



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“One day when Chicken Lichen was scratching among the leaves, an acorn fell out of a tree and struck her on the tail.

‘Oh,’ said Chicken Lichen, ‘the sky is falling! I am going to tell the King.’”

-From *Great Children’s Stories*, the Classic Voland Edition, 1972

When my children were young, I read to them and told them stories. The stories I told were partly retellings of fairy tales I read when I was a child, and partly made-up ones. I loved to make them up, and there were a few my daughters wanted to hear over and over. Like many parent-created stories, they were mainly about my children: Where they came from (the little girl store) and the many adventures of Ann-Rae and the Blue Moon.

Now that I am the Albany Library children’s librarian, I have a chance to read books aloud at the school age storytime we have every week. This has been a great opportunity to find old favorites and to discover new picture books. Some of these are other versions of familiar stories, like “The Persian Cinderella.” In fact, I was surprised to discover that there are anywhere from 350 to over 1500 versions of Cinderella, and the earliest recorded version comes from

China, where it was written down in the middle of the ninth century. I found a website called *History of Cinderella, Part of the Sur La Lune Fairy Tale Pages* by Heidi Ann Heiner (www.surlalunefairytales.com) and it not only covers the history but also has some interesting links.

But the biggest discovery has been how many stories are hidden in my memory. I used to love folk and fairy tales and as a child I read my way through all the colored fairy tale books by Andrew Lang, as well as Grimm’s and Andersen’s. Many of these stories, like “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Cinderella,” and “Hansel and Gretel” seem to be in every collection and are familiar to many children. However there are also stories, like the “Three Sillies,” that are less common but have been a part of my perception of the world as long as I can remember. In case you

aren't familiar with this story, it is about a young man who shares a meal with his betrothed and her parents. One by one the three of them go down to the cellar and never return. When the young man discovers them foolishly crying together at the bottom of the cellar stairs, he leaves, saying he will return and marry her when he has found three sillier people in the world. He does just that and the story ends happily ever after.

It is a wonderful story and seems to come to mind more often than one would think. That is it the beauty of these stories – they are about our lives in some way and I think that is why they have endured. Their symbolism is apt and they gently carry messages about our interactions and our lives.

Another story I think about occasionally is the story of the good princess who is

rewarded for her good deeds by having pearls and jewels come out of her mouth, while her bad step-sister has frogs and toads coming out of hers. I first heard this story at summer camp and tried all summer to live up to the selflessness of that perfect princess, by never taking the biggest piece of anything.

In fact, now that I think about it, that habit is still with me – it is amazing how a story, heard so long ago, can be carried with us forever.