young people in residential units across the City

By the time I left, they had all listened, laughed, considered and participated together. Overall they looked brighter and had 'lightened up'. They tended to think I was mad.

Our next step was to encourage the staff to have a go. Colm and I had set a maximum of 16 for the group but we were realistically expecting about

8. There are such difficulties in residential units for staff to be released for daytime training. We were amazed and delighted to find 17 eager people turn up on the day. They were so enthusiastic, I even heard stories being swapped during the lunch break!

The next stage has been to encourage an event within each unit where the staff would do some of the storytelling and this has happened to some degree. We hope there can be further training and ultimately a culture where storytelling can be established as 'part of the fabric'.

Colm has a great relationship with the young people and has bloomed into a fine storyteller during this project. Here's hoping that the next stage of the project will see a bumper crop of flowering storytellers from the staff and young people.

Ruth Kirkpatrick

Stories for Literacy

We were delighted to work with Ruth as part of the Reading Champion project. The project seeks to promote reading and stories to young people in residential care. Ruth was very successful in getting the attention of the young people with her brilliant stories, songs and riddles; we had a couple of sessions where the kids didn't want the riddles to end!

The training day was an enormous success and she really inspired everyone who went along. The best part of the training was where we all workshoped a story and everyone had to tell a part of the story without a script – I think that approach means that you develop the confidence to go on and tell more stories. We have held a follow-up session in one children's home and both myself and a member of staff managed to tell a story each all by ourselves! We have also had very positive feedback from other trainees who said that the stories we learned on the day were very popular with young people at their unit. We hope to continue with follow-up sessions and develop confidence and enthusiasm for storytelling to young people in residential care in the future.

This important and valuable aspect of the Reading Champion project wouldn't have been possible without the fantastic commitment from Ruth, but also the continued support of our partners in the Scottish Storytelling Centre and the Scottish Book Trust.

Colm Linnane

Soup, Song and Story

'Soup, Song and Story' started life as the 'No Been Seen' at Carlton Studios two years ago; a play on the coffee shop of a similar name, but without the corporate coffee and leather settees. SSS was more a jumble of cushions and lampshades brought from my house, in a bid to make it feel, well, a bit like my house, but without the grumpy neighbour who calls the police if I laugh too loud!

The laid back surroundings and friendly clientèle, have seen many budding storytellers, comedians, singers, poets and writers take to the limelight and flower beautifully. Whilst brushing shoulders with more established performers, the audience fluctuates between cheeky heckles to encouraging cheers.

Competition in the city is high for a good night out, rich with food, music,

banter and alliteration! However, standards have been extremely high at Carlton Studios in this do-it-yourself, pleasantly home-spun variety show.

'Soup, Song and Story' starts back at Carlton Studios, following the summer recess, on the 3rd of October and will continue on the first Friday of the month, through to June 2009, skipping January. 8pm 'til 12pm, £4 donation.

Lesley O'Brien

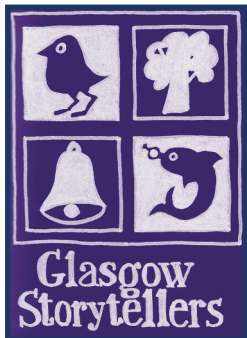
Glasgow's a City of Storytellers – Aye, That'll be Right!

Storytelling fever has hit the dear green place and, as it intensifies all over Glasgow, tellers of tales and sorcerers with stories are busier than ever.

From clubs and festivals to schools, multi-faith and cultural groups, word has got out that storytelling has a lively future in Scotland's biggest city.

Twilight sessions for teachers, work for people with learning disabilities and a series of stories from the world religions are only some of the innovations which have been attracting whole new audiences, says Rachel Smillie, recently appointed as Glasgow Storytelling Development Officer. "The idea for the post has been to give storytelling a higher profile in the city, not only by supporting the network of Glasgow Storytellers or arranging events during some of the city's many festivals, but also by more sustained work.

"It is an opportunity to be involved more strategically within the five Community Planning Partnerships areas of the city, linking up with a whole range of community groups to develop innovative and appropriate work, as well as with museums, libraries and schools."



Glasgow was ready for this post. The Better Crack Club and Even Better Crack Club had been active in the city for years, in 2007 the monthly

'Soup, Salad, Song and Story' nights began, and, significantly, in 2006 the Glasgow Storytellers took off. The steady work of The Village Storytelling Centre in Pollok since 1999 was well known not only at local level but also by the education department, museums, libraries and parks department, and some outreach work during city festivals had begun to put storytelling

'on the map'.

Funding

"The commitment made by Culture and Sport Glasgow and the City Council to contribute funding to the post has opened many doors, providing an opportunity to do more long-term work often in partnership with local organisations, gradually embedding storytelling in the work of voluntary groups and public bodies alike," Rachel says.

The international make-up of the city has inspired a focus on schools and community groups in the south-east of the city. In January this led to Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Christian storytellers gathering in a yurt at Govanhill Trinity Church, and visiting a variety of local groups for a remarkable exchange of experiences and stories. In May this was followed up at the Hidden Gardens with

a similar exchange of cultural stories from Sikh, Jewish, Punjabi, Slovakian and Irish storytellers and musicians. "We live in a time when it is of utmost importance for people to understand each other, and what better way to do this than by hearing the stories of each others' faiths, traditions and cultural experiences? When we tell stories we instantly engage with each other. This is difficult to achieve when we focus on religious dogma and practice. Stories open us up and help us to see the common values we share."

Plans are in hand for work with a housing association and other partnerships, which will feature reminiscing with older local people and youngsters who will be encouraged to tell their own stories.

To meet the demands of a developing programme, training has become a priority, Rachel says. September will see the introduction of a new series to encourage newcomers to storytelling.

Workshops

Its popularity is attracting interest from some unusual places. Storytellers met staff behind the Silk Route exhibition at the Burrell when The Village co-ordinated a programme of family activities. The popular Aye Write festival spotted the potential of storytelling at once and workshops were co-ordinated there involving schools,

libraries and community groups, while the West End Festival, the Kibble and Hillhead Library extended a very warm invitation.

While storytelling is mushrooming all over Scotland, the growth in Glasgow seems to be particularly strong. Rachel has a possible explanation: "This can only be because Glasgow is a city of storytellers! How many of us have only to stand at a bus stop to hear a

great anecdote? Not many people stand at bus stops these days, but the desire to tell and hear is still there. We are providing avenues for this great Glasgow tradition to flourish!"

Next year offers a great chance to build on what has happened in Glasgow over the past twelve months. Says Rachel: "I hope there will be ways in which we can encourage more storytellers from different faith communities to emerge, develop more skills as children's storytellers, get it firmly into the curriculum and have a storytelling development officer in each area of the city. They would spot more opportunities for storytellers to work with artists from other artforms." Rachel could clearly go on, but maybe that's enough to be getting on with!

For more information on Glasgow Storytellers visit www.glasgowstorytellers.org.uk

Ann Davies



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