

## **Susi Wolf - Storyteller**

We go through life having plans for things. I was operating a musical performance space that catered to small acoustic acts. One day my phone rang. On the other end of the phone I was asked this question? Do you allow storytellers in your performance space? We talked for a little while and the answer to her question was I do now. I stopped planning so much and started allowing more to happen. Story plays such an important part in all of our lives that we don't realize until we consider all of our shows, all of our theater, our music, all owe their own form of tribute to story. This wonderful storyteller Susi Wolf will make you wish you had experienced this pure version of the art form of "Storytelling". So one day I announced I was going to blog

about my musical friends and Susi contacted me shortly after, can storytellers be included and again my answer was of course.



### **When did you begin storytelling?**

As a small child I would draw on a magic slate and make up a story, erase it, draw the next scene, and so on. Story has always been a huge part of my life without my even acknowledging it as such. In my 20s I went to acting school for 2 years and then went to clown college for 1 year. For 13 years in Dallas I made my living as a professional clown ("Shaboom the Clown"), as well as other characters.

When I saw the movie "Out of Africa" my life changed. During the scene where Meryl Streep took Robert Redford into the library after dinner and told him a story, I literally felt chills all over. I knew I was supposed to be a Storyteller. That was the beginning (over 30 years ago!).

### **What instrument(s) do you play?**

I actually play the Limber Jack, which is an Appalachian percussion instrument (looks like a wooden puppet on a dowel). The mountain people did not have drummers but loved keeping rhythm so this wooden instrument was created. I demonstrate the Limber Jack when I tell traditional Appalachian "Jack" tales. I also have dabbled in spoons a bit.

"When I tell a Story my words are the percussion that keeps the beat so we all know how to dance together."

- (c) Susi Wolf, 2017

### **Do you come from a family of storytellers?**

Nope – came from a traumatic background which probably was instrumental in developing me into a storyteller (my creative side was greatly enhanced during these painful times).

### **Are you self-taught or do you have training or a mixture of the two?**

I believe I came with a natural ability to create and tell stories. But I have received training in various forms (conferences, colleges, guilds, other storytellers, etc.). So it is a combination of being self-taught and formal training.

Once I knew I was to be a storyteller, I still had some misconceptions. I thought it would be like doing a monologue (I was a trained actor – monologues were familiar to me). But then I attended the National Storytelling Association's annual conference (which was held in Dallas that year) a mere month later. Once I experienced professional storytellers on stage, in workshops, etc. I knew I was in a different realm. I told myself to be humbled, to sit at the feet of the masters, and to learn, learn, learn! Which I did.

### **How often do you practice?**

I am constantly reading new stories, writing tales, and telling them to myself. On a daily basis, I would say. I am filled with joy whenever I tell stories – even if I am alone.

### **What was the first folktale book you purchased? Does it still influence you? How?**

I was gifted (from a master storyteller) a must-have for all who are learning oral tradition: Best-Loved Folktales of the World by Joanna Cole. It is a treasure chest of learning about worldwide folktales and the cultures in which they thrive. To this day I will periodically thumb through it for new stories to tell. The language is very rich in most of the stories and it is an opportunity to see how the same folktale is told in various cultures around the world (i.e., there are over 800 versions of Cinderella).

### **What is the most bizarre thing that has been shared with you at a gig?**

I did healing storytelling at a women's lockup. I loved this work and I was always guided intuitively (I am a Shaman) about what stories to tell. On my first night they were hesitant at first but finally warmed up. I kept sensing (yes, I heard a guidance) that I was to tell the Princess and the Pea fairy tale. I kept resisting, fearing the women would think I was being patronizing. It kept happening: "Tell the Princess and the Pea." Finally I relented and they absolutely loved it.

The guards took them back to their rooms and I saw one woman huddled in a corner beckon me. She whispered how sorry she was that she could not listen to the story but she was in so much pain as she had just gone through detox. She explained that her most favorite story in the whole world was the Princess and the Pea and that her grandmother used to tell it to her. She began to cry, asking how did she get where she was, what had happened in her life, and just generally pouring out her soul. I remained silent, holding her and rocking her. Finally they took her to her room and the therapist asked what happened. I told her and the therapist explained that this woman was very sick and they had doctor's orders to give her pain med's but for two weeks she had refused to speak to anyone. "You are the first person she's said a word to. Maybe now we can help her."

I have never questioned again when I am guided to tell a story.

### **What was the last book you purchased?**

I purchased Trail of Tears by Joseph Bruchac. I am Eastern Band Cherokee/Celtic and it is the tragic tale of the attempt to annihilate my entire tribe by removing us from our homeland and forcing us to walk to the Oklahoma territory.

### **Do you have a favorite story?**

My favorite story is the one I am telling at the moment. But I guess I could characterize it further by saying I like short, pithy tales that pack a punch. Story is the ultimate form of communication and connection. So stories that make you feel or ponder are my favorite.

### **Does it go on tour?**

I do tour throughout the year doing storytelling events and one-woman shows. I love seeing the reaction of people to Story, especially those who have not heard a storyteller before.

Another thought

“Sleeping dragons may awaken as we move through the shadowy forests of life’s paths. Story is the Light...the lantern dispelling the dragon’s darkness and guiding us to safe haven.”

- (c) Susi Wolf, 2013

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