

CONNIE *Regan-Blake*

So you are ready to tell your first story . . .

- Begin with traditional stories (398.2 section of your local library.) The old stories have the foundation and structure already built in. Look for the tales that reflect your *own* heritage. Your knowledge of that culture brings an extra richness and depth to the telling.
- When learning folktales, picture the landscape of the story - the setting and characters -rather than memorizing words on a page. You may forget the exact words but the images can carry you along.
- Use your 5 senses in the telling. *'Know'* the color of the trees in the forest. *'Smell'* the fried corn-pone cooking. *'Hear'* the wind whipping across the mountain peak. These are not just 'words' but rather the energy of the story.
- Seek out the elders in your family and community, the true treasures on earth - and listen. They are the living libraries! And you will be finely rewarded: sometimes with their personal stories and often with remembered traditional stories. Developing your listening skills is integral to becoming a good storyteller.
- Listen to and observe other storytellers. This is a great way to learn about different styles, pacing, techniques — but don't copy. Just tell in your own voice and natural dialect. Learn stories that you enjoy – the ones that compliment your personality
- Before you print your business cards and quit your day job, first hone your skills. Get as much practice as you can, in many different situations. Try the stories out on friends and family. Then volunteer to tell stories. Senior citizen centers, children's hospitals, libraries, and child care centers often welcome new tellers.
- For teachers; you have a ready-made audience. Your own classroom is the perfect place to test out stories and to practice. As your skills develop and you become more comfortable with telling, you can use these same tips for teaching children to learn and tell stories.
- Don't think about the number of stories you can rattle off, but rather the quality of your telling. Learn your first story very well; then add to your repertoire. An 82-year-old storytelling teacher suggested learning one story a year. She said, "Just think how many stories you will know by the time you are my age."
- And remember, when you are telling a story, you are giving your listeners a gift and they want you to succeed. So let go of nervousness – breathe and enjoy!

Storyteller