

The Country Hears Young Voices

By Kevin Cordi

NSN Youth Telling SIG Co-Chair

www.kevincordi.com

Across the country little voices are becoming louder, clearer, crisper, and better yet, heard. It is amazing to see the youth renaissance that is occurring with storytelling. Children and young adults this year have been telling stories and Tellabration! has added another dimension, a Pledge to Build Youth Tellabration! Across the Country.

Earlier the NSN SIG Group for Youth Telling issued a call to encourage youth storytellers either to create a Youth Tellabration or to include kids and /or teens in a current Tellabration, the response has been overwhelming. Some groups have already included young people in their Tellabration. We are still registering groups that have enlisted youth for the first time this year. At present there are over 25 groups to date and growing.

Across America kids were invited to share their stories. As we peer into the lens of America during National Storytelling Week, join with me and take a glimpse at the wonder and joy of young voices being lifted.

The Ocali Storytelling Guild in Florida had 11 tellers with two youth, Cathy Moore (12) and Jeremy Evans (13.) Guild member Don Leonard said “Both of these young tellers discovered our storytelling guild by attending last years Tellabration and both have been active members of our guild ever since.”

Jeremy told his version of “Big Mouth Frog” using a jaw harp. Cathy was selected last year in Florida’s Inaugural Youth Storytelling Contest.

Leonard stated “Over the last five years the guild has made it a practice to spotlight youth telling stories...but the last three years we have also sprinkled their performances among the national and state adult talents. These young tellers were a big hit!

In Las Vegas, Nevada, Lajadje Sebela created a Tellabration featuring youth with surprising results. A group of 8 young women told stories but also danced a beautiful Langston Hughes story poem. Adding to the event, three young children, ages 3, 4, and 6 danced an “adorable” Chinese folk tale in costume. Sebela said, “They were great! And the hit of the show.”

In one performance they bussed 350 children and even with an unexpected visit of a well-known rap star named “Gun U Winem,” the kids were “attentive as they could be” for the Tellabration performance that followed.

In South Carolina, Storyteller Thom Bristow shared a magic moment at their show.

“A truly magic moment occurred when young Rixon Lane was introduced. His grandfather is a member of our guild in Columbia and he was our MC for the evening.

There were many smiles around the room as he introduced his grandson trying not to bust with pride.”

Thom says we need to act now to reach young kids and storytelling.

“We need to find ways of not just getting the young stars with special talent to tell but we need to encourage telling in the classroom and Sunday school class. I have seen young people up in front of an audience looking awkward and having no fun.” He goes on, “The point I would like to make it that teaching and encouraging these young people have made the difference.”

In Chicago, Illinois, Velma Gladney, after taking charge of story hour at the church, she created a Tellabration where kids shared Bible stories and folktales. She shared that, “the kids felt very good about themselves and wants to know when will the next event be.” From this event she said, they now have a youth storytelling workshop each week in the month of February.

In Northern Colorado, Nora Heaton said the magic was provided at her Tellabration by one of the sixth grade student listeners who said, “I know most of these kids and they are sort of shy. I appreciate what it took for them to stand in front of us and tell their stories.” The 7 tellers soaked up this recognition and stood a little taller in their peer’s eyes.”

In California Southbay Storyteller Joy Swift said they don’t call their youth, youth storytellers, rather “just make them part of our storytelling group.” She said a 14 year old Mia Lieberman, 14, not only told at Tellabration but now tells professionally in schools and special fairs.

Elsewhere in California, Storyteller Elizabeth Gibson said she offered to personally coach a young teenager named Evan Kendig and he surprised her and “accepted without hesitation.” She said her coaching took a great deal of time but “Evan performed like a real pro.” She said she never thought of including teens in Tellabration but when encouraged to try it, she is glad she did.

“The Arts bring joy to our lives. It has been a privilege to share the joy of the art of storytelling with a young man that is still discovering the possibilities of the world. It is not something I would have thought of doing. I do recommend the experience to all Tellabration producers.”

Let us heed Elizabeth’s advice; our young people are itching to tell. We just need to remind them we are listening.

For more help with working with youth feel free to join the Y.E.S. (Youth, Educators, and Storytellers) SIG and visit their website at LIST SITE.

Included on their site is a longer version of this article, an article on How to Enlist Kids in Tellabration, and contact numbers.