

MEET MANY OF OUR MEMBERS

JO ANN DADISMAN

I'm Jo Ann Dadisman, a West Virginia native and long-time resident of Preston County. I've been telling stories to family members and others for more than 50 years, following in the footsteps of my father whose original animal tales and true family tales were characteristic of his speech for as long as I can remember. I performed at my first festival in September 1978, and I have told at festivals each year since then!

For more than 20 years, June Riffle, another member of WVSG, and I performed as tandem tellers under the name of Mountain Echoes. She retired in 2011 and so I have returned to solo performances, much as I had done when I first began public telling. I tell folk tales and those stories which focus on Appalachian life and heritage, some tall—some true. With a blend of tales, sometimes a bit of poetry or a verse or two of song, I try to create an Appalachian sampler, much like a patchwork quilt, for my audience to hear and remember. I also tell stories from around the globe and stories that rise up from the written form, as part of my work with the National Writing Project and the teaching of writing for so many years.

Years ago I reflected on a question I frequently asked my students: "Do you want to be a teacher who tells or a teller who teaches?" For a long time, I considered myself a teacher who told stories. Years ago, however, I realized I thought in metaphors, and that was the influence of storytelling! I closed my grade book 8 years ago, but my work as a storyteller continues.

The two honors I treasure the most are the WVU Eberly College of Arts and Sciences—for my teaching—and the WVSG's Bob McWhorter Clock Award—for my service to storytelling. I am incredibly blessed that those two careers have supported and reflected each other.

I can be reached for performances, workshops and much more at joanndadisman@gmail.com or at 304.216.3273. I look forward to our conversations!

DYLAN HARRIS

I am Dylan M. Harris. I grew up in Chunky, MS, currently live (at least sometimes) in Worcester, MA, and work in West Virginia, Alaska, and Georgia. I guess you could say I am more of a story listener, but I have told a few tales here and there, formally and informally. I am a PhD student writing a dissertation... which I would argue is some sort of storytelling. But, in short, I've just been interested in storytelling nearly my entire life.

I grew up in a family of storytellers; finding ways to talk with one another always involved some form of storytelling. As such, I've always circled back to it. I toured in bands for a while before going to, and during, college. It wasn't exactly storytelling, but it was my way of making meaning in the world, at least for myself. For my undergraduate research, I collected stories from former Tibetan political prisoners in Northern India, which introduced me to the transformative power of storytelling. More specifically, I was keyed into the transformative power of listening to others' stories - the act of listening, and being listened to, is such a gift. I took some time off after school to work. I moved to Bolivia, where I was studying glaciers and - because I always seem to find it - storytelling. Then, I moved near Spruce Knob in West Virginia, where I have lived off and on since 2013 doing outdoor education work. For my masters degree work - though I initially had other plans - I ended up listening to stories (can't get away from it!) about life after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and along the Mississippi Gulf Coast with the intention of stitching together alternative narratives about life after the

flood from voices that have historically been, and still are, ignored. For my PhD, which I am getting from the Graduate School of Geography at Clark University, I stuck with storytelling. I am currently studying intersections of storytelling - all kinds: from folklorists in Appalachia to Native tellers in the Alaskan Arctic - and environmental history. The idea is to work with storytelling to find meaningful ways to discuss sensitive topics in regions and with people that are often overlooked in 'environmental' conversations.

I am on month 10 or so out of 13 months of 'fieldwork' at the moment, which has consisted largely of me traveling back and forth and across West Virginia, Alaska, and Georgia, listening to storytellers talk about their work. I have learned a lot, but perhaps the most important and profoundly simple thing I've learned is that folks want to make sense of the world. In a world that doesn't make sense for all kinds of reasons - environmental, political, economic, cultural, etc. - people need storytelling; people do storytelling. I know I have talked to many of you already, but I would be happy to chat with anyone else if you've got the time! Perhaps I will be passing through your part of the country and can stop for a visit, but I am also generally easy to get in touch with by email: dyharris@clarku.edu or phone: 601-480-3756.

DAVID BRAUER

I am currently David F. Brauer. For most of my life storytelling has played a role. From the time I told my wife when we first met that my cousin's Eldorado Convertible was mine until today. During my business career I was a sales person and finally a managing director of insurance companies. My grandparents had passed away before I was born and I told everyone that when I become a grandfather I will retire, which I did in 2007. Since then my wife, Candy, and I have been PhG's (Professional Grandparents.) I am an author, a storyteller as well as a business consultant and sales trainer. For non-profits I do pro bone insurance consulting. Spirituality is of great interest to me and I am an ordained minister. I have workshops on becoming a storyteller, how to be comfortable in front of an audience, and unleashing your inner storyteller. I have worked with local high school drama classes on storytelling.

My stories are all original and come from the depths of my mind. The character names I use are from a book I have where I collected wonderful names from cemeteries, such as Pearly Mudgett and Wonderful Harmony. The stories and the characters do all the work I simply capture them. My genre is somewhere between the Twilight Zone and Stephen King. I am quoted as saying, " I don't believe in ghosts, I just wish they would stop bothering me." Tales with spirits and demons take place worldwide as do my stories. They are everywhere.

I do have some stories that do very well for middle school on up but I prefer a more mature audience. The greatest compliment is when audiences ask me if the story is true, to which I reply , "what do you think?" I reside with Candy in Wexford (Pittsburgh), PA, when we are not traveling. I can be contacted at 724-622-5801 or dfbrauer@beecherscoffee.com.

JAMES FROEMEL

James is the winner of the 2015 and 2017 and 2019 West Virginia Biggest Liar competition, as well as the 2015 Fibbin' on the 4th storytelling contest in Ripley, WV. He has been featured in

storytelling performances at schools and festivals across the state. His work has been published in Goldenseal, the magazine of West Virginia traditional life and in the summer of 2017 he was crowned “King of West Virginia (for a day)”.

In 2019 he headlined the West Virginia Comedy Festival (album will be out soon!) His stories blend personal experience and coming of age tales everyone can relate to with off-beat ideas that are hopefully not as relatable, like that he transformed a deep fryer into a time machine, or thwarted a hot-dog car heist set up by woodland creatures.

When he’s not lying in his stories, he’s lying about who he is, portraying cartoonist Schulz through the Humanity Council’s History Alive! program. His Schulz portrayal has been performed and requested throughout the state.

James is a graduate of WVU College of Creative Arts where he received a BFA in Acting. He resides in Morgantown, WV with his wife Katie and their two sons, the oldest of whom recently won his own Golden Shovel after becoming West Virginia’s Biggest Liar in the youth category in 2017.

LYN FORD

A nationally recognized fourth-generation storyteller, author and teaching artist, Lynette (Lyn) Ford shares “Home-Fried Tales”, seasoned with heritage, humor, and heart. Her folktale variants and adaptations, spooky tales, and personal and original stories are rooted in her experiences and her family’s multicultural Affrilachian (African-American Appalachian) storytelling traditions. Her first two published works, the award-winning Affrilachian Tales and Beyond the Briar Patch, honor her family and their folkways and stories.

Lyn is a teaching artist for the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education and a Thurber House mentor for young authors. She is also a co-editor and contributor to several books on storytelling in education, and a two-time recipient of the National Storytelling Network ORACLE award.

Lyn has travelled and told in performances, workshops and interactive keynotes across the United States, in Ireland and Australia. Lyn is also a Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher, a great-grandmother, and a world-class hugger.

“An exceptional artist.” - Jim Arter, Greater Columbus Arts Council

GIL MEYER

I am Gil Meyer, and I am a compulsive storyteller. Friends and family sometimes use a different term to describe this compulsion. Such offenders often end up imprisoned in the next story. My telling takes form in oral presentations as well as the written word. In fact I just published my first novel, The Healer’s Dream. A description is on <https://gilmeyer.com/>. My other book is a business book, Corporate Smokejumper--Tools, Tales & Techniques, which leans heavily on stories (more info at <https://www.sparkellc.com/>.) I am a graduate of WVU. My wife and I live in Hampshire County, WV. Among other activities, I am a docent for the Nature Conservancy’s Ice Mountain Preserve, where stories abound. I can be contacted via either of the above websites.

BILL HAIRSTON

I am W.I. "Bill" Hairston, the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Charleston, West Virginia. I have been a professional storyteller since 1985. As a storyteller, many of my stories and music are based on my experiences growing up on the Coal River in rural West Virginia. My stories embody the rich Appalachian culture that I was exposed to as a child.

I have performed in concerts, festivals, libraries, corporate meetings, conventions and schools throughout the region and the country.

Among my many endeavors is my work as the Music Coordinator at the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee for the 35 years until it ended in 2008 and my work as the coordinator of Vandalia's "West Virginia Liar's Contest."

My featured workshop is entitled "It is indeed all about me". It focuses on how to read audiences and how to keep the audience's attention during a presentation.

I am an active member of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild, the Kentucky Storytelling Association, the Ohio Storytelling Network. I am also the West Virginia liaison to the National Storytelling Network.

I can be reached at 304-546-7786 or bhairston@ntelos.net.

MISTY MATOR

I am Misty Mator, and when I am not caring for my four children, I am a storyteller. I specialize in stories for young children and families, and perform in libraries, schools, churches, and public events. I usually perform as my character "Starla the Storyteller," and my programs are strung together with a moral theme.

I also tell stories for older children and adults, and have contributed to "Tellabration" in the past. I am co-chair for the StoryShare storytelling guild, and try to stay connected or involved with various storytelling ventures in the Greater Pittsburgh area. I especially enjoy trickster tales, heroine stories, true narratives, multicultural stories, and, of course, moral tales. You can contact me at starlathestoryteller@yahoo.com.

FRED POWERS

My name is Fred Powers, a retired miner and schoolteacher from Southern West Virginia. I became interested in presenting mining stories in character to interested audiences to preserve our history and honor our Appalachian coal miners, always thinking someone should tell stories of their hidden and mysterious world. My

background of being a third-generation miner, growing up in a mining community, then being an underground miner over a twenty-year span has given me ample material to share personal mining stories in a one-man drama type of storytelling. Afterwards, I normally bring a few mining artifacts to elaborate about mining history and discuss the miner's role in the West Virginia Mine Wars. I have presented at many types of venues including Appalachian festivals, historical societies, libraries, churches, various storytelling programs, public schools and universities in nine states from Preop-K through College. My program at West Virginia University's First Miner's Day was audio taped and broadcast nationally on C-Span Radio. My wife Sharon travels with me and presents her "Interactive Children Pioneer Games" at venues as well. I have written two books on mining and others are in the works. Thank you.
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RICH KNOBLICH

Rich Knoblich is author of Talking 'bout the Relatives his original tall tale collection inspired by visits to his family homestead in the mountains. His rustic humor brought home eight ribbons (including first place) from the WV State Liar's Contest. He also has several awards from other festivals and he has served as judge for several 'liars' contests. His creative tall tale writings have been published in various national and regional magazines. This storyteller has entertained festival audiences throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.

Currently, Rich does weekly entertainment at Oglebay Resort in Wheeling, WV. This includes the Festival of Lights and Historical Wheeling narratives for Oglebay's motor coach visitors. He also presents a lively Behind the Scenes program for Wilson Lodge guests. During the summer he delivers storytelling fun at Oglebay's Wilson Lodge fire pit with Judi Tarowsky. On weekend afternoons he conducts Historical Walking Tours of Oglebay's Hilltop area.

Once the Ghost Host for Steel City Bus Tours (Pittsburgh) and Wheeling's Halloween Ghost Tours, Knoblich relates a wide assortment of paranormal tales that will cause you to pause for a moment and wonder, "Maybe there is something to this?" Currently, his research delves into Wheeling's river history and railroad lore of the Wheeling region. His PowerPoint presentations focus on historic Wheeling, Oglebay and Wheeling's ghost tales.

Knoblich, along with Judi Tarowsky, has co-founded storytelling festivals at Pricketts Fort State Park in Fairmont, WV and Grand Vue Park located above Moundsville, WV.

JUNE RIFFLE

I am June Riffle from Fairmont, West Virginia. I grew up on a small Preston County farm. My dad was a company coal miner and farmer. My mother was a devoted, but

often frustrated homemaker. Seven children with little material possessions, but almost unlimited freedom and space to roam, provided the natural broth to brew stories to entertain ourselves.

Following graduation from college , I became a teacher in Preston County. Marriage brought the births of four children and a journey across many southern states as I followed my Air Force husband from assignment to assignment.

My professional journey as a storyteller began when I returned to West Virginia after my husband's retirement. My good friend and former teaching partner, Jo Ann Dadisman, conspired with my sister to present a tandem storytelling program for the local reading council. Our audience was enthusiastic and Jo Ann and I had a great time. With that inspiration, the tandem storytelling team known as the Mountain Echoes was born. We continued to tell stories and present workshops throughout West Virginia and the tri-state area for over twenty years.

Life challenges brought changes to our storytelling team. Jo Ann continues in the professional circuit and I spend more time in family and personal pursuits. My hours are kept busy with grandma duties, traveling, gardening, reading , storytelling and volunteering.

Life is one continuous story with unpredictable adventures. I eagerly look forward to experiencing its many new chapters and sharing my stories with others.

BARB SEELS

I'm Barb Seels. I came to storytelling through clowning. I used to be an amateur clown named "Rhubarb". At one time I was president of the Tri Rivers Clown Alley. Storytelling

presentations and workshops were offered at clown conventions. I also attended storytelling conventions sponsored by WVSG at Fairmont State University. After the alley disbanded, I segued into storytelling organizations. I started with Raggedy Ann stories because that was one of my clown costumes and alter egos. I think the selection of stories is the most important part of developing a program. My grandchildren are my selection judges and timers.

Before I retired, I was on the faculty of the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh where I chaired Instructional Design and Technology. Storytelling takes me back to my roots. My undergraduate degree was in Drama and English. Recently, I taught a course in storytelling for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Pittsburgh.

I live in Pennsylvania near Canonsburg. Since the 1970s I have owned a vacation home on Tygart Lake in WV. Currently I am a member of StoryShare in Monroeville, PA. I have been a member of WVSG for many years.

You can contact me at 412-310-2606 or bseels@pitt.edu.

TOM TAROWSKY

I'm Tom Tarowsky. I am twice retired; my first retirement began in 2005, after 25 years at (what was then) Belmont Technical College, in Ohio. I "came up through the chairs" in Student Services and was Dean of Students when I wrapped up my career at the College. I went to work at the Marshall County (WV) Historical Society's Cockayne Farmstead in 2008. After almost 7 years of great fun at as Program Director at the Farmstead, I retired (again) in 2015. Although I've done some general storytelling over the years, these days my practice is now limited to an annual fundraiser for (and at) the Farmstead—Things That Go 'Bump' @ Cockayne. It's an hour-long late-evening ghost walk through the large ca. 1850 farmhouse in the middle of Glen Dale. My stories recount the experiences of the museum's staff, volunteers, contractors, and visitors, and there's not a fabricated tale among them.

Most importantly, I'm also Storyteller Judi's husband (coming up on 50 years), as well as her roadie, driver, and a sounding board for her new material. I previously served as the WVSG's Treasurer, while Judi was its President.

Early in 2019, we moved from St. Clairsville, Ohio, to Weirton, WV, where we lived when we first married. It's good to be back on the "right" side of the river!

BTW, folks who are interested in visiting the Farmstead for my ghost walk can contact me at tjtarowsky@gmail.com to set up a visit.

PAIGE TIGHE

I am Paige Tighe. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, artist, storyteller and teacher. I grew up at the feet of two fabulous storytellers--my dad and my maternal grandmother. Because of them, I have always felt I actually remembered NYC of the 1920s and turn-of-the-last-century York, Pennsylvania. It's only natural that I would also communicate in story.

I have been telling stories professionally since 2003, and as a teacher who tells stories (as opposed to a storyteller who teaches), since 1987. I am drawn to redemptive stories, restorative stories, the ones in which you get a second chance even if nobody thinks you deserve it. I pull from the ancient stories of my Christian faith, folk tales, and life. I have studied under wonderful tellers and learn more everywhere a story is being told.

Currently, I am telling weekly in my school (Capon Bridge Elementary) and last April launched MONKEYSHINES, a youth storytelling club full of wonderful and talented...well, monkeys.

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STAS' ZIOLKOWSKI

I am Stas' (rhymes with gosh or push posh) Ziolkowski. I was a chemistry, math, astronomy teacher for 40 years and retired in 2006! For the past 35 years I have been involved in theater as an actor, writer, director, and producer. Also during those years I have performed as a storyteller. I have been very fortunate to be able to be involved in each of these wonderful pursuits and now I find I sometimes am able to combine my experience in all three to entertain audiences from young children to elderly listeners.

I live in Sharpsburg, MD and am in an enviable position because I am able to be a committee member of Adam Booth's SpeakStory series in Shepherdstown, WV and also help Fanny Crawford with her series, Stories In The Round in Hagerstown, MD. Fanny and I do a weekly internet radio show that is then turned into a podcast, taltales.enlightenradio.org where you are able to hear more than 18 months of our shows.

This summer I have been fortunate in that I was hired to do performances for the Summer Reading Program at all Washington County, MD. Libraries. I am also a member of a new guild, the Antietam Storytelling Guild, and have tried my hand (mouth) at a new challenge, telling Liar's Tales.

LARRY STAATS

Larry Staats, grew up in Sandyville, West Virginia. He obtained BA, LLB, and JD degrees from Ohio State University and was commissioned as an officer in the U S. Army Reserve. He was a practicing attorney and a Chapter 7 Bankruptcy Trustee in Columbus, OH for many years. Active in percussive dancing for a long time, Larry has performed at Clifftop and many other venues. He plays a wide variety of instruments including Jew's harp, banjo, bones, nose flute and more. As a storyteller he has performed, mostly for fun, at the Swanannoa Gathering, the Mars Hill Festival, and many other venues.

OTTO ROSS

I am Otto Ross, a retired math teacher. Even though I no longer teach the subject, there's nothing I like better than doing math problems for fun. I guess that's why several of the guild members encouraged me to be the treasurer of the organization. I have been holding this position for the last two years. I came to storytelling through my wife, Katie. When we started dating 27 years ago, she found out that I could play the accordion, the banjo, and the guitar. She convinced me to be part of her storytelling programs. Now we perform together weaving stories and music into our presentations. I am not a storyteller although many people tell me that indeed I do tell stories at least in an informal way. Actually I did tell my students stories to keep the subject of math more interesting. And even now I make up tales on the spur of the moment.

KATIE ROSS

I am Katie Ross, a teller whose grandmother, Bess Courtney, loved nothing better than entertaining audiences with her poems, dramatic presentations, and stories. From her I inherited not only my love of storytelling, but also a number of storytelling magazines dating back to 1939.

I grew up in Riverside, California which is located about 60 miles away from Hollywood. I attended a large school where my graduating class had almost 900 students. Because of the size of the school and its proximity to Hollywood, I was able to take drama classes from grades 9 through 12. I loved theater so I took advantage of these various offerings during my high school years. So much of what I learned back then has helped me out as a storyteller.

I went on to teach French and Spanish in grades 7 through 12 in San Diego, California; Misawa, Japan; Montgomery county, Maryland; and Allegany County, Maryland. Then one day back in 1989 something happened that changed my life. A storyteller by the name of Gail Herman came to give a performance of African stories to my junior high students. Her stories drew me in, and I suddenly realized that this is what I wanted to do: to tell stories. Gail became my mentor that day. I learned so much from her.

I married Otto Ross in 1993. Not only did I acquire a husband but I gained a storytelling partner as well. Otto was an accomplished musician who played the guitar, accordion, and banjo so I started incorporating music into my presentations. We call our duo *Stories by the Score*. We share all kinds of stories and music for various audiences. I enjoy giving workshops on storytelling as well. I love being part of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild of which I am the membership chair and vice president.

Otto and I live in Mineral County West Virginia. I can be contacted at 304-738-2338 (land line) or 240-522-8668 (cell). My email address is okross40@gmail.com. Please feel free to contact me.

KAREN VURANCH

Greetings from Fayetteville, WV. My name is Karen Vuranch and I have been telling stories since 1980. I was four. Okay, that might be stretching it, but I have been telling stories and performing Appalachian history since 1980. I am a West Virginian by choice and have lived here for over half of my long life. Over the years, my storytelling has been a journey. In undergraduate school, I majored in Theatre. But, I always felt that I wanted somethingdifferent. When I found storytelling, I found that it was the style of performance that

suited me. I perform Appalachian, Celtic, ghost, multi-cultural and personal stories. I have had the good fortune to perform traditional stories all over the world, including a trip to China in 2003. I also collect oral history and create performances. Coal Camp Memories is a storytelling-drama that chronicles the life of a woman in the West Virginia coalfields in the early 1900's. I have performed that show throughout the state, in 39 US states and England and Wales. And I continue to perform that show, especially for bus tour groups that visit West Virginia. Homefront is the story of four women during WWII, based on an oral history I collected.

But, as a full-time storyteller, I soon learned that one has to be diverse to make a living (like the swimming pool salesperson that sells Christmas trees in December!). In addition to my traditional stories and oral history, I also perform Living History, where I thoroughly study a historic woman and bring that character to life. I have 13 historical characters I perform including Mother Jones, Pearl S. Buck, Mary Draper Ingles, Clara Barton, Julia Child, Edith Wharton and am working on developing a new character, Gertrude Bell, even as we speak. Finally, I also added to my performing career by writing and producing murder mysteries with my troupe, The In Cahoots Players. Recently, my career has taken a bit of turn, as I returned to my theatrical roots. I am now a full-time faculty member of Concord University, teaching Theatre. I direct several productions a year and teach everything from building sets and costumes and acting to drama as literature. However, I am still able to incorporate my love of storytelling by teaching my students living history and storytelling classes. While my journey has brought me back to Theatre, my love and passion for storytelling and Appalachian history will always be an important part of me and I will continue tell and create new stories.

If you want to drop me a note and say hi, I'd love to hear from you. My email is karen@wventepprises.com. By the way, my company is WV Enterprises. It does stand for West Virginia, of course, but it is a bit of play on words. My husband's name is Gene Worthington, so the WV could also be Worthington and Vuranch. Cute, huh? I would also be glad to help anyone with navigating the business of storytelling. I did a workshop for our Guild last Fall, telling storytellers how to do income tax and log expenses and all other forms of taking care of business. If you have questions, just drop me a line. Thanks for the opportunity to introduce myself to you.

JOYCE GEARY

I am Joyce Geary, for 55 years the wife of one called Hugh, the mother of two named Mark and Lisa, and the grandmother of three - Kaleb, 27, Nate, 25, and Seth, 18. Lisa and Seth live in WI off the grid in a straw bale house with solar heat, a well and animals all picked for what their purposes are on her fledgling 40 acre farm. The geese are to weed and debug the about 200 raspberry bushes which are being grown for their leaves which will make great saleable tea someday as will the leaves of the rose bushes. The sheep mow the grass. The hogs and cattle will provide meat and money, the guinea hens eat ticks, chickens provide eggs and eventually meat. The dog guards it all. The cats love you! And so on. And they all provide stories for me at schools, camps, senior citizen and child care centers, wherever I tell which is wherever there are people to listen! Seth lives at University of Wisconsin - Madison, a totally city boy until four years ago but now can drive through downtown Columbus with ease as well as set up electric fences as needed to contain the animals in their day's duties. More stories.... The rest of us are still city folk. Three of us live in Worthington, founded in 1803, although it is now totally surrounded by that 1812 upstart Columbus! I spend much time "living" at the Ohio Historical Village as Laura Chase Reed, teacher of grades 1-8 in the one room schoolhouse - living, telling and encouraging stories in that role and others.

I love personal/ family stories and first person characters such as Katie Luther, wife of Martin Luther. I am Susanna Wesley, mother of the Wesley brothers founders of the Methodist church

as well as being a teller of every Bible story that has a female character - even Moses has a sister who tells about her big brother! I tell historical stories of Worthington and the US to DAR and other meetings, science and environmental stories, folk and fairy tales from around the world and stories from many holiday traditions. I will admit that a birthday party for a one-year-old, friends and family was a challenge and I did quickly increase my repertoire for one-year-olds almost 100%!

We love to travel and have been to every state in the US and most of Canada and always find new stories. It was a thrill telling in the fjords on a Norwegian mail boat and I'm sure I have the picture of the house where The Man Who Kept House MUST have lived in Switzerland!

I am a friend, retired classroom teacher of gr. 3-4 in a "way out in the country" school and an ESL teacher who has taught English and told stories to ages 3- 95 in homes, schools, camps, and churches. I like to read, swim, travel, play board games, learn and share stories, and play clarinet and bells.

I am a member of Storytellers of Central Ohio (SOCO), Ohio Storytellers Network (OSN), National Storytellers Network (NSN), am on the boards of OSN and SOCO. You may contact me at <jgeary@columbus.rr.com> OR 614-885-3164 OR 630 Morning St., Worthington, OH 43085.

JULIE MCGHEE

Julie O'Keefe McGhee...Mary Julia O'Keefe...Julie McGhee...Mary J. McGhee

I sometimes feel like a four-headed creature for I've gone by different names at different phases of my life and some I still use and some have faded from use.

Actually that is true of all of us. Our life is like a book and each chapter may tell a different story. The following stories/chapter will be brief, as I don't want you to use too much ink in printing my story.

I was born, raised and went to school through high school in Columbus, Ohio. My family was truly a nuclear group, mother, father and two children. We went to church every Sunday and we saw grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins from time to time.

Because I figured even if I didn't go to college somewhere else, I'd likely never leave Columbus, Ohio...I went to school in Cincinnati. It was good that I did for when I met Bill and we were married for fifty-seven good years, well we never did leave Columbus until about ten years ago when we moved three miles over the county line and left Franklin County/Columbus and moved to Delaware and Westerville.... big deal for just three miles.

Bill died last year and for a while I lived alone but recently acquired a dachshund, Willie. He was a rescue dachshund and now I have someone to talk to who never argues or complains...he just slips out of his harness every chance he gets.

What were the influences in my life? Well, they were: my parents, Michael and Louise, grandparents, Bertha and John, Aunt Mame, my co-workers at our store, Foersters, my co-workers I taught with, my pupils that I taught and my own children that I "raised".

I could tell you stories about each and all of those but let's get to why I'm now a storyteller. Well, when I was young I loved to hear the family stories and gossip. My father used to call me "Elephant ears" because if there was a story being told, I was a good listener. I pestered my grandmother to tell me stories and I loved to be read to by any relative that would accommodate me. At one time there was a bookstore near our store and my father was

always bringing home books and of course we were avid library patrons. My Aunt Mame was the school principal in Chillicothe, Ohio and if there were any extra books, you know where they went. As a teacher I loved reading to my students and they loved it too. As a mother I started reading and telling to my own children and I think they loved it too.

I actually sort of morphed into storytelling because I used it in my daily life with my own children and pupils when it became apparent that lessons were presented as a story both students and my own children listened more carefully and remembered more. So that's when I became a storyteller.

Since I have retired as a classroom teacher I have told at a variety of venues; classrooms, festivals, libraries and small groups. When I tell I've told as myself, Ildnat, a tenth century herbalist, Julia Johanna O'Hanrahan, a 19th century immigrant and Ellen Ewing Sherman the General's wife.

In collaboration with four others we published a book, *Transplanted Shamrocks*, a collection of Irish-American stories from Central Ohio. We felt that ethnic group deserved to preserve their stories.

I am a proud member of several groups that actively promote storytelling: N.S.N., O.S.N. and S.O.C.O.

There are many quotes about the value of storytelling but I recently heard this said on a television program that sums up my feelings about the value of storytelling, "We can't go far....if we can't remember where we came from". That statement is why I'll continue to tell stories.

Spotlight On our Members

RAYMOND ALVAREZ

Here's a bit about me, Raymond Alvarez.. I'm a native of Marion County, where I live today. After retiring three times from healthcare management, I'm back to work at Fairmont State University as a visiting professor in the School of Business. I think of myself as a writer of stories and would like to become more adept at telling them. I've worked with the FSU Folklife Center over the past six years on various projects such as historical displays and community lectures. I've published 17 history-based articles in Goldenseal over the years focusing on retelling Fairmont stories long forgotten. My most recent work is about the life of Navy Lt. James S. Maddox, who died in 1943 after surviving 77 days on a small raft with 4 other men; three of whom were rescued on day 83 after their ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Brazil. It's a gripping tale of a young man from Fairmont who found himself thrust into an impossible situation but his leadership kept them focused on survival... and story telling was one of the techniques he used. It's available on Amazon and Kindle ("Forgotten Hero: Ensign James Maddox")--sorry about the shameless plug. As I researched this, I found a wonderful story that, for the most part was forgotten locally. The men had very little, if any, conflict. Two men were Dutch and one was only 17 years old. Maddox told him folktales and stories each evening. The other men listened as well. When we did a Folklife presentation, Judy Byers said "this is all about the power of a story." Recently, I helped organize a Writer's Group in Taylor County at the Taylor County Arts Council. Storytelling was one of the aspects I want to incorporate into the group--and my neighbor down the road, June Riffle, agreed to come talk to us. I'm bringing a lot of information to the group that I gathered at the April 27th meeting. We hope to have storytelling by members of the group at some point in the future at Grafton's First Friday events at the Arts Center. I find a lot of information from the 50+ years of newspaper columns by C. E. "Ned" Smith. These were published in the Fairmont

Times from the 1920s to the late 1950s. He was a story teller every day in his column... amusing tales and incidents of a city dating to the 1800s. So I guess the stories I like are those that are colorful tales of the early 20th century... if we don't tell them in stories, they won't be remembered. Our Taylor County Writing Group meets at 6:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month at the Arts Council building on Main Street in Grafton.

SUE ATKINSON

I grew up in South Georgia in the small town of Swainsboro. It is where Highways 1 and 80 intersect. If you were born before the days of Interstates, you know that Highway 1 went from the southern United States to the tip of the Northern United States and Highway 80 did the same from East to West. Therefore, we billed ourselves as the "Crossroads of the Great South."

This Georgia Peach was transplanted to Beckley, West Virginia in 1969, and I blossomed under the acceptance and friendliness of Mountaineers. I did not get into storytelling until I met Danny McMillion about 2004. This was after my husband passed away, home was an empty nest, I sold the family business and had taken a part time job because I didn't know what else to do with myself.

I have always been an avid reader and Danny showed me how to share myself and my stories through storytelling. She would always introduce me as, "Sue Atkinson. She has lived in WV for 45 years, and she still talks funny."

Now I live in Ohio, next to my daughter and tell stories rarely, although I do enjoy telling a good lie from time to time. And that's how I am usually billed...a liar. Most of my stories are lies, with a grain of truth. I want to work on telling stories written by others so I can share what I enjoy reading.

JUDITH CLISTER

I am Judith Clister. I live in northern Preston County, West Virginia. My background is in elementary education and counseling and environmental education. Many summers have been spent camping and telling Native American stories around the campfire. One of my loves is Celtic stories and I have been involved with the Garrett County Celtic Fest for several years now. I have not yet, but can provide music along with my stories and pictures if talking about Ireland. I hope to begin learning some West Virginia stories to share in classrooms and around campfires.

I can be reached at 304-379-3564 or jclister@frontiernet.net.

Judith Clister
Spiritual Companion

ADAM BOOTH

I am a full-time professional storyteller who resides in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. I have told stories professionally for fourteen years and, of that, this is my seventh year telling full-time. I am fortunate in that I get to travel the country telling stories. I have told at some of the premiere storytelling events in the US, including the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival and the National Storytelling Festival. I have worked in twenty-five states and am proud to get to tell quite a bit around WV each year. I got my start in the WV Liars' Contest but have broadened my repertoire to include traditional Appalachian stories, ballads, and original neo-traditional stories. I have released five collections of stories which have received Parents' Choice Awards and Storytelling World Awards. I have been an active member of the Guild telling at events around the State, previously serving as President, and now I volunteer as the Webmaster for the Guild.

Adam

KEVIN CORDI

When asked “who am I?” I turn to my friend and colleague George Ella Lyon’s “Where I am from” poetry.

I am from rich stories of deep hollers of Clay County and rural life in Newburg West Virginia. My parents who told me my first stories and allowed my veins to speak narrative.

I am from the richness of stories of Appalachia.

However, I am also from teaching 14 years of teaching in Ohio and California.

From African American teens to migrant workers , I held on to each tale as my students found their voice in story and together we formed a storytelling guild for 11 years.

I am from listening and learning from storytellers such as Jackie Torrence, Jay O’Callahan, and from everyday storytellers like my neighbors and friends.

I listened so much I have written about the importance of listening in my new books.

I am from Jack who stands as a metaphor for my journey of being a teller.

In the tales of Jack, I am connected to story.

I am a deep listener of the mountains, nation, and the world, as they echo their tales to be heard.

Being a storyteller for over 25 years has taught me that there is so much more to learn.

The only way to know Jack and his story is to find out more about both.

The only way to discover narrative is to use narratives.

This has brought me to correction officers in Qatar helping them use narrative to discover people not inmates.

Children with parents suffering from AIDS to remind them laughter and story can comfort them.

standing alongside the lollipop kid from , now grown up, from the Wizard of Oz being not Kansas, but a new place called narrative as they wait for the film to begin.

To study the art and earn a doctorate in narrative and education

and teach future teachers that their story needs to be strong, as well as their students.

Where I am from

is where stories reside and where people need to know the simple message that stories help create meaning.

It has done this for me and my journey has only begun.

*Kevin D. Cordi has been telling stories and teaching the art professionally for over 25 years. He currently has taken a new position at Ohio University Lancaster serving as an Assistant Professor of Education and Literacy. He is the author of *You Don’t Know Jack: A Storyteller Goes to School* (2019) and *Playing with Stories: story crafting for writers, teachers, and other imaginative thinkers*. He continues to travel teaching and telling about the art we know as story. He runs the monthly series Storyville at Columbus, Ohio and serves on the National

Advisory Board for Teaching Tolerance. You can find out more at www.kevincordi.com Email: kctells@gmail.com