



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Long, long ago and far far away in a kingdom inhabited by magical people and mythical beasts, where dragons still roamed and life remained magical, there lived a bent and frail old man called Dalian.”

-From “A Giant Comes to Supper Unexpectedly” on the *Enchanted Kingdom* website (www.enchantedkingdom.co.uk)

In the past few weeks I have attended one storytelling workshop and two memorial services. And it wasn't until the second service that I started to think about the connection between these events. As I sat in the church pew, holding a hymnal in my hands and looking around at the faces of the people who came to acknowledge the life of someone they loved, I realized the stories I was hearing were just that: stories. They were anecdotes about a man named Bruce and as each person shared a memory, Bruce's image started to become clearer and clearer, as if they were drawing him with their words.

This was true at the first memorial service, too - although instead of a church, we filled the benches in a high school gymnasium. But again, story after story was told - some funny, some moving - and all contributing to the continued remembrance of someone who was no longer present.

I don't know if I would have had this thought if I hadn't just gone to an Infopeople storytelling workshop, led by local librarian and storyteller Gay Ducey. I'm not sure what I expected to learn at this workshop - maybe some tricks on how to be instantly good at entertaining groups of children and their attendant adults. What I got instead, however, was a gifted storyteller's thorough introduction to the absolute value of storytelling in our lives.

Gay promptly and gently started the day by asking us about family stories - what she called “literature of the heart.” She talked about their importance, emphasizing the benefits - such as comfort, security, entertainment and enriched language. She pointed out that storytelling is about images which are given to us through the vehicle of words. She also reviewed the different kinds of stories in the world, such as myths, fables, and fairy tales.

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She invited us to tell some of our family stories to each other, and as I told the story of the time I fell off my bicycle because I was trying to ride it as if it were a bareback horse in the circus, I realized my family has always been full of stories. How many times have I told my daughters about the snake in their Uncle Geoff’s bed? I thought to myself. Or about the stick-on navel jewel my mother wore when she was pregnant with my youngest brother?

And how many stories have I not told them, because I didn’t think to or I was ashamed – like the time I destroyed my sister’s doll because I was mad at her? Once I began to think about these events in my life, I realized Gay was right: we already know how to tell stories, we already do tell them.

After the workshop, I stopped to ask Gay a few questions about her past, in case I

wanted to include some facts in this column. But somehow we ended up talking for an hour, about our lives and the books we’ve loved and what we believe in and why. It was a conversation that helped me remember again how I came to be a person who spends her days with words – words in books, words I write and words I use to reach others. And how all of these words are part of the ongoing story of my life.