
Concluding Our Story of Stories

The final session of "Story: From Fireplace to Cyberspace" ended late on a sunny Tuesday morning with one last song and story from Joseph Sobol, and Janice Del Negro's welcome words to attendees, "Go forth. Eat lunch. Tell stories." And so they did. And so we have, in editing and shaping these proceedings, which is the story of stories from fireplace to cyberspace.

To some, stories and storytelling belong to a distant time of stone knives and petroglyphs. Hunter-gatherers had stories. Primitive societies had stories. And storytelling requires a wood fire and a dark night. But of course stories may be found not only at the family dinner table or with the last survivor of the Titanic. Stories are also in the next booth at a fast food restaurant, in the bleachers during the seventh-inning stretch, and in the classrooms (and in the teachers' lounge) of an elementary school. Stories may even be heard while standing in the ticket line for the latest Disney animated feature. In our interest in child welfare, we often forget that children are not simply passive receptacles for whatever treasure or trash the adult world throws at them, but are lively agents who are continually interacting with their environment. Children actively create meaning as readers, viewers, and listeners. And so, of course, do adults. To use one more technological image, stories appear to be hardwired into the human psyche.

The traditional oral narrative, which reaches only those within the range of the storyteller's voice, can seem like an endangered species in the media-rich (and often content-poor) environment of contemporary U.S. society. The reverence we feel for traditional stories can cause us to try to preserve them just as they are, unchanged, a precious treasure to be kept secluded from the hustle and bustle of life in a technologically advanced society that seems to worship the newest trend, the latest gizmo, the densest hard drive and the most capacious memory. This

enshrinement, however, can become a mindless dogmatism in the cause of the real Cinderella, the true Jack and the Beanstalk, the original Anansi that ignores the enduring and fluid nature of stories themselves.

Paradoxically, stories are both as fragile as orchids and as hearty as dandelions. They call forth our protective urges, yet they spring up like the weeds we strive to eradicate. Stories endure and adapt and grow and flourish. Stories survive.

CJ