Once Upon a Journey

Travelling gives rise to stories, and stories inspire journeys in a never-ending cycle that fuels mankind’s drive to reach new lands and explore the unknown. This is true in every culture and in every country because this truth is buried deep into our own wandering hearts.

This year’s Scottish International Storytelling Festival follows in the footsteps of nomads, explorers, travellers, pilgrims and shamans, all of them wandering storytellers who were often despised and persecuted, but carried the great myths and legends of world culture throughout Scotland and internationally.

The Festival is about journeys that link Scotland to the rest of the World, Scotland’s own journeys, and the universal human instinct to travel. The programme traverses continents, nations, regions and islands, but equally important to any journey is home, the place we leave for adventure and the place we return to at the end of the journey. This is why the Festival also explores Edinburgh as a unique city of stories, with a strengthened partners’ programme of events throughout the city.

Among the many Festival strands to explore, it is worth mentioning Open Hearth, a programme that will showcase the best of Scotland’s storytellers alongside international guests from Canada, Norway, Botswana and India.

Inner Journeys will explore a different kind of voyage, undertaken by those who have travelled inner routes on their journeys to healing, while Storytellers’ Journeys is an exciting series of events commissioned especially for the Festival. Scottish storytellers will explore Scotland’s influential explorers and share their tales with fascinating insights and details. Audiences will be treated to the adventures of John Muir, Martin Martin, John Rae, David Livingstone, Mary Slessor and many more.

So come join us this October, let’s gather around the open hearth while the night is still young to share traveller’s tales and songs, before the journey calls us on to another day, a different road.

(continued on page 2)
When she and her husband Andrew moved to Perthshire in 1960, few could have been better placed to make a difference to the world of Scottish tradition.

Sheila spanned the world of song-making, tradition and academia, gaining a PhD in Folklore from Stirling University and recording traveller storytellers, particularly the Stewarts of Blairgowrie and Willie MacPhee, then tirelessly working to give back what she had recorded as a storyteller. Her day job was teaching, but there was no division between that and the other aspects of her life, so her students were treated to stories from traditional storytellers, often in the guid Scots tung. Her publications have become prime sources of story world-wide and include *King o the Black Art* (1987), *The Sang’s the Thing* (1992), *Come Gie’s a Sang* (1995 and The Last of the Tinsmiths: *The Life of Willie MacPhee* (2006).

Nell Hannah, now aged 93, is fond of telling people how she came to the folk scene and began to sing and tell stories at the age of 69 - she was on holiday in California when somebody asked her if she knew Sheila and Andrew. She didn’t, but as soon as she got back home to Perth she phoned them, thus opening a wonderful new world that changed her life, for she has been singing and telling stories ever since.

My own most memorable blether with Sheila was in Balquhidder by a blazing fire, plenty tea, home-baking and a dram. Andrew, Willie and Bella MacPhee, my son Martyn, my mother and her brother were also there. Suddenly a power cut left us in the firelight - but no one wished the return of power, for we found ourselves in the most perfect atmosphere to begin another ceilidh. Such memories fill me with lasting gratitude for everything Sheila was, and is, to storytellers the world over.

Margaret Bennett
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The folklore and legends of Inverclyde have been an inspiration for us for a long time.
From bogles and river monsters to pirates and witches, we’ve collected, reinterpreted, retold and published our local stories for almost fifteen years now.
However, it has only been in the last year that we have been able to fully get back to our roots and encourage the *telling of Inverclyde’s stories*.

Our *Tales of the Oak* project is funded by Heritage Lottery and aims to collect and share some of our old stories and legends with new audiences, but also to support a new storytelling club in Greenock. The club is based in The Dutch Gable House, one of the oldest buildings in Greenock on one of the oldest streets in the town, an excellent and appropriate setting for stories from long ago.

It was there that storyteller Allison Galbraith met with the group to take us through the basics of storytelling and beyond. By the end of the first evening everyone was telling and sharing stories. By week two we were learning longer tales for our own storytelling ceilidh. Allison hailes from the area originally, so she was perfect for the task, with her knowledge of the town’s stories.

The project is still in its early stages but we are really encouraged by the response so far. People who have joined the group are not professional storytellers and neither are we. No-one is here to do formal presentations or give a performance; it’s not a book reading or a drama group.

We want to draw inspiration from the tales that folk used to tell around firesides, and we want to help restore an old oral tradition by creating a new living tradition. If this also interests you, please get in touch!

Magic Torch are a volunteer-led heritage group based in Greenock, Inverclyde. You can find out more about our projects and stories at www.talesoftheoak.co.uk or contact me for more information.

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The *Tales of the Oak* project is also retelling local stories through other mediums, such as the illustrated children’s book *Wee Nasties* (which can be downloaded at www.scribd.com/doc/146508341/Wee-Nasties) and also the 64 page 1950s style horror comic to be launched this September. You can see some pages and panels from the artwork on our project blog.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund
Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, HLF invests in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 26,000 projects, allocating over £4 billion across the UK and more than £1/2 billion across Scotland.

www.hlf.org.uk
What’s a story?

At the theatre, the curtain rises, we see a man and a woman on stage. Immediately we wonder if they will get together. Immediately we are intrigued by that age-old scenario, whether that is what the story turns out to be or not.

We all love stories. They help us make sense of ourselves, others and the world. But what are they? What is a story? It has a beginning, a middle and an end. Yes, but so has a couch. Which is hardly a story, although there could be a story about it.

Whether fact or fiction, stories tell of things that have happened to somebody or to something. In their simplest form, stories are journeys. A certain path is followed, decisions are made. Those decisions have consequences, often unforeseen, that steer the journey. How such consequences are dealt with will either conclude the story, or propel it onwards into further uncharted territory.

“When you’re telling somebody a story, you’re really taking them on a journey” Stanley Robertson

To make any story a satisfying one, as well as telling of the challenges of the physical journey, the hero needs to undergo some change in character or attitude as a result of such an undertaking. If the hero completely transforms his beliefs in the course of his journey, that can be even more satisfying. Thus, a mental and emotional journey has also taken place.

In every story the hero wants something - e.g. the girl, the boy, money, position, win at something, save the town, defeat the enemy, travel to another place, new experience, solve a mystery, learn something, resist temptation, rescue someone, improve their character etc. However, if the hero was instantly granted their desire the story would end there, just as it was beginning. It is the twists and turns that flout hopes for a while that make the story.

“My characters shall have, after a little difficulty, all that they desire” Jane Austen

Another important point is that the audience needs to be able to identify with the hero, with what he or she is trying to achieve, otherwise they will lose interest in the story. When thinking about the hero and what will drive the story, it is extremely useful to identify with what she or he is feeling.

Probably the most difficult aspect of creating stories is how to structure them. Tradition has passed down to us archetypical story structures, and there are so many ways these motifs combine and recombine, often mixing with the modern, to create countless new stories. The more we are aware of different story structures, the more options we have for hanging our ideas on. Here are some modern examples of story structures as used by certain programme makers.

**Sit-com**

1st Act

Set up the problem.

2nd Act

Through trying to come up with a solution to the problem, the situation becomes a whole lot worse, even though the solution may seem at first to be ideal.

3rd Act

Resolve the situation.

I personally enjoy a happy ending, and generally feel cheated if I don’t get one, just because the writer wanted to wrong-foot his or her audience at the finish. However, story endings need not be happy to be satisfying. Perhaps the story is a weepy about unrequited love; or perhaps the hero, in the course of the story, has gone over to the dark side, and so we relish seeing him getting his comeuppance. Whatever the ending, it should suit the purpose of the story. And only in that way will the audience go away happy.

James Spence
wizzardpoet@gooagmail.com

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Doctor Who

They land in some place. The planet/place is not how it should be. Often the Doctor and his assistants somehow end up splitting into two parties to try to understand what has happened (often one party has been told to stay put in the TARDIS and not to leave under any circumstance whatsoever). This gives two strands of story going on and many rescue/escape opportunities.

Babylon 5

In structuring each story about the Babylon 5 space station, the writing team would ask themselves these three questions: what does a person want? How far will they go to get it? How far will someone go to stop them?
The ABCs of Storytelling: tips, techniques and reflections

B

is for Blogging and Breathing

What does 'blogging' and 'breathing' have to do with the art of storytelling? To begin with, both are instrumental in helping you to communicate; and both will ensure the vitality of your storytelling.

Let’s begin with blogs. For those who don’t know what a blog is, think of a website where an individual can express her or his opinion, offer information and news on a regular basis - often monthly, weekly and even daily - and invite readers to interact.

Unlike professional websites which can cost a lot and require experts to build, a blog is a relatively simple and inexpensive (if not free) solution which you can set up and administer yourself. Companies like Google and Wordpress offer their users free blogs with adequate space and functions to keep any storyteller happy.

So, does a storyteller need a blog? An increasing number of storytellers certainly think so. But it depends what you want to do. If you are interested in building an online relationship with your audience, then a blog can be a great way of reaching a large audience over a wide area. It’s like an online resumé or CV, but so much more. You can keep an up-to-date schedule of upcoming gigs, post photographs and videos of past ones, and links to your favourite sites or downloads. You can also invite comments from your fans and followers and, with some extra help, sell your story products, like CDs, books, courses, and audio file downloads.

Interested? Check out Google’s Blogger (www.blogger.com) and Wordpress (www.wordpress.com). Both offer instructional videos to get you started and both have very helpful user forums to answer your questions and offer advice.

Now, let’s turn to our breath.

Firstly, from a hygienic perspective, ensure that your breath is pleasant smelling. Nothing worse than being up close and personal with an audience and turning them off your story with the foul breath of a dragon. Lots of remedies to be found there. Mine is mint leaves and avoiding coffee before a gig.

Secondly, give attention to your breathing. Singers, actors and storytellers all learn to breathe effectively so as to serve their texts and vocal delivery. Your voice is your instrument so learn to play it well with breath control. When I don’t pay attention, I invariably run out of breath before the end of the line or section I’m speaking. When I do, I’m able to pace my delivery, giving emphasis where I want. Breathe effectively and your characters and story will live.

Breathing from your diaphragm will give you greater control and tap into your ‘fire in the belly’ energy. Relax and let your voice resonate. Try experimenting, moving the sound of your voice around in your body - from the belly, the chest, the throat, mouth and nasal cavity. Warm up with vowel sound exercises, then consonants.

If working with a partner, try tossing a ball or beanbag back and forth to one another in time with the sounds you are making. Modulate between loud and soft, fast and slow. Move your body in response to the sounds you make. Have fun.

Finally, give thought to how your characters might breathe. Consider their emotional and physical state and breathe accordingly. Imagine your voice, your entire body as a finely-tuned instrument. Pay attention to your breathing and audiences will respond to the music of your storytelling. Then you can follow up your performance by inviting them to comment on your blog, learn more about your work and find out when they can see and hear you again.

Michael Williams

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NEXT TIME

C is for Characterisation and Coaching

Michael Williams is a professional storyteller, story coach and narrative consultant to community and corporate organisations. He is also the host of The Teller and the Tale radio show for Blues and Roots Radio. More at http://michaelwilliamsstoryteller.blogspot.com
I recently had the privilege of working with a group of physicists from Heriot-Watt University’s Institute of Photonics and Quantum Sciences on a full-day workshop at the Scottish Storytelling Centre. We began by exploring what got them interested in science.

For some, it was the passion displayed by family and friends. For others, it was something more numinous, captured by the words mystery, imagination, distant, unseen, and magic. Already, the connections between science and storytelling were evident.

One thing that all participants had in common was a desire to communicate more engagingly and entertainingly with the general public, as well as other scientists. They also anticipated that learning to tell stories better would help them with grant applications, stimulate their creativity and help to cement their sense of professional identity.

But storytelling can also be incredibly powerful in helping with the core activity of every scientist. According to Bruner, the development of theories in science is a narrative task. That is to say, scientists think with stories when they interpret the results of their experiments and develop explanations for what they have observed. Be it at macroscopic level or at the quantum level of electrons, gravitons, photons or their even tinier and more elusive wave-like and particle-like brethren, being able to think with metaphors is part of the job description.

And the quantum physicists at that workshop indeed proved to be gifted with metaphor and story.

After spending the morning in the library learning how to structure memorable stories and warming-up by telling each other’s stories of origins, the physicists spread out across the Storytelling Centre so that they could concentrate on crafting stories about their own areas of research. At the end of the day we gathered to share tales of qubits and vindictive cats, quantum guitars and quantum computers, vanishing balls and entangled cities, proving that stories really can take you anywhere.

Alette Willis
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Dr Alette Willis is a Chancellor’s Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. She routinely uses storytelling skills in her day job as well as in her volunteer work at places such as the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. To hear her tell a story developed in a previous collaboration with quantum physicists go to: https://soundcloud.com/once-upon-a-universe

Scotland’s a Blether!

Here is a snapshot of some of the storytelling groups and clubs across the country. Make sure you are on the Centre’s mailing list to get monthly updates on storytelling clubs and groups in your area.

1. Tayside and North Fife – Blether Tay-gither
The club meets every month on the last Tuesday in The Burgh Coffee House, Dundee. Our tellers come from a wide range of backgrounds, from professional storytellers to folk who just want to listen, and from students to OAPs. In the past six months or so, as well as individual storytelling projects in schools, nurseries and other venues, we have been involved in family storytelling events at Baxter Park in Dundee, Cupar Children’s Gala, West Fest in Dundee and, in collaboration with Dundee Contemporary Arts, the Blue Skies Festival and Serendipity Project, as well as a couple of local fundraising events. We are looking forward to being involved in Cupar Arts Festival and the Scottish International Storytelling Festival later in the year. We are always looking for new members and new ideas, and we pride ourselves on being a friendly and supportive group, so why not come along and join us?
Contact Sheila Kinninmonth
sheila@blethertaygither.org.uk or see www.blethertaygither.org.uk

2. Borders – Borders Bards
Unfortunately, due to my work expanding in other areas and new commitments, I have taken the decision to leave the Borders Bard club. I know that the timing is not ideal; currently the club has been going through a bit of decline as our committee has reduced in number and also attendance dropped at our monthly storytelling session in Peebles, so much that it became difficult to continue running the sessions. This is unfortunate, as the club has quite a long history going back a number of years, with many storytellers being involved and many exciting events, especially the yearly outdoors storytelling gathering at Wooplaw Woods in the Borders. I can only pay homage to the support and encouragement the club gave me in my early stages of public storytelling and I wish all in the club well and hope that they find new blood to be involved and that they continue to grow and move on to new things!
For those interested in the Borders Bards, they can be contacted via the current Secretary Howie Armstrong
guidcrack@hotmail.com

Music, Verse & Stories
Howard Purdie, who is the host of Music, Verse & Stories, still has plans in development for resurrecting this club. The idea is that, rather than being monthly, it will be run around four times a year, due to the fact that audiences were seriously dropping and donations were sparse for the club. The club will be moving to a new venue also but these plans are still in development and as soon as things are firmed up we will let you know - so look out for updates and invites for guest spots!
Contact David McAleece, 07853 845019, david@mcalleece.com

3. Perthshire – Silver Branch
We are a small group in Highland Perthshire and meet on the second Wednesday of the month in the Perth Arms in Dunkeld at 7.30pm. Our numbers are small, but we are committed to encouraging and supporting individual members and storytelling skills and initiatives in our local communities. We are looking forward to storytelling for three weeks in our Yurt at the Enchanted Forest and a variety of Tayside Forest Education CPDs connected with the Tree Story Resource. Two of us are also involved in the Living Voices project with the Scottish Storytelling Centre and the Scottish Poetry Library.
Contact Claire Hewitt, 01887 820339 or 07765 160334
claireasch@btinternet.com

4. Fife – Kingdom Tales
Kingdom Tales has been in recess over the summer since many of our members, professional and emergent storytellers; are teachers, librarians or have families to enjoy at this time of the year. Some members have been involved in charity regional events, but we are all planning for a project close to our hearts, which will start when schools return.
Courtesy of storyteller Beverley Bryant and storyteller Jen Dudley from the English department at Woodmill High, where storytelling is embedded in the curriculum, Kingdom Tales will be running a storytelling club every two weeks for teenagers from local high schools. So far we have members from four high schools, including a mini bus load from Inverkeithing High School where storyteller librarian Angela Macari has run long term storytelling sessions at lunchtimes for many years.
All our members will be donating time to this project - we believe in happy ever afters!
Contact: Judy Paterson
judy@stories@yahoo.co.uk

5. Glasgow – Better Crack Club
Glasgow’s Better Crack Club, storytelling for adults and accompanied older children, is still going strong. We meet in Tchai Ovna (42 Otago Lane, Glasgow), a very homely, atmospheric venue adding to the relaxed, friendly, welcoming mood of the Better Crack Club. Story, music, song and laughter are the usual format for the evening. Meetings run from 7:30pm to 10pm, usually on the third Friday of the month.
The remaining dates for 2013 are: 16 August (Open Mic Nite), 20 September (featuring the fantastic Jack Martin), 25 October (Open Mic Nite for Tell-a-Story Day), 15 November (featuring our own Rising Star, Michael Gowan). There is no meeting in December. We kick off 2014 on 17 January (Open Mic Nite) and on 21 February Daniel Allison will visit us.
The Even Better Crack Club
Storytelling for ALL the family on the following Saturdays from 10.30am to 12pm in the Fairfield Room of the Mitchell Library, North Street Glasgow.
Next meetings: 14 September, 9 November and 14 December. (All dates still to be confirmed).
Why not join us in Glasgow for stories, songs and general feel-good factor? Come along and try us out!
Contact Frances Logan
loganfrances@gmail.com

6. Grampian – Grampian Association of Storytellers
No meetings are currently scheduled in the immediate future for GAS.
Contact Claire Milne, 07743993271
clairesach@btinternet.com
www.grampianstorytellers.org.uk
Our October meeting is during the Scottish International Storytelling Festival. We will have no guest on that occasion and all contributions will come from the floor, and we will encourage you to follow the theme of the previous story or song.

Do join us on the last Friday of the month at 7.30pm at The Waverley Bar, St Mary’s Street. Put your name in the book if you feel inclined to share a story, song or poem.

Contact Andy Hunter
andy@storybikes.co.uk

Burga Blatherers Storytelling Group
The group has evolved into an evening of storytelling where experienced and developing tellers can come to get extra performance time. The last few meetings have seen guest storytellers Duncan Walker with Tales from the Four Winds and Calum Lykan with Traditional Tales of Scotland, and many more guest tellers are planned for the next few months. Our meetings take place on the second Friday of the month upstairs at the Waverley Bar from 7.30pm onwards and we welcome one and all. Updates and events can be found on our Facebook page.

Contact: Calum Lykan, 07794 020583
calumlykanstoryteller@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/Burghblatherers

8. Lothian – BagaTelle
We meet at Dalkeith Library on the 2nd Monday of the month 7-9.30pm (and afterwards on to the Black Bull for further refreshments). We are a friendly storytelling development group open to all corners - from complete beginners to professional tellers. Come and share a story, song or poem or just sit and listen. You will be warmly welcomed and encouraged. Our group has a strong social element to it - we go to events and visit other storytelling groups, perform at local venues and mostly, almost always, laugh a lot. Themes for the next months are: September - Tales for the Young (or Young at Heart). Consider how to dress up a tale with props, actions or puppets. Come on, show us what you’ve got! October - Science Stories. Given we are supporting Midlothian’s Science Festival, let’s see what tales we can create or develop on this theme. November - Tales that Go with a Bang! December - Tales to Warm the Heart and Bring Good Cheer. January - In with the New.

Contact Lea Taylor, 0131 660 5783
Bagatellesstorygroup@googlemail.com

www.facebook.com/pages/BagaTelle/538569772827164?ref=hl

Stories Allways: tales for children’s well-being
by Ruth Kirkpatrick, illustrated by Catty Flores

After seven years of labour, Ruth Kirkpatrick, storyteller and social worker, gave birth to this account of her deeply felt and considered practice. Formed around a collection of ten outstanding traditional tales, Ruth teases out the emotional connections, and illustrates the kind of activities she wraps round the story sharing.

The good news is that Ruth’s resource is catching on with schools, storytellers, and other professionals who are using Stories Allways as a guide into and through the psychological treasures of traditional narratives. Everything here is tried and tested, resonant and well thought through for the 5-14 age range, though much of what is here applies to storytelling for any age.

On top of all these strengths of content, the book is beautifully produced for frequent reference and use. The illustrations by Catty Flores are superb, and two CDs encompass both the stories and specially composed music by Jenny Gardner and Gica Loening. Advice on selecting and developing stories for your own contexts is also provided.

Truly in all ways, this project brings the heart of the traditional into contemporary life. See www.storiesallways.co.uk for fuller information and how to order.

A little bird tells me that Ruth has a significant birthday approaching, and what better way to mark and celebrate all she has achieved so far through her art of stories than reading this book? We look forward to what the next seven years may bring with anticipation!

Donald Smith
Director - Scottish Storytelling Centre

The Little Book of Hogmanay
by Bob Pegg

And as the cold season approaches, look out for this delightful collection of stories, folklore, customs and verse from Bob Pegg, which is available now online and in bookshops. Everything you wanted to know about Hogmanay, from its pagan past to its pagan present - with vivid illustrations by John Hodkinson. The perfect Christmas (and New Year) present. The History Press - £9.99
Stories in the Land

The Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) is an educational charity that promotes an understanding of natural environments and human societies, and how they interact. Their vision is to make us better stewards of our world, by informing and inspiring individuals about the interplay between people, places and the planet. As an organisation, they have been championing geographical education and exploration since 1884, and with this in mind Joyce Gilbert, RSGS’s Education officer, initiated and created the bedrock of the project called Stories in the Land. Funding was sourced from Heritage Lottery fund All Our Stories and the Ernest Cook Trust, and the journey began.

The focus of the project was to encourage schoolchildren and their communities in Lochaber and Badenoch to become collectors, creators and tellers of old and new stories inspired by the land and by the epic journeys of the Scottish drovers. Cattle droving was a vital part of Highland life for three hundred years, with Highland soils better suited to rearing cattle than growing crops.

At market time, drovers would move the cattle long distances on foot, to sell it in towns with larger populations. In the evenings, around the fire, they would tell stories connected with their journeys - folk and fairy stories, cow and horse tales, legends explaining ancient features in the landscape, stories of place-names spanning centuries. Locally, many of these stories are now forgotten or are held by just a few local people who remember living and working on the land. Stories in the Land aims to capture and share these stories, and to help young people to explore the old drove routes in their area, so they can discover the intricacy and wonder of local landscape, including the stories that are embedded in the land. Storytellers, writers, sound and visual artists, craftspeople, historians, ecologists and geologists have all had their part to play in the weaving of the journey, working with older members of the communities and local primary schools and youth groups.

The main project has been journeying since March and will come to completion with an exhibition at the Scottish International Storytelling Festival in October. The first step consisted in preparing for the journey and contacting all schools and communities that were to be involved. A wonderful droving storyline was created and sent to local primary schools, and following in the footsteps of that story in April and May the droving team set up camp in woods near the participating schools and children experienced a day of bannock and butter making, storytelling, droving skills and storymaking.

In June we were on the road in Badenoch, where we visited Newtonmore, Kingussie and Alvie Primary schools and communities in a week long Travelling Tales journey with highland pony and cart. Storytellers Essie Stewart, Alasdair Taylor and me walked from town to town sharing stories in each community. Children shared the stories they had created and a rousing drovers rant met our weary travellers at the end of an eventful walk to Kincraig:

'Bannocks o’ Bere meal ,
Bannocks o’ Barley,
Here come the Highland Men’s Bannocks o’ Barley,
Travelling Highlands …
Travelling Lowlands,
Here come the Drovers wi’
Bannocks o’ Barley'

Spean Bridge Primary School, which is near the home of Scotland’s most famous drover, Coirechoille, organised a droving celebration day near the old drovers road and we were blessed with stories from the last man to walk the drove, local Shepherd Ronnie Campbell. We also wrapped the kids’ wee feet in wet wool and 24 pairs of felt shoes were peeled off soggy feet at the end of the pilgrimage!
Meanwhile in Lochaber, Community Artists from Room 13 International and Caol Youth group worked together to create an amazing project with local girls who will be walking and riding an old drovers route with their ponies for their Duke of Edinburgh’s Award in September. They have immersed themselves in all things droving, including a day of making and eating food that drovers would have survived on - black pudding and bannocks!

In July a walking journey called The Bedrock Walk took place, in partnership with Spey Grian Educational Trust. The journey went from Dalwhinnie to Glen Nevis in Lochaber via the Thieves Road, a fabulous route that runs past Loch Pattack and Loch Ossian and was used by drovers in the 18th/19th century. A small group of writers, geographers, artists, geologists and environmentalists took the road and were met with a feast of food and storytelling at Loch Ossian Hostel mid journey.

There are so many stories and journeys to be shared that cannot be written on this page and so many wonderful people we met who deserve to be remembered!

If you wish to learn more on this journey that is still unfolding and want to see the paths of the journey we have woven please take a peek at RSGS site storiesinthehand.blogspot.com or come see our exhibition in October at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, where you can hear some of the stories created and tales told on the way.

Claire Hewitt
clairesach@btinternet.com

Storytelling in Prisons

Over the past two months the Scottish Prisons Service and Fife College have been running a storytelling project in conjunction with the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Polmont Young Offenders Institution and in Edinburgh Prison (also known as Saughton prison).

I have personally been involved in the project, working with women prisoners in Saughton along with Colin McEwan, who has been running story and song classes while Claire Druett worked with young offenders in Polmont. The aim of the project is to try, through the use of storytelling, to develop the inmates’ communication skills and a sense of self-esteem, and to date - the project will run into next year - things seem to be working well.

Far Flung Dance Company has also been involved in the project. They worked intensively with a group of women in Saughton and put on a dance performance on the 9th August which was truly remarkable. The theme of silkie (or selchie) was taken from Claire’s storytelling sessions and the women, under the tutorship of Rhiana Laws, developed it and put on a moving and beautiful performance which would not disgrace itself in the Fringe. The same occasion saw another group of women performing two songs that they had written with Colin. Given the personal circumstances of so many of the women, it was remarkable to see them having the courage to stand up and perform in front of the invited audience of prison professionals, educationalists and arts workers.

The response to the power of storytelling on an individual level is considerably varied, but the fact that all sessions are attracting consistent numbers is testament to the potential for this project to be of benefit. Apart from the individual commitment needed for the participants to tell stories within the groups, some of the women in Saughton have started telling stories to other inmates. There is also a clear demand from several of them to learn stories that they can tell their children upon release.

To date the project has been both enjoyable and stimulating, and given the environment it is in no way surprising that some of the stories and comments deal with a range of human emotions and situations. As it progresses further, this project may well link more directly with vocational education; it is early days but there is potential for considerable development in terms of creative writing and education. And let’s not forget the all important aspect of helping the prisoners as individuals by raising self confidence, helping develop listening and memory skills as well as a greater sense of empathy with others - all of which will be of considerable value when they re-enter society at the end of their sentences.

Stuart McHardy
stuartmch@tiscali.co.uk
A Tale of Two Cities

Many of you will remember my article in the Scottish Storytelling Centre’s Network E-bulletin where I described how I got involved with Jean Guillon and the Theatre Volant. For those who don’t, over May and June 2013 I was part of a bi-lingual, multicultural storytelling project as part of the twinning of two great cities - Glasgow and Marseille. It all started when Jean asked me if I would partner with him for a bilingual telling in the two cities. After my initial hesitation, I said ‘yes if you can’t find anyone else.’ He didn’t, so my fate was sealed.

After my Glasgow experience, described in my previous article, the project took me to Marseille last June as part of a week long programme. The Theatre Volant was based in an area in front of a large high-rise block designed by world famous architect Le Corbusier, aptly called Les Jardins du Corbusier in the St Ann’s area of Marseille. There I told traditional Scottish stories which I had translated into French especially for this project, fine-tuning them to the last minute with Jean so that the French was as accurate as possible. The final result was something quite unique that the general public and the schools that attended had never heard before.

To bring a taste of my nation and culture to Marseille, I wore a Scottish outfit complete with a Scottish tartan kilt, all the more appropriate as my grandmother was a kilt maker. I even did some informal Scottish dancing with a small group of children before and after the performance!

The Habla Cadabra sessions normally begin with the non-native speaker telling a story in the host city’s language. When Jean told a story in English in Glasgow last May, no pupil made any comment, although invited to do so - I don’t think they culturally felt free to express themselves. But it was very different for me in Marseille, as even without invitation many pupils stopped me and corrected my French pronunciation. This was very challenging and demanded every ounce of skill I had in order to keep the flow of the story.

The second story of the session is told by the native speaker, and I could really see, as Jean’s story unravelled, how telling in your own language gives you a fuller voice, especially when describing emotions, feelings and the deeper things of life. When you tell in your own tongue, it is as if you are in your own home, and when you tell in another language it is as if you are a guest in someone else’s home. In your own language you tell from your heart, your soul, but it is not the same in another language.

After Jean’s story, the two of us launched into a tale in French and English, where Jean and I alternated telling (not translating) sentences. I think this is a good way to give children an experience of another language while at the same time making it accessible.

The session ended with the telling of the first part of The Three Rings from the Decameron, and the children were then asked to continue the story. Interestingly, in Glasgow the development of the story was very real and action-packed, but the Marseille children went into fairytale mode and were unreal with their fantasy solutions. Both Marseille and Glasgow children loved the bi-lingual short story which ended Habla Cadabra.

The responses of the general public audiences were also very different in Glasgow and Marseille. In Glasgow the audiences were very participative and interacted enthusiastically, while the Marseille public listened intently but were not so comfortable with participation.

To engage a Marseille audience, an explanation of the session was needed, as I think participation tends to be regarded as something you expect children to do, not adults.

It is obviously impossible to draw conclusions on cultural difference from a few tellings in two cities, but I certainly found it interesting that in Marseilles people tend to be very participative as children, but lose spontaneity in adulthood, while in Glasgow it is exactly the opposite!

In any case I found this a great experience. Marseille is a wonderful city and it has captured my heart completely, and in spite of the cultural differences, people there are like the Glaswegian in many ways: friendly, helpful and proud of their unique culture, but with a healthy sense of humour.

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Are you free to do some storytelling? - Yes
Next week? - Yes
In Turkey? - Why not?

The mission that the Storytelling Centre bestowed on me was to showcase the art of storytelling at an awards ceremony and conference held in Eskişehir by the Turkish EU Delegation. Each year the delegation (think embassy) sponsors a creative writing competition for GCSE-level high school students across the country, in which students are asked to submit a story based on a theme that promotes EU values; this year it was ‘unity in diversity’. The best 66 students and their teachers are invited to the awards ceremony and then spend two days attending workshops, talks and cultural events.

Some people thought I was crazy to go. The event was taking place right at the time of the protests and subsequent clashes with police over the bulldozing of Gezi park to make way for a shopping centre. The Foreign Office were advising against all but essential travel to Turkey.

After doing a little research, I was at a loss to understand why such a high level of alarm, and I still am. The situation in Istanbul was more akin to the Occupy movement than the London riots. A large part of the Turkish people were uniting behind the protestors to make clear their dislike of the PM, who had responded to a peaceful sit-in protest with rubber bullets and tear gas. People on their way to work dropped off food for the protestors; doctors were arriving and setting up makeshift clinics in tents.

These events both overshadowed the conference and invigorated it. As Turkey’s hopes of EU membership seemed ever more unlikely, the discussion panel, based on the roles and responsibilities of writers, took on an electric atmosphere. The students were passionate, argumentative and very serious about their country and about writing. It was a privilege to share the art of storytelling with them; no-one that I spoke to had ever met or heard of a professional storyteller before.

I sat on a panel, talked about storytelling and the Scottish Storytelling Centre, told some tales and ran workshops for the students. When the time came for my final contribution, I told them one of my very favourite stories. In this ancient Russian story, a young hunter is given increasingly difficult and life-threatening tasks by a despotic king. Eventually the king’s pride leads him to jump into a cauldron of boiling water after seeing the hunter do it.

The police were placing doctors who treated the protestors under house arrest; news channels covering the clashes were being given massive fines by the government. The head of the Turkish EU Delegation came and gave a speech making it clear how unimpressed he was by the PM’s actions.

Of course, he doesn’t survive and the hunter takes the throne. The thrust of the story is that renewal of the kingdom does not come from the centre but the edges, from the young and bold and daring. The challenges thrown their way by the old and weary are initiations necessary to fuel their growth.

As a stranger in a strange land, I was wary of commenting directly on the situation, yet I sensed that this was the story for the moment and so I told it. The audience were delighted and by the final moments of the story the tension was almost unbearable! That evening and the following day I talked to many students and teachers about the story and storytelling. Wonderfully, I am now in correspondence with a number of the students who have decided to become storytellers themselves. I was reminded that in the end we are only servants of the stories; they know where they want to go and it’s our job to get them there.

I left Turkey deeply grateful for the chance to have inspired the people I met and inspired in turn by their generosity, their kindness and above all by their sense that it is up to them, as individuals and a people, to determine their own future. The seed of a story has been planted and I hope the flowering will come on the day when we welcome some of these budding storytellers on stage at the Netherbow Theatre.

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The Flight of the Golden Bird: Scottish Folk Tales for Children
By Duncan Williamson / Edited by Linda Williamson

Of course many houses have opened their doors to Duncan Williamson’s stories since 1983, when Canongate first published Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children. I continued in this rich and glorious vein after his death in 2007 because of the great joy we shared working together on my transcriptions of the Traveller tales, as Duncan would record them for me or for the thousand other souls who thronged to his hearth to hear him.

But why write books when the legacy of storytelling is so strong? Who needs a text when you can hear a Duncan Williamson story on the lips of practically every traditional Scottish storyteller working professionally today? Is there something else one might do to remember him? Something else a true lover might do to fill up the hours longing for the storyteller’s art?

The Flight of the Golden Bird: Scottish Folk Tales for Children is a collection of eighteen of Duncan’s narratives edited for a readership of eight to twelve-year-olds, very unlike our earlier collections when Scots and dialectal speech in print was seen to be the one sure way to promote the culture and identity of the Travelling People. But Duncan’s Traveller speech was never broad Scots and was always tinged with a deeper, profoundly eloquent grammar; the proverbs, phrases and old sayings descended from the Scottish Gaelic of the island folk. There is a lift and cadence to Duncan’s narrative which belies its West Coast origin; and when heard with a discerning ear, can be successfully translated to the page. As Duncan’s storytelling evolved, so did his language, with a cyclic return to his native Argyll as he grew into age.

For audiences in the 1990s and into the present century, the Highland English of Loch Fyne, where Duncan spent his childhood, was the key to his astounding ability to communicate across international boundaries.

So it was the narrator’s incomparable way of telling traditional stories for audiences of totally mixed backgrounds, for listeners of all ages, from wee infant babies to the elderly in old folks homes, that inspired me to comprise the recent collection of Scottish folk tales for children. The Traveller child’s life begins with the parent’s desire to impart essential knowledge, ‘how to be a natural human being in this world’ through story. As Duncan always said, ‘Stories was wir [our] education.’ And so, after his death, there was no option but to continue with the work, publishing the folktales from Duncan’s massive repertoire - those stories that had not been published previously - along with stories from earlier collections I had passionately committed to print in dialect (see A Thorn in the King’s Foot, Penguin, 1987), unconcerned about children comprehending them on the page.

The Flight of the Golden Bird celebrates the pure essence of Duncan Williamson’s voice as he embraces the young mind and ever wondering curiosity of his listener. Many of Duncan’s most popular children’s tales not published before are included in this collection: The Nightingale, Hugh and the Angel, Flight of the Golden Bird, Spider and the Fly and Freddy Far-Off, as well as the retelling of Death in a Nut (first published in dialect by Penguin) to end the collection, because only Jack can find the truth - that there is no life without death, no seasonal light without darkness, no warmth without cold.

Princess and the Glass Hill is also in the collection, from a very early recording of Duncan, when he was telling in close family settings long wonder tales springing from his Traveller culture, which he rarely ever told again to public, mainstream audiences. The story is one of Duncan’s finest wonder tales, and it is such a pleasure to see it on the page for young readers to enjoy.

(…) His mother said, ‘Son, please don’t go to the palace! You’ll get your brothers hung and me forbyes, if the folk find out. And you go in that state of rags up to the king . . . what’ll happen? He says, ‘I’m going tomorrow. Nobody’s going to stop me! I’m going to see the king.’ (…)"

Well, you’ll need to read this story! It is just so very Duncan, one of the best Jack tales you’ll ever come across, telling how the filthy, dirty Jack tames three magical horses, climbs a glass hill and marries the princess.

I had saved this and other stories as transcripts for forty years in suitcases and old moth-eaten folders, trailed them round with me through caravans and tents, packed carefully by in attics and other folks’ closets. From the days before computers and Word, when a sound from your ear was realised as a precious jewel to be discovered on the page under your finger tips, not on a screen but on real paper with ink. And here under the covers of a book you can hold, real connections to the stars in a memory that will never die but only bring eternal light. This particular collection of stories is a solar partner in its contents to the lunar collection which precedes it, The Coming of the Unicorn. And we certainly hope you will enjoy the experience reading Duncan’s vibrant narrations - a close second to his living voice. With thanks to the Floris team for this beautiful testimony to Scotland’s greatest storyteller of our time.

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