

## Youth Storytelling: Building a Legacy

By: Kevin Cordi

In light of the continual pressures that youth face in the media and their homes it is time to teach them something they can believe in the power of storytelling. Ask any teenager or young child what they want the most and in some way they will respond, "to be noticed."

One of my students Lacy, Junior, returned from the National Storytelling Conference last year in Kansas City she wrote to me about the experience.

She wrote, "Yet after everything that happened at the conference, it was not the experience of traveling far from home or receiving a standing ovation that really changed the way I thought of myself. By getting involved in spreading the word about youth storytelling, I was changing my world. When we had adults come up to us and say that we had inspired them, we knew then that we could make a difference. And when I had people who I respected, Storytellers, not only hear me but listen to what I had to say, I knew I had a voice."

Children and teens need to be heard; storytellers are the perfect people to listen to them. For over 25 years storytelling has been undergoing a renaissance, people's attitudes about storytelling are changing with each new day. However, it has only been as late that storytelling has found a voice with our youth. For years they have been listening to stories, but now there is a demand by the youth to tell them.

What happens when youth grow with story? Just ask people like adult teller Antonio Sacre, listen to the words of student tellers like Jessica Carleton who is training with Donald Davis or Katie Latimer who works with Jay O Callahan. Donald has shared with me that working with youth is a whole new experience, but an enjoyable one. He and his wife believe the combination is invaluable for passing on the legacy.

Of all the knowledge we have richly earned with age, what do youth desire most from us? The answer is simple, stories. Stories of long ago, stories of today, stories of far away and not so far away. Stories that chill their bones and soothe their souls. Their stories of how they saw long ago and see not so far away. Stories of their worlds. Stories that make us remember it is ok to be a kid.

This is why Professional Storyteller Don Doyle and myself have volunteered to Co-chair a committee on Youth Storytelling for the National Storytelling Membership Association. With the expert help of storytellers and story teachers Rives Collins of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and Dr. Flora Joy of East Tennessee State University, we are trying to build programs and gather insight about what is needed to "pass on the legacy of storytelling."

We need your help! If you know someone who works with youth or you simply wanted to be involved in the committee, please contact us. If you have information, articles, or recommendations, please let us know. We are in the process of gathering an intensive contact list that can network with each other about youth programming in storytelling. We are also working on cementing a place for storytelling classes in our public schools.

We know that many guilds have used featured youth members in Tellabitations, meetings, and concerts across the world. We want to hear from you. We want to help students learn that stories serve many purposes and by becoming tellers they can also become healers, listeners, believers, and yes, even dreamers.

You will also have a chance to add your voice when Don Doyle and I chair a panel discussion at the National Youth Storytelling Membership Association Conference in July. Distinguished teachers of storytelling and professional storytellers will have a healthy discussion on how to build youth storytellers. Some of the speakers that are scheduled are:

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Kevin D. Cordi, a California high school storyteller and teacher that has a job as a full time teaching storytelling classes. He had a high school, now 2 middle school storytelling troupes, and just included elementary students in the program.

Dr. Don Doyle, a well-known Arizona Storyteller and teacher that actively works with youth and Professor Emeritus of theater and storytelling.

"Sam" A storyteller and teacher that uses storytelling at her school the Phoenix Day School for the Deaf.

Judy Sima, A Professional Storyteller and teacher that runs her own storytelling middle school troupe in Michigan. Kathy Pallermo, A California high school storyteller and teacher that runs her own storytelling high school club and class.

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