When Story Chooses the Teller: One Teller's Journey
Lorna MacDonald Czarnota

I like many storytellers, feel that I was “chosen by story.” On one hand, this is exhilarating. It feels wonderful to be a part of something bigger than myself. On the other hand, if I spend too much time in contemplation of exactly what kind of sacrifices are required of one who is “chosen,” it can be unsettling. Mythologically speaking, the chosen must give up something in exchange for what is given. But the truth is, before this path can be taken, the chosen must admit to themselves that they are on a journey very different from what is common and they must agree to give themselves over to that journey. As journey stories tell us, the path is fraught with many difficulties and trials. The path of the storyteller does not include a retirement plan, paid holidays, health benefits or company cars. Instead it guarantees long hours, working holidays and weekends, a lot of unpaid travel, and the teller is often alone on the job. Of course, an audience enraptured, and the feeling that you have accomplished something magical and marvelous. Who wouldn’t want to be there? Yet, this journey isn’t something that happens overnight and for me, it was a complete surprise. I can’t even remember what it was that happened that day. I couldn’t tell you where I was or when in the year it was, but it was as if I woke from a long sleep. The light at the end of that tunnel was so bright and clear it was as if I should have known it all along. One day I just said “Self, you have got to choose. Storytelling or teaching. One or the other. Give yourself completely to something.”

The rest of the conversation may be familiar to you. Teachers don’t necessarily get paid a whole lot of money for the work they do and the hours they work. They teach the future doctors, lawyers...well, you know the speech. But they get paid more than I ever had or ever have since. They have health benefits, paid holidays, and retirement. I’ve only had paid benefits once or twice in my life and can never plan on a comfortable retirement. The teaching profession is fairly secure. Most teachers can say they will teach until they retire. If I chose storytelling, I knew I would never have any of those things. And secure? You never know where the next job will come from. Yet, I knew that day just as clearly as if I had been born to it, that my heart would be happiest as a storyteller and my soul would soar in that work. Story was there. It had come out of its hiding place and shown its face in the light of day. And it looked beautiful. But I was still doing the choosing, so I thought. You see, being chosen involves test of fire. I was

Contains “23 tales newly collected from children 5 to 10.” The authors rate each story by its “fearfulness” and gives an approximate age level range: 5-6, 7-8, 9-10. Some of the stories are familiar. All are written to tell easily but can be adapted and expanded to fill one’s own personal style. The Afterward contains advice for parents and teachers. Also by the authors: *Classic American Ghost Stories and Ghost Stories from the American South.*


Another “must-have” collection, Yolen presents more than 150 stories from all parts of the world, including stories of ghosts, lovers, tricksters, noodleheads and heroes, tales of wisdom; tall tales, fooling the devil tales, life and death tales; and stories of stories. One of the best story collections, some tales can be told as is, others need work to become tellable. There is no index. Also: *Gray Heroes: Elder Tales from Around the World.*

MORE ADVANCED FOLKTALE BOOKS

**Nature Stories**


Organized into ten themes such as Earth, Water, Sky, Plants, Fire, and Wisdom, the stories come from every continent. Includes suggestions for lessons inspired by the stories and additional extensions for further exploration.


Twenty-three Native American stories about creation, fire, earth, water, seasons, plants, and animals are presented along with discussion questions and activities. Tribe of origin is given. The authors have written several other books along the same lines: *Keepers of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children; Keepers of the Night: Native American Stories and Nocturnal Activities for Children.*

**Ethnic Story Collections**


This book contains seventeen tales about animals, kings, warriors and hunters, clever and foolish people, good and bad people, and how things came to be. Courlander is one of the foremost collectors of African folklore. Other books for children: *The Fire on the Mountain and Other Stories from Ethiopia; People of the Short Blue Corn: Tales and Legends of the Hopi Indians; The Tiger’s Whisper and Other Tales form Asia and the Pacific.*


DeSpain is a prolific writer of stories from around the world, written in a simple, uncomplicated manner, easy enough for kids to tell but probably should be embellished by the adult storyteller. This book includes stories from Mexico, Korea, Tibet, India, Russia, China, Fiji, Africa, and Japan. Also from August House: DeSpain: *The Books of Nine Lives Series; Twenty-two Splendid Tales to Tell from Around the World; Eleven Turtle Tales: Adventure Tales from Around the World; Eleven Nature Tales: A Multicultural Journey; The Emerald Lizard: fifteen Latin American Tales to Tell.*
Looking At Perspective

the story—but you do have one!

perspective that influences the course of
not yet identified the point of view or
comes out. At this stage, you have probably
from which you tell a story. When you first
willing to begin, by opening yourself, and
forgotten those words.

trust. You are but the vehicle.” I have never
done. You must open yourself up and
to think that what comes to you is your
private muse. It was a miracle and I feared
seemed to be delivered to me by my own
Creation Lake.” The words and images
me with one of my stories, “Reunion at

You are working with is the last one that

material runs right to the mother lode of

memory.

When you first begin to connect with
your stories, you might get the feeling that
they are in short supply—that the story
you are working with is the last one that
will ever come to you. This happened to
me with one of my stories, “Reunion at
Creation Lake.” The words and images
seemed to be delivered to me by my own
private muse. It was a miracle and I feared
it would never happen again.

I mentioned this to a professor once. He
looked at me and said, “You are arrogant
to think that what comes to you is your
doing. You must open yourself up and
trust. You are but the vehicle.” I have never
forgotten those words.

The creative process begins by being
willing to begin, by opening yourself, and
by being willing to not know how it will
turn out.

You can build trust in your creative
process by playing with the perspectives
from which you tell a story. When you first
find a personal story, you tell it the way it
comes out. At this stage, you have probably
not yet identified the point of view or
perspective that influences the course of
the story—you do have one!

Looking At Perspective

To broaden and deepen your story.

To trust your stories. You don’t always
know where a story is going to lead. So just
letting it rip, stumbling through it and
getting something down, is one way to
trust. Don’t even think about editing yet.
Start letting your raw material surface in
whatever form it takes. This valuable raw
material runs right to the mother lode of
memory.

When you first begin to connect with
your stories, you might get the feeling that
they are in short supply—that the story
you are working with is the last one that
will ever come to you. This happened to
me with one of my stories, “Reunion at
Creation Lake.” The words and images
seemed to be delivered to me by my own
private muse. It was a miracle and I feared
it would never happen again.

I mentioned this to a professor once. He
looked at me and said, “You are arrogant
to think that what comes to you is your
doing. You must open yourself up and
trust. You are but the vehicle.” I have never
forgotten those words.

The creative process begins by being
willing to begin, by opening yourself, and
by being willing to not know how it will
turn out.

You can build trust in your creative
process by playing with the perspectives
from which you tell a story. When you first
find a personal story, you tell it the way it
comes out. At this stage, you have probably
not yet identified the point of view or
perspective that influences the course of
the story—you do have one!

Looking At Perspective

To broaden and deepen your story.

To trust your stories. You don’t always
know where a story is going to lead. So just
letting it rip, stumbling through it and
getting something down, is one way to
trust. Don’t even think about editing yet.
Start letting your raw material surface in
whatever form it takes. This valuable raw
material runs right to the mother lode of
memory.

When you first begin to connect with
your stories, you might get the feeling that
they are in short supply—that the story
you are working with is the last one that
will ever come to you. This happened to
me with one of my stories, “Reunion at
Creation Lake.” The words and images
seemed to be delivered to me by my own
private muse. It was a miracle and I feared
it would never happen again.

I mentioned this to a professor once. He
looked at me and said, “You are arrogant
to think that what comes to you is your
doing. You must open yourself up and
trust. You are but the vehicle.” I have never
forgotten those words.

The creative process begins by being
willing to begin, by opening yourself, and
by being willing to not know how it will
turn out.

You can build trust in your creative
process by playing with the perspectives
from which you tell a story. When you first
find a personal story, you tell it the way it
comes out. At this stage, you have probably
not yet identified the point of view or
perspective that influences the course of
the story—you do have one!

Looking At Perspective

To broaden and deepen your story.
A small book packed full of "story starters" and memory joggers written by America’s foremost teller of personal stories. Gives ideas on how to build plot, structure stories, developing crisis, expanding descriptive skills, recovering memory, and telling personal stories.

Easy-to-learn stories that follow set patterns for such tale types as the chain story, cumulative tale, circle story, endless tale, good/bad, question, air castles and the catch story are accompanied by an explanation of each type of formula tale and mention of additional stories. Useful for creating your own stories.

Full of tried and true ideas and information on how to use storytelling in the family.

Lipman is considered the foremost authority on storytelling coaching, this book presents principles for giving and receiving good coaching help for classroom, stage and other venues. Also by Lipman: *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play*.

Contains ideas for making storytelling easy, spontaneous and affirming. Includes traditional stories in an easy to follow format, helpful hints and techniques. Focuses on storytelling for the youngest listeners, bedtime stories, expandable tales, scary stories, improvisational ideas, and family folklore.

Comprehensive book describing types of stories, how to find the right story for children of different ages and interests, how to adapt stories, create your own stories, improving your storytelling technique, and extending the story experience through music, poetry, puppetry etc. Includes several stories to illustrate types of stories.

The authors interviewed over 50 well known storytellers who are also teachers, librarians, clergymen, actors, musicians, and full-time professional storytellers. The book gives their opinions and advice on many topics such as: shaping stories from printed text; controlling stage fright; marketing; worst performance experiences; learning and rehearsing a story; creating original stories, making a program flow; copyright; using storytelling in the library; and recommendations for the "storyteller's bookshelf." Excellent source for anyone who is serious about telling stories.

Many excellent ideas for creating original stories.

A storytelling classic. Sawyer relates her own storytelling journey and vision. An inspiring book for the novice as well as experienced teller.

Schimmel, Nancy. *Just Enough to Make a Story: A Sourcebook for Storytelling*. Sister Choice Press. nancy@sisterschoice.com
Ideas for choosing and using stories in various settings. Includes several stories including "The Tailor," as well as two paper-folding stories. Annotated bibliography.

Step-by-step guide for organizing and running student storytelling clubs including activities, story learning process, coaching and fund raising ideas, and a extensive annotated list of resources. A "must-have" for anyone working with young storytellers.

Written by Northlands' vice-president and containing a chapters written by Northlands' members Mike Mann, Karen Wollscheid, and Margie Reisman, this book was written for the "faith based" community. It uses bible stories for its instruction, but can be applied to any traditional story. John presents a simple and accessible method for those interested in using storytelling in any part of their lives.

Judy Sima is a storyteller and middle school librarian from Southfield, MI. She is also the Michigan Representative for the Northlands Storytelling Network Board of Directors. She is currently co-writing a book on youth storytelling. You can contact her at "judsim@hotmail.com".
A small book packed full of "story starters" and memory joggers written by America's foremost teller of personal stories. Gives ideas on how to build plot, structure stories, developing crisis, expanding descriptive skills, recovering memory, and telling personal stories.

Dailey, Sheila. *Putting the World in a Nutshell: The Art of the Formula Tale*. Wilson. 1994. Easy-to-learn stories that follow set patterns for such tale types as the chain story, cumulative tale, circle story, endless tale, good/bad, question, air castles and the catch story are accompanied by an explanation of each type of formula tale and mention of additional stories. Useful for creating your own stories.


Mooney, Bill and David Holt. *The Storyteller's Guide: Storytellers Share Advice for the Classroom, Boardroom, Showroom, Pulpit, and Center Stage*. August House. 1996. The authors interviewed over 50 well known storytellers who are also teachers, librarians, clergymen, actors, musicians, and full-time professional storytellers. The book gives their opinions and advice on many topics such as: shaping stories from printed text; controlling stage fright; marketing; worst performance experiences; learning and rehearsing a story; creating original stories, making a program flow; copyright; using storytelling in the library; and recommendations for the "storyteller's bookshelf." Excellent source for anyone who is serious about telling stories.


