

Nancy Donoval  
Storyteller/Story Coach  
-Telling Stories of the Moments That Shape Who We Are  
-Coaching Clarity for Performers, Presenters and Public Speakers

Hi Pat,

Sadly, I realized this week that I would not be able to be at Northlands this year. For a variety of reasons that I won't go into... What I'm saddest about missing is your workshop. I was almost tempted to drive down just for that, but other obligations don't allow. However, I'm happy to share a memory or two for your photos and captions. Maybe it will be on display next year too and I'll see it then.

Here's a memory for you:

My first year going to Northlands was 1988 in Elkader...a rank newbie to storytelling. There was a ceremony that took place in a narrow little patch of park, planting or dedicating a tree I think, as a memorial to Reuven Gold who had just died. I heard all these strangers that I'd just met telling stories of a storyteller whom I would never meet. I remember feeling a sense of loss, that I had somehow just missed a chance to know this great man that clearly had impacted so many.

Then Andrew Leslie told a story that Reuven used to tell of Mullah Nasiruddin and the Lost Key. He told it in a high, screechy voice that made everyone laugh because clearly that was Reuven's voice. The story struck a very deep chord in me, and I went home to tell it to my classmates and friends back at Northwestern where I was studying storytelling. It became a story I told over and over. I still tell it. It is part of my foundation as a storyteller. I learned from Reuven Gold without ever meeting him face to face. In Elkader, I had my first close encounter with oral tradition and the continuity of community that Northlands created.

And if no one else mentions it...someone should give a shout out to Robby and all the Mardi Gras beads she brought us for so many years from New Orleans. A storyteller who traveled this far north from that far south every April to cherish the warmth of the folks of the North Lands.

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Love, Debby Bliss

Hope it's not too long. If someone else mentioned Robby (was it Robbie?) then you can cut that. I sure have some memories of Patrick's that I was hoping to share in person. I can trace some stories I tell now to the permission that was given at Patrick's to tell bawdy, grownup stories. I remember standing on those stairs in the corner. So many memories and stories from those years. Ah, well...

Love and luck to you for your workshop. Give my love to those who would want it.

Thank you for reminding me of how much fun it was. I can't be there this year but will be thinking of you, all of you, my dear friends. My husband Bob was diagnosed in January of 06 with far-advanced prostate cancer, and although he is at this moment doing quite well considering the circumstances, I need to be with him as much as possible. I am trying to hold myself together and am feeling pretty positive, but it is taking a toll on me physically. My job is exhausting me, yet I very much enjoy it. I work for a hospital cancer program, as I have now done for 19 years, coaxing and cajoling a bunch of immune-compromised doctors to do what they truly want to do in their heart of hearts, which is to think creatively and develop good goals for cancer care. You who know how patient I am (not!) will be amazed to hear that I have never, in 19 years, ever made a negative comment to a doctor or a nurse! I am proud! My officemate, an oncology nurse, is one of the kindest and loveliest people I have ever known, so that is helping me get through the day. I won't go on further but would love to hear from you from time to time.

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Carol McCormick, Storyteller  
Helping imaginations fly

Elkader being such a quaint little town on the Turkey River seemed to fit NSN as we were growing our legs and getting ready to stretch our wings. This setting was a natural place to foster friendships. One year by some geographic reality warp, a monsoon struck Elkader. My tent pitched in the city park became a tiny swimming pool, so I took refuge at the city's only Bed and Breakfast which had historic furnishings. Another year I stayed at the motel at the edge of town. I remember the life-sized drawing of handsome Abdul El-Kader in the motel lobby. The story was that Abdul El-Kader gave refuge to Americans in his Algerian castle which saved them from being killed by Arab terrorists and President Abraham Lincoln sent him dueling pistols as a thank you. The Elkader town founders decided to "brand themselves" with this story. However, these rural farming people misspelled and mispronounced his Arab name. Over a century later, the U.S. State Department flew the Elkader city council and their spouses to Washington, D.C. for a dinner with Algerian diplomats because the state department credited Elkader's sister city relationship to our country's re-establishing diplomatic relations with Algiers.

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Anne Bodman

Hi Everyone,

I first came to Elkader in 1991 as a fairly recent transplant from Ithaca, NY to South Dakota. I can't remember quite how it happened, but suddenly there was a familiar slim shape with long blonde hair, and there was Susan Gilchrist, just as she had appeared 20 years earlier when we knew each other in Ithaca. My fondest memories of Elkader are of her, the new community I found, the funky couches in the teenage Sunday school room, and the bar stories. Story-starved, I took notes that weekend, and again in 1992, and I have just found them.

Here are my notes from Patrick's Bar in 1991, some with teller's name. Friday night: Blast thru crap process (re not being able to tell your story--unfinished orgasm); Mike-Polish Farm; Adopting a Baby; Julie--Great-great-grandfather and Slave Wife; Holly--Man and Puka; Mary Knight--Clotilde's Gift; Tailor and Just Enough to Make a Story; Nan--Mrs. Sullivan (cleaning house with tongue); Jim--Cat and Coyote; Robbie--Perfect Role Model.

Saturday night: Anne Bodman--Bull Fries; Andy--Guadalajara Oysters (sometimes the bulls win); Susan Gilchrist--Contraceptive Jelly on Toast; Dale Whiteside--song on banjo; Iris Ericksen--funny story; Larry Johnson--playing opera on a condom; Jim--Passion Play where Jesus is stuck with a real rather than a retracting sword and says "My God, what have you done?" and the other guy says "Oh Jesus--you're bleeding!"; Robbie--about being in bed with a girl or a dead boy; story about birth control; Nancy Donoval--Seven Dwarfs Get Religion (Dopey asks "Are there any dwarf nuns?" and after the last time all the dwarfs giggle and chant "Dopey did it with a penguin..."); Patrick the Bartender told me several short ones too.

1992 (probably Saturday night): Andy Leslie--A woman is stuck on a toilet seat and her husband rushes her off to the hospital in the back of his pickup. He asks the doctor "Have you ever seen anything like this before?" and the doctor replies, "Yes, but I've never seen it framed!"; Mark Wagler--passionate story about Kent State protest and shootings, "We must protect the freedom to say what we want to say"; Cynthia Sorenson--Drinking Contest with Chinese General; Debby Bliss--about the drummer in a band and his drumstick which was pointing at her; Tony--a rap song; Robbie--The Amazonians (38D). She told us she comes from a family of flat-chested women; so, her mother purchases a pair of foam rubber Amazonians to improve her silhouette. They become uncomfortable during a long bus ride; so, she unbuckles herself from them and as she leaves the bus she doesn't realize that they are rolling down the bus stairs after her. People came running up to her--"Are these yours?"; Loren Niemi--Sauna Story. He and his sister leave, naked, to get water on a cold night. Once outside, there are headlights, and a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses insists on making their spiel. Loren's sister is getting very cold and finally says

"Leave your booklet and we'll read it. But if you'll excuse us, we're naked." The car tears out of there at 65 mph and Loren and his sister return to the sauna, that intense steam, the earth, air, fire, and water.

It would be fun to hear these stories again--and their successors--in Pat's workshop or in the bar. I look forward to seeing you next weekend.

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Judy Farrow Busack Storyteller  
West Bend, WI 53095

Oh, those memories. Starting with Elkader, but keeping in mind "The Root Years" in Mineral Point.

The closing I remember was always "We are the old people, we are the new people, we are the same people: deeper than before... That closing tells everything I felt about the weekend. I even extended it to my libraries summer reading program to be: We are the old readers; we are the new readers... This was to bind them to the library as sure as I felt bound to storytelling. Northlands was and is my connecting glue.

First time in Elkader, I tented with Jean Andrew and Maggie Melvin and forged the friendship that has lasted over the years. The next tenting year, it rained so heavily that we moved to the basement of the Opera House and slept on the floor. One year, the motel was out of rooms and moved a friends' trailer/camper on the site and we slept there and one year the rooms were all gone, and we stayed at the Manor Inn in Garnavillo and I locked my car keys in the trunk, the motel owner got some on to drive us to Elkader in what I sort of remember as a tractor/wagon. He drove through the fields swearing a blue streak all the bumpy way and when I got out, I thanked him sweetly for delivering Maggie, SISTER Jean and me to our conference, the stunned expression on his face still brings a smile to my face.

Always, upon arrival we checked in at the Opera House and then found our way to the church where we made and placed posters as to the various workshops and then decided who would go to which school to tell stories in the community. We (Northlands, not me) were paid with bags of pennies the kids brought for the event. Sometime Saturday mornings I dressed up like Mother Goose and went over to the library for Storytime. Granny Rutabaga was there also and a few more depending which year.

One School of Storytelling, that stands out from those years was given by Elaine Wynn on Fairytales, lots from Zipes and we wrote our own modern-day tale and told it that night in the Friday opening concert. I'm still telling mine.

The Opera House was so wonderful, some said haunted, and it was magic for sure. We were so grassroots and so much a big family sharing year after year our joys and heartbreaks as if it were yesterday and not a year since we last met.

We took over the little bar and didn't really drink, just told, and told. One year Maren Hinderle called a week before the conference and said, "Bring a bar story; the women are taking over this year," and we did. A real stretch for me but very satisfying. But then stretch is what we are about and still about. I'm grateful to have been part of it.

Fondly, Judy

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From Dale

Hi, Pat!

Sorry I'm so late getting back to you. I've just returned from a 1200-mile trip to visit, likely for the last time, a dear, long-time friend who is succumbing to cancer. Yes, I'm OK. I'm limpin' a little with a sore heel, cause as yet undiagnosed. I underwent cardioversion last December to put my ticker back into proper rhythm, but I never felt the slightest symptom before or after. I'm still ambulatory and functionin'.

I've read what you sent of others' thoughts, and I'm happy they (y'all) are thrilled with urbanization of our masacrees. Me, I'm a bucolic, albeit a resident of an urban area. For me, Elkader was the cat's meow, the perfect layout for my kind o' storytellers' confabulation.

Years ago, I invited my American Folk music Class to spend a Saturday on my woodsy little farm in Southern Illinois. Lecturing and demonstrating folklore and folk music in a modern university building is only the barest beginning of what it's about. At the farm, they got a whiff of "standin' in the shade, fiddlin' barefoot." A core group of students and faculty have been convening twice yearly ever since, for over thirty years. We meet in the open, sing and lie to each other, cook for each other, charge each other's batteries, and wallowin Nature.

That said, you may understand why, for me, much of the magic of our conference stayed behind, when we moved to the big city. I really LOVED walking in shower clogs through the snow to the campground shower house. I miss Pedretti's Bakery and the Opera House. It was my kind o' romantic setting--jiggled my bone-marrow. Years ago, I bought a ratty old book at a farm auction and inserted randomly in its pages were newspaper clippings from the twenties and thirties of last century. Here's one:

"SUMMER FALLOWED

"

It'd be nice to be summer fallowed. They say you don't have to do anything when you're fallowing.

"They don't clip you or mow you or bother you. You just lie there--fallowing.

"This is the weather for fallowing, too.

"The best place to do your fallowing is in the shade, with your meals brought to you and a pitcher of cold water handy, because a fellow gets powerful thirsty sometimes after steady fallowing, hour after hour.

"Of course, when you are fallowing that way, it takes up a lot of energy, and you have to eat a great deal, especially watermelon, because nothing helps a fellow fallow better than cold, sweet watermelon.

"And they say they can't snip any installments off you, and the interest boys and tax collectors can't harvest you while you are fallowing.

"Yes, it'd be nice to be summer fallowed."

On a personal note, I always basked in your aura on and off the stage. I, too, look forward to our next meeting. This foot will likely keep me away from the impending conference, but we'll figure out how, when and where to bump, I'm sure.

Love and stuff, Dale

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Maren Hinderlie  
Minneapolis, MN 55409

Pat, I apologize for being so slow and forgetful of this. It's a wonderful thing we have all done and are doing together and thank you for the will and the way to say what we have to say! Love Maren.

PS Let me know how it turns out! I almost went to the Saturday event but too much to get out of here.

My favorite quote is from Muriel Rukeyser. "The world is not made of atoms; it is made of stories" and as I reflect on our journey with Northlands, I recall people galore who told and are still telling with the faith that if we live the stories we tell, we must also **tell the stories we want to live!** --**Maren Hinderlie**

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### Patricia Coffie

The first ones to arrive began to make signs and arrange chairs and tables. We brought our own coffee and tea and such and even brought our own coffee makers. Storing the accoutrements between conferences was an assigned task. A volunteer went to **Pedretti's** bakery to bring the rolls to the Opera House basement and to marvel at the quality of the treats and at how inexpensive they were. If you wanted to be sure you had a seat in the Opera House Basement or the Peace Church meeting rooms, you sometimes carried your folding chair from one place to the other and back again. They were about a block apart. Everything was volunteer. No presenters were paid. Charge per day for the Opera House (the whole thing) was \$25 and there was no charge for the church.

One member told me how to find a certain kind of success at **volunteering**—you say “Yes.” and then you ask questions so long that the other volunteer stays and does the work while chatting with you and becoming more and more convinced you do not know enough to be the volunteer. You get all the credit of volunteering without much of the work for which you are volunteering, you have pleasant company, and people think twice about asking you again. I saw this very system recommended in the Wall Street Journal in April 2007.

Because the small restaurants could not handle the crowds with any speed at all, some years we contracted with a church group or a community service organization for a breakfast or dinner or two.

The **annual dinner meeting was held at Johnson's Restaurant** for several years. The food was good although the Elkaderites tell me they were really thrown by that strange request for “**Vegetarian**” meals. Johnson's rose to that task and provided delicious meals. You did have to pay some attention to what you took into your mouth as seating was so close it was difficult to tell whose fork was hovering near your mouth. Johnson's was the location for the passing of the responsibilities—the outgoing president would pass the gavel (or **pencil box** to Larry Johnson or actual **live horse** to Jim May) to the in-coming president and the in-coming president would share a story or was that the other way round?

The Annual Dinner/Business Meeting was always fun but hurried a bit as the concert would be next, and for some, the bar stories followed, and for a very few the prosperity ritual was celebrated after that.

The Coast-to-Coast hardware store was where one innocent and simple purchase was made by two men for later use in the storytelling in the bar. The purchase became one story and the item purchased played heavily in another.

There were stories one night at Patrick's and then one storyteller told about his hunting dogs and how difficult it is for them to avoid the seven deadly sins what with pheromones and all. Then a storyteller told how innocent the trip to the hardware store had been and the more shy and innocent the storyteller was, the less innocent the purchase seemed. The men had purchased condoms so one of them would have what he needed for the story he planned for the bar. Then a story of war and sex and those pheromones and all was told. Then a storyteller played "Bolero" on a trumpet mouthpiece with a condom attached and the condom

bursting at the crescendo of "Bolero" as anticipated. A carefully led discussion of whether it was best to use tape or tacks to attach condoms preceded this musical finale in Patrick's.

For others after concerts at Patrick's, stories were told of religious epiphanies and folk tales and original stories crafted for telling. It was a place to do new stuff and experimental stuff and these stories did not need to be rude or crude—even the pretty explicit was couched in good story, well told.

One year, Mom and Pop at Patrick's did not even have a liquor license—they could only sell beer and that was fine with us.

The first year in Elkader, we tried the Rathskeller across from the hardware store, but it was long and strung out and filled with locals. The next year we discovered **Patrick's**. This was an old bar with a stuffed moose head on the wall complete with dust in the fur and cobwebs drifting down from the horns. No two chairs matched at the tables. There were two wooden booths and stools at the bar. Storytellers filled the place. We sat in small circles or at the bar or in the booths. That first night, every time a new person came in after all the seats were taken, Mrs. Patrick's would make her way up the stairs to the storage room and bring out yet another unique chair. When she wasn't going up and down for more chairs, storytellers stood on the steps to tell.

There was no sound system. This was total involvement—you made it known you had a story to tell by standing up or making your way to the steps or by standing on a chair. The group gave permission to tell by listening.

Later years saw a change in venue to the restaurant because Patrick's closed. Now everyone could be seated, and a sound system was provided. That changed the nature of the sharing. **Patricia Coffie**

**Saying goodbye** took about an hour.

First there was the circle, then the chant,  
the group hug, and then  
individual hugs and goodbyes.

We are the old people  
We are the new people  
We are the same people  
Deeper than before

Arc of eternity  
Blossom of bone  
Cauldron of changes  
Whole in the stone

This was not the only **chant** used. Marcie Telander introduced this closing circle chant and group hug. One year we used Mother Earth and Father Sky.

One year, in Mascara Park next to the Opera House, a long arch was formed, and you went through softly saying the same one word to each person. The word summed up your experience that year. It was a grand farewell.

Some are uncomfortable with the **bonding farewell** and they skip out—others keep that final embrace in place. **Patricia Coffie**

A few would gather for **Sunday dinner at Johnson's** before heading back home. **Patricia Coffie**