



DISTRICT ONE StoryMasters

Enamored with StoryMasters on Valentine's Day

By Margaret Mitchell

At 3:00 p.m. on February 14, StoryMasters and friends gathered online to enjoy an afternoon of superb storytelling. The setting—virtual backgrounds of flowers and chocolates—was just perfect for Valentine's Day.

Kathy Falco, in *This Isn't Going Anywhere*, presented a personal story about coping with grief as a new widow raising a teenaged son and daughter. Initially, she moved mechanically through her days; but in a steely moment of determination announced to herself and her children that while death may have taken her husband, grief would not overtake them all. As the years passed, she saw her children off to college, returned to school herself, moved through her grief, and finally opened her heart to loving again. This enchanting, heart-warming story was the perfect way to kick off the afternoon's entertainment!

Hiba Hamdan, in *Make It Happen*, presented a formula for surviving difficult times and achieving one's goals. A survivor of the 15-year civil war in Lebanon, Hiba learned not only how to survive, but how to thrive during difficult times. Through trial, error, and reflection, she took the best of SMART goals and The Law of Attraction to formulate her own strategy for success: Ask, Believe, Act, Adjust, Receive (ABAAR). Her formula helped her survive challenges ranging from surviving the war, to completing Engineering school and finding her life's work, to finding the perfect home for her husband and herself in Santa Barbara. Hiba's authenticity and enthusiasm were convincing on the power of ABAAR.

In *Let's Talk About Leadership*, **Lin Van Gelder** shared her personal insights into what constitutes a leader and offered tips for leadership growth. Having held leadership roles throughout her life, she prefers to support other leaders as a member of their team. Qualities she looks for in a leader are big ideas, passion, empathy, integrity, appreciation of logic, science, and technology. To grow as a leader, she suggests: developing your skill sets, being strategic; getting a mentor, and incorporating diversity and inclusion to get better results. Spoken like a leader, Lin!

Jacki Williams-Jones presented a story titled *Love*, relating how she met and married her second husband, Michael. The two were high school sweethearts who met in their high school geometry class and dated until they went off to college in separate states. Their romance did not survive the distance, and they eventually married other people. Jacki allowed this story to unfold slowly, using dry humor as she described how the one-time sweethearts were brought together again. It was another perfect tale for Valentine's Day!

In *Big Momma*, **Camille Miller** described the profound influence that Mrs. Mosely, a mother of seven children, had on her life. Mrs. Mosely lived a life of kindness and generosity. She treated Camille like honorary child number eight, earning herself the appellation Big Momma. The story's message—be good to others without expectation of payment—was delivered with humor, tenderness, and an impressive range of storytelling skills. This International speech has all the makings of a contest winner!

The meeting flowed smoothly, thanks to: Toastmaster, **Mallery McMurtrey**; General Evaluator, **Jill Vanderweit**; Timer, **Anna Ziss-Patton**; Wordmaster/Grammarians, **Margaret Mitchell**; and Evaluators, **Miyo Yamauchi**, **Pieter Severynen**, **Aprille Isham**, **Janice Strachan**, and **Tina Tomiyama**.

Jill Vanderweit's masterful summary of the evaluation points given to speakers provided additional value to a very fine meeting.

Next meeting is March 14. ([RSVP FROM HERE](#))

MEET OUR NEWEST STORYMASTER

Ashton Cynthia Clarke

Ashton may be new to Toastmasters, but she’s been performing in the spoken world for years, at RISK!, Strong Words, The Otter Story Hour, and Tales by the Sea, to name a few. Also, she’s been studying storytelling under Barbara H. Clark with other StoryMasters. So we were tickled when she told us she wanted to be a StoryMaster.

Welcome to StoryMasters, Ashton!



PAST EVENTS

StoryMasters have been BUSY! Thank you all for supporting our members and friends!

Bold Faced Secret — "Going to the Distance" / The Otter Story Hour — "What I Did for Love"

Miyo Yamauchi told two stories in one week; an inspiring story, “Mind Games,” on January 29 and a romantic humorous story, “For the Love of Joe,” on February 1. Two totally different stories, but there was one thing in common. Both of them did make the audience burst into laughter!



Toastmasters Speech Contests

Our own area speech contests are still a bit far into the future, but our members have been showing off their talents



Cynthia Moore shared her beautiful story, "Good Daughter" at the District 1 Area A1 International Speech Contest.



Lin Van Gelder won the District 1 Area C3 International Speech Contest. Her next round is April 17.



Anna Ziss-Patton came in second place at the District 1 Area C3 Humorous Speech Contest.



On the other side of the world, **Bharat Sangekar** won the District 73 Area I47 International Speech Contest. His next round is March 12.

Not only that, he was also on ABC Radio Melbourne, being interviewed! How cool is that?

SAC’s Romantic Story night

Kathy Falco

Following Catherine’s alluring performance last month, Kathy Falco charmed her audience with her story, “This Isn’t Going Anywhere” at the Storytelling Association of California (SAC)’s Romantic Story night.

When she was spotlighted, suddenly, the screen seem to brighten up with her pink blouse, lovely orchid, and beautiful smile.

After her performance, somebody said “It was a perfect story for the theme.” It sure was! In fact, the renowned storyteller (and Kathy’s teacher) Barbara H. Clark told her:



I was completely enchanted by your presentation on the SAC zoom last evening. Yours was by far the best performance. The story was better organized and you were poised and convincing. Your voice quality was steady and your “eye contact” truly appeared to reach the on-line audience. Your backdrop was uncluttered and the lighting level was just right. You looked beautiful! I am very proud to be a part of your storytelling development.

Kathy, your story was such a delight! Thank you for making us smile!

Watch Kathy’s story here. <https://youtu.be/4UEcA3kbOU0?t=2782>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mar 12 **District 73 Inner City Division Speech Contests** 2:00 PM PST/ 5:00 PM EST
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86233466612?pwd=Z3RaWU04bGVNMithYS9jWUg0VndBdz09>
Bharat Sangekar's Division Speech Contests in Australia. His district runs all the contests every year, so even division contests take all day long. In LA time, his contest runs from 2pm till the midnight.

Mar 19 **District 1 Area F1 & F5 Speech Contests** 5:00 PM PST/ 8:00 PM EST
<https://district1toastmasters.org/events/2021speechcontestf1f5/>
Let's support our long-distance members: Camille Miller and Bharat Sangekar, who will represent StoryMasters!

Many storytelling classes, workshops, concerts, and festivals are listed on our website. Check our event page regularly!

Check out more events at: <https://thestorymasters.org/events/>

A STORYMASTERS FRIEND'S STORY

Rick the Plumber

By Jim Mueller, Producer, South Bay Stories Show

When our plumbing is clogged, we call Rick the Plumber. Before long, our water is running free again.

But, wait a minute! One day, on his way out, Rick suddenly stops.

"That's Royal Albert," he says. We follow his gaze to my wife's teacup collection. He continues, "I have about 900 of those."

How does a plumber happen to know anything about teacups, much less have 900 of one specific type?

Turns out Rick loves estate sales...and, he sold some of his teacups to Alpine Village Collectibles where I bought that particular Royal Albert teacup for my wife's collection. In fact, the very teacup hanging on our teacup rack may have been one of Rick's. What a coincidence.

One day, Rick was doing plumbing for a Japanese-American lady and her elderly mother. The mother was bright, but nearing 100 and a bit frail. She had come to America as a child and lived in Redondo Beach all her life. She said proudly that she had graduated from Redondo Beach High School in 1929.

Rick said, "I have the 1929 yearbook from Redondo Beach High."

The ladies stared at Rick. The mother's own yearbook had disappeared sometime in the 80 years since she had graduated.

Rick said, "I bought it for 50 cents at an estate sale a couple of years ago. I don't know why. I can bring it over tomorrow."

The next day, when Rick arrived with the yearbook, the daughter opened it to her mother's class portrait.

"Mommy, look how pretty you are," she exclaimed, laying the book in her mother's lap. The old lady began to cry, and cried more as they turned the pages. The mother was transported back 80 years. The daughter wept to see her mother's happiness and soon, Rick was crying, too.

Rick left the book with the ladies. Later, he heard they had made enlargements of the photos and hung them on the wall. They sent the yearbook to Japan so family could see it.

A year or so later, Rick heard the old lady had died. He felt good bringing her happiness — and fixing her plumbing.



The sixth South Bay Stories Show will be ready as soon as they can schedule a theater. In the meantime, they've helped a charity organization, FirstServe, produce a storytelling video as a fund-raiser.

Click the link to see a preview: <https://www.first-serve.org/first-person-stories>.

A STORYMASTER'S STORY

The Bog Pond Telling

By Pieter Severynen

I was lucky enough to be selected as one of the Southern California representatives for the November 21, 2020 Tellebration™ event, a worldwide storytelling celebration sponsored by National Storytelling Network. I knew I wanted to tell ‘the Bog Pond’ story. Storytelling popularity waxes and wanes, but it will always have an irresistible charm for listeners of all ages. Just as we know within minutes whether we will make that hoped-for magical connection to the author of a book, so we sense right away if we are going to bond with the storyteller. On the part of the storyteller, creating that resonance and depicting the setting and movement of the story is the result of hard work at least as much as natural talent. But in the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic’s effects, with electronic Zoom meetings replacing live ones, have made things much harder for us storytellers.



Before 2020 we could look at our audience during live meetings, gauge the faces and reactions while telling the story, and fine-tune the telling as needed. Now, I was sitting alone, in front of a computer screen, in an uncomfortable position, looking directly at a clip-on camera atop the monitor that did not even show as much as a tiny ‘I am working’ laser light, and trying to convince myself that I really believed with all my heart in my facial pantomime show, while chatting with an unseen and unheard audience. It was weeks after the event before I finally saw myself telling the story on screen, and when I did, my reaction was: ‘Man, relax, smile, it is a good story! Even if the telling is subject to a lot of improvement, show the joy of communicating it and the wonder of experiencing it. And remember why you picked the story.’ One reason is that during my lifetime that ‘bog pond’ story has become the exception instead of the rule; remaining bog ponds have turned into relics. From country dwellers we have become city people. Richard Louv, in ‘Last Child in the Woods’, Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, describes our alienation from the natural world and the physical and emotional effects that has on us.

Children complain that there are no electrical outlets outside. We know that we are barely connected to or realize the effects of our actions on the natural world. For two centuries the world’s people have been contributing to carbon dioxide accumulation in atmosphere and ocean, a little bit at a time, and we still have a hard time grasping that without countermeasures, Global Warming may ultimately kill us—slow or fast, it does not matter. I think that if I understand that possibility, then I have the responsibility to talk about it. I may not be the best spokesman for the environment, there are far better ones, but at the moment we need everybody who can talk about it to do so. We need to show the dangers of our slow world heating if we do not take corrective action. Preparing for the speech, I was wondering if I should mention ‘Drawdown’ at the end, the realistic solutions book: I don’t want to spoil good stories with ‘thou shalt’ or ‘must do’, commands and morals that nag. But I do want to make clear what is going on in nature, and to do so effectively. Most people have no clue, and there is active resistance against spreading this knowledge by people who have a vested interest in keeping things the way they are, even if in the end we all go under. Like I think most of us, I aim to present my stories attractively, list the moral sparingly, tell an occasional fun story for relief, and keep trying to find the magic formula that has the audience moved to tears while discovering the message. In the meantime, I am grateful to StoryMasters for the chance to try. Thank you all for your support, and your storytelling examples.

Watch Pieter’s story here. <https://youtu.be/QVYZZo3lFZM?t=1587>



Pieter Severynen, a graduate of both UC Berkeley, California, and the State College for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, Deventer, The Netherlands, is the Director of Planning and Design at North East Trees, a non-profit design build firm dedicated to increasing green space and constructing innovative environmental improvement projects in Los Angeles. He also heads his own design and consulting firm, Pieter Severynen Associates, Landscape Architects, Planners and Arborists in Los Angeles, and he teaches classes in pruning and arboriculture.

Prior to his current positions he worked for over 20 years at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development as land planner for the Western states, environmental officer and community planner. He is experienced in public administration; project management, real estate negotiations, land use planning and landscape architecture and is familiar with Southern California demographics, recreation, open space and housing needs.

An accomplished public speaker, he explains and makes of interest to a broad public, a variety of work and interest related issues, including land use planning, international environmental cooperation, urban-rural interface problems, global warming, fire resistant landscaping, rare fruit growing, and sensory awareness. He is also a professional storyteller.

STORYTELLING STUB

Kurt Vonnegut's 8 Rules for Writing a Short Story

This is not my first time to introduce the famous post-war American novelist Kurt Vonnegut's tips because they're always intriguing. In his book [Bagombo Snuff Box](#), he listed these eight rules for writing a short story:

1. Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.
2. Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for.
3. Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water.
4. Every sentence must do one of two things—reveal character or advance the action.
5. Start as close to the end as possible.
6. Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them—in order that the reader may see what they are made of.
7. Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia.
8. Give your readers as much information as possible as soon as possible. To heck with suspense. Readers should have such complete understanding of what is going on, where and why, that they could finish the story themselves, should cockroaches eat the last few pages.

The rules are made to be broken (as Vonnegut pointed out), but they can be a good starting point. In fact, some of the rules can be used for personal stories. Keep them in mind when you write a story next time!

EDITOR'S NOTE

Why Do I Live?

The other day, I was telling my friend, Tina, about a nightmare that I had the previous night. It was a lengthy story and we laughed in the end. Then, a few days later, I realized that it was also a dream. I've never told anybody about the nightmare, which reminded me of "No Reason," one of the episodes from the medical TV series *House*. In the episode, the protagonist couldn't separate fact from fiction, as hallucinations began to get a stronger grasp on his sense of reality. In order to snap out of his hallucination, he decided to kill a guy with the facility's surgical robot. I had a similar experience when I was a kid. In my dream, I couldn't end nightmares no matter how hard I tried, so to get out of the insanity, I tried killing myself, but I couldn't because it was a dream after all. I was 100% immortal in my dreams.

I don't know theories of dreaming, but I know that my dreams are always affected by my reality.

Why do I have to live?

That was the question I kept asking myself over and over at the time. I was exhausted by being a sick child. After the intense nightmare, I reached the conclusion; *I live because I can't kill myself*. The answer made sense.

Lately I dream a lot. In general, my dreams are vivid and colorful. Oftentimes I can tell that it's not real while I'm having a dream, and when I sense the dream going south, I try changing the narration (that's a long story for another time). But I cannot tell the recent dreams because they're so natural.

It's still February, but 2021 is so mean! You can call me a drama queen, but this year already looks depressing to me. When I started thinking that I should feel self-pity and go dark for the rest of the year, I got a call from my friend.

Miyo, do you need a ride? If we open all the widows fully and wear a mask, we should be fine.

I was struck by her offer. Knowing that she hasn't let *anybody* step inside her house since last March, her offer to share such a small space with me must've been a huge deal for her. I thanked her, but said no.

The following week, a few hours before the 2/14 meeting, I got a call from another friend.

Miyo, come and stay with me as long or short as needed. This can be your new territory, but just say yes.

Her unexpected offer broke me down. Am I hallucinating? Or is this real? I guess it doesn't matter because even if it's a dream, it's not a nightmare that I need to escape from. One after another, somebody has brightened my days with their texts, emails, calls, cards, and care-gifts.

Sipping a glass of water and listening to birds chirping in my friend's backyard, the feelings of thankfulness keep on overflowing and don't stop.

I live...maybe not because I can't kill myself but because I'm worthy.

— Miyo Yamauchi