

From The Editor: On Storytelling

We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling. ~ Jimmy Neil Smith, Director of the International Storytelling Center

I love a good story, both as the recipient of a well-told tale and as a sometimes over-eager storyteller. Stories comfort and sustain me. Because of that, and because I am well aware of our impermanence, I recently bought a voice recorder in hopes of preserving some of the stories we tell and re-tell in my own family. Someday, I predict these recordings may well be treasure.

Surely by now our older grandkids can recite verbatim most of the stories they've heard from us. Yet, usually, they are still happy to curl up and listen one more time. I feel a need to preserve that gift.

"Tell us a story, Grandpa!" It's a refrain we hear, especially from the younger ones. Grandpa's tales entertain with silly, personal touches like, "And then Beckett walked right up and pet that old skunk, even though we said, 'Don't do it, Beckett! Don't do it!'" Cue the howls of laughter, even though we know what's coming next and it might be just a little over-exaggerated! But that's half the fun! Stories, in all their forms, make memories.

On that note, I was sorry to miss the connections, stories, and memories you all may have made at the fall MCDES conference, especially when I read the evaluation comments. The attendees' reviews were full of statements such as "Ken Doka was a wonderful storyteller," and "Ken effectively used stories to illustrate rituals." To be fair, another comment did say, "He sometimes used too much storytelling," but conversely, another wrote, "The stories throughout the day made it powerful."

Personally, for me, stories make any topic come alive. They open my heart in a way I can't explain. Of course, statistics and research are valuable, necessary teaching tools, and must be included, but a well-told story connects and stays. So, indeed, I missed being there to see all of you, and I am especially sad I missed all those stories!!

Stories this past year, in all genres, seem especially prevalent and rich. Maybe we're searching for meaningful ways to come together. Recent movies, like "Midway" and "Harriet," and even "Judy" dramatized (with some license to embellish) historical facts using memorable cinematography and music. Television's use of documentaries to recount historical topics is certainly storytelling at it's finest! I couldn't get enough of this fall's Ken Burn's series of "The History of Country Music." Frankly, what narratives are better than country music! And then there's all those Ted Talks and podcasts bombarding us these days. I propose we're just plain hungry for stories.

I hope this issue of *Coalition News* might also draw us closer. Thanks, as always, to those who share time and talent to tell personal stories. I especially love the essays we receive which, in their telling, teach, inspire and offer hope. Thanks to Charlie Greenman for the beautiful tribute and story of his father's death. The lessons Charlie offers are tender and lasting! Thanks to Dorthy Geis scholar, Jacklin Steege, too, for her insightful review of the fall conference. I especially enjoyed the connections she made about the topic of disaster response in relation to her own work at the Red Cross. Thank you, Jacklin!

Don't miss the question posed this issue by Vice Chair, Florence Wright who asks, "What is your 'elevator speech?'" How do you succinctly explain what and why you do what you do? (Submit your stories to sdardis@aol.com. Next deadline is Feb. 1st.) And one last thanks to Kelly Grosklags for sharing stories and lessons she's learned in her work with hospice, oncology, and social work. Once again, well-told stories illustrate and teach. Thank you, Kelly.

Mark your calendars now for the next MCDES conference on Friday, April 24th, 2020. Clinical psychologist Wendy Lichtenhal, who specializes in helping cancer patients and their families, will discuss her experiences and research regarding "Meaning Centered Grief Therapy." Remember to share your organization's upcoming happenings and/or reviews, of death and dying-themed conferences, books, or movies, for future issues of *Coalition News*.

So we continue to share stories that sustain us in many ways. Minnesota's own Kate DiCamillo, in *The Tale of Despereaux*, writes, "Stories are light. Light is precious in a world so dark. Begin at the beginning. Tell...a story. Make some light."

And there it is. Tell your stories; unite in the telling and the listening. Thank you for the light you generate in living authentically. Thanks, too, for the good work you continue to do, so well, for so many. Happy holidays and a blessed New Year, filled with meaningful connections, stories, light and hope.



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