

STORYTELLING

By Bonnie MacFarlane

Storytelling is ancient. It was done before writing and is continued today in the oral tradition. The oldest record of storytelling was in Egypt with that of the sons of Cheops when entertaining their father.

Storytelling was often used to explain phenomenon such as thunder, fire, floods, and lightning. Certainly, these kinds of stories are ever present in Greek mythology. My interest in the oral tradition is mostly with Native American stories.

For a story to be remembered is in the telling. The entertainer must be able to reach across all age barriers and to stimulate the audience to use all senses when listening. A good story will be remembered a long time. It makes use of the sound, rhythm and repetition of words. Many storytellers make use of repetition of certain words so their audience can participate. It's even harder to reach an audience today as people have short attention spans and are too used to TV and other electronic devices which diminishes their imagination.

As kids, we told many a ghost story around the camp fires and could scare each other to death. The best tellers varied the pitch and volume of their voices.

I am most familiar with Native American tales. The coyote is often referred to as the trickster. However, in one story "The Butterflies Trick Coyote" by bringing him back home every time he sleeps by a salt lake when picking up some salt for his wife's cooking. The butterflies laugh so hard that, to this day, they can't fly straight.

Another tale, "The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush" which was retold and illustrated by Tommie dePaola tells of how the Indian paintbrush first came about. It's the story about how a Native American artist goes to a hillside with a desire to paint a sunset. The colors and paint brushes are provided for him when he awakes from a dream-vision. Thus, the Indian paintbrush flower of reds, yellows, and oranges is created.

Another story, told and illustrated by Paul Goble is called "The Gift of the Sacred Dog". A Native American tribe is hungry and searching for buffalo. A young boy goes into the hills to pray for help. A rider appears on a magnificent animal called the sacred dog or horse. As clouds close, a countless number of sacred dogs course down from the sky. After this, the peoples' lives become prosperous.

Some of our famous storytellers include the Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen, and Joel Chandler Harris.

I am not "plugged into" technology and still enjoy a good story. I attend the Native American Powwow every year and enjoyed the story of the four directions last year.