

Storytelling

Storytelling missed the early years of my life. I had passed forty before taking a storytelling workshop. My very first one took me on a path that I have gladly traveled since.

Marcia Bowers led that workshop. She gathered a small circle of neophytes and asked them to envision a scene. Mine covered rolling hills with green grass and occasional trees. The next step invited someone into that scene - a dragon entered mine. He encountered a female dragon and that promised the beginnings of a story.

For the second part of the workshop, Marcia invited the participants to describe the scene they had just created. When my turn came, my hands moved, my face came alive, and I knew that I had found my path.

That path eluded my early years. My father was a natural storyteller. As the family gathered around the table for our evening meal, he would recount numerous episodes of growing up in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. At gatherings with friends and relatives, he always had a tale of events involving our family. He laced those tales with exaggerations, believing that facts should never get in the way of a good story.

Listening to my father's stories, it never occurred to me to tell one of my own. I listened, just as I listened to my friends recounting events in

their lives. Never can I remember sharing my own experiences. One day I raised the issue with my mother, complaining that I never told stories. She answered, "Some people are tellers and some are listeners; you and I are listeners."

Moving beyond listening took some curious steps. Speaking before a group always excited me. In high school I joined the debate team. In college I joined the Oratorical Society. Arguing before a court was one of the principal attractions of being a lawyer. To hone my lawyer skills, I took acting lessons from a student in the University of Pittsburgh's drama department. Playing with voices became my forte and I enjoyed depicting different characters.

Those skills awaited my move to Harrisburg. As a lawyer in Pittsburgh I had many occasions to tell a story - presenting witnesses and writing legal arguments told stories and tapped my creative energies. In Harrisburg I worked as a supervisor, providing advice to those who did the creative work. Storytelling became my creative outlet, thanks to Marcia's workshop.

Many workshops followed but most important was the venue provided by the annual talent show at the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg. I performed *Casey At The Bat* before two large audiences. Their

appreciative applause set me on the path to telling stories whenever an audience appeared.

Irish tales drew many audiences, from young children to adults in a retirement center. My exploration of Irish tales quickly expanded to tales from around the world. The audiences again ranged from the very young to the not so young. The wisdom of the tales, passed down through the ages, attracted many ears.

Personal tales are my next storytelling path. Coming to an end are many decades of never telling my own story. Late in life, I have finally reclaimed my father's gift for turning life's events into a tale. And that story is soon to be written.