

Teen Tellers Speak Out: Leaders of Now & Future

By Rachel Hedman



Storytelling thrives when one person passes the torch to another. Some storytellers worry that, at any moment, the torch of leadership may be dropped due to a generation gap since it seems most storytellers are 50 years of age or older. These fears are unfounded when you look upon the amazing youth finalists at the [National Youth Storytelling Showcase](#) and the trail-blazing youth tellers forming storytelling clubs.

Four outstanding teenagers—Rixon Lane of South Carolina, Stephanie Strauss of Texas, Chloe Clunis of Florida and Jeremy Evans of Florida—demonstrated five key areas on how to keep stories burning within other youth tellers during the Smoky Mountain Storytelling Festival on February 3, 2007. Please see bios of presenters at bottom.

Five areas to have stories burn within others:

1. **Explaining “Storytelling” to Peers**
2. **Finding Stories**
3. **Searching for Guilds/Clubs/Coaches**
4. **Sharing/Marketing the Storytelling Opportunity**
5. **Building Positive Self-Perception of Telling Personal Tales**

Explaining "Storytelling" to Peers

The storytelling community tends to avoid defining storytelling, though this is something that Strauss, Clunis, Evans, and Lane find imperative to connect with their peers. Strauss tells other classmates, “Storytelling has the drama of theatre, the vibrancy and color of a painting, the physicality of sculpting, and the reality of photography. Storytelling is giving something personal to the audience.”



Clunis felt it best to show someone what storytelling is before there can be any understanding. She has a “30-second commercial” in which she recites a poem with the facial expressions, gestures, and voice inflections often found in storytelling.

Evans said, “Storytelling is the weaving of images through the mind.” Lane added that when watching TV or a movie—no matter what your imagination power—you couldn’t change the images. Lane continued, “Storytelling is magical—I can’t think of another art form where the audience is so involved.”

Finding Stories

Once youth are hooked on the potential and excitement of the art, then it’s time to find stories. Strauss tells mostly poignant stories, but likes to be prepared with ones that fall into the humor category, too. Sometimes the audience needs to laugh and sometimes the audience needs to think. Often, an audience needs to experience both emotions.

Clunis queried, “What type of a storyteller are you? What types of stories are you comfortable telling?” A “comfortable” story is one that has drawn you to it.

Evans admitted that pretty much all of his stories are funny except for a couple serious ones. He often divides the types of stories into two groups: stories good for 2nd graders and younger and stories good for 3rd graders and up (to include senior citizens).

Searching for Guilds/Clubs/Coaches

At some point, youth tellers will want to find a support group and/or a mentor so as to hone skills. Sometimes, a local storytelling club is not available. Clunis recommended searching within the school. “Find the best teacher and then plead, beg, perform—

whatever you need to do—to convince them to be a club sponsor.”



When convincing other youth to join, Clunis uses three selling points: members will feel the magic of storytelling, members will be able to travel to tell at venues, and members could get paid. The “paid” part is always told under the breath with a couple winks.

Strauss acknowledged that she lived in the middle of nowhere. The club gathering was small yet had a positive atmosphere that anything anyone did was great.

Some youth tellers turn to coaches. “People feel they need coaches,” remarked Lane. When thinking of a coach, Lane pictured a woman who “radiated drama” and feared that what the coach would want him to do would be different than what he, the teller, wanted to do. Evans agreed that coaches could be controlling and a “coach would want me to listen to them.” Evans smiled and continued, “Now, if I don’t like something, I don’t listen to it!”

Sharing/Marketing the Storytelling Opportunity

For the serious youth teller, it is never too early to have a website and to have business

cards. Lane is in process of creating a website with the help of a friend. He advised, "You need people to know about you if you're going to get a job."

Yet, nothing can replace the power of word-of-mouth. Evans noted that librarians talk to each other, whether on a local level or at events such as young author conferences or library conferences. To build rapport with librarians, Clunis joked that she returned her books on time. She knew Miss Margaret the Librarian since she was nine-years-old. Later, this relationship led to performances.



Strauss recommended that a youth teller should become familiar with the newspaper Arts section and discover the staff writer who would cover storytelling events. She also encouraged to find the character education coordinators in the schools. Strauss found these people a smart alliance and said, "I was the peanut butter of their bread and we stuck together."

Building Positive Self-Perception of Telling Personal Tales

Youth can have confidence in their marketing skills until it comes to selling themselves on the idea of telling personal tales. Folktales, fairy tales, or stories told by national storytellers seem easier to perform.

Lane observed that new youth tellers feel that their lives are not interesting enough to include in storytelling programs. At the 2006 National Youth Storytelling Showcase, Lane told about his experiences in Little League baseball. This invitation proved to Lane that he had stories within him that the audience wanted to hear.

Strauss added, "You don't have to rake your brain like older storytellers." She noticed that national storytellers often told stories that happened to them as eight or eleven-year-olds. With fresh memories, youth tellers have the advantage of telling stories that occurred the day or month before.

Strauss, Clunis, Evans, and Lane are four teenagers who continue to carry torches of leadership to their peers. May the flame of hope burn bright within all our youth.

Biographies of Presenters: (order left to right in pictures)

Rixon Lane is a 14-year-old storyteller from Woodruff, South Carolina with storytelling experiences since the age of three. He has been a featured teller for several years in South Carolina's Stone Soup Storytelling Festival. On his 10th birthday, Rixon won his age division in the National Youth Storytelling Olympics, leading to his participation in the Youthful Voices performances at the 2002 National Storytelling Festival. In July 2004, he

was a keynote speaker at the National Storytelling Conference in Bellingham, Washington.

[Stephanie Strauss](#) , graduating senior and class salutatorian, is from Midland, Texas. She has been telling for eight years and is annually a featured teller at the Celebrations of Light Festival. She performed in the 2003 Youthful Voices concert at the National Storytelling Festival and was invited to perform there again in 2006. Also in 2006, she was honored as the National Youth Storytelling Showcase Grand Torchbearer. She hopes to bring storytelling to the Ivy League next year at Harvard.

[Chloe Clunis](#) is in the 8th grade and was the 2005 National Youth Storytelling Showcase Grand Torchbearer. She later performed at the National Storytelling Festival in 2006 and made special appearances at the Florida Storytelling Camp and the Ocala Storytelling Festival. In September 2006, she served as a youth teller ambassador in China. She would like to be a journalist and own a chain of bookstores.

[Jeremy Evans](#) recently graduated high school in Weirsdale, Florida. His appreciation for storytelling began with his dad's wild bedtime stories. Listening to people like David Holt and Bobby Norfolk added fuel to the fire. At the age of 12 he told his first story. From that time, the best part of storytelling has been his ability to make the audience laugh. He is a member of the Ocala Storytelling Guild. In 2004 Jeremy became the National Youth Storytelling Showcase Grand Torchbearer.

Until we tell again,

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