

**THE WORLD OF STORYTELLING
IT'S NOT SUCH A SMALL WORLD
AFTER ALL**

By Mary Lou Williams, M. Ed.

Not many people know this, but Carmen Agra Deedy, Bil Lepp, Donald Davis, Kathryn Windham, Kevin Kling, and Willy Claflin are world famous. Why, then, have you never heard of them? Because they are world-famous storytellers, and the world of storytelling is a small world.

Once upon a time, before there were movies, television, videos, and DVDs, there was storytelling. Then all these rival media crowded the storyteller off the stage. Storytelling became old-fashioned, antiquated, obsolete. If people thought of storytelling at all, they thought of it as something that puts kids to sleep at night. It was relegated to the children's section of the library. It was not considered suitable for sophisticated adults.

A storyteller is just as much a performing artist as an actor, a singer, a dancer, a musician, or a humorist. In fact, many storytellers are also all of the above. And many are often authors, directors, and producers as well, because they write their own stories and direct and produce their own shows. Storytelling is usually a one-man or one-woman show. A famous example of a storyteller who wears many of these hats is Bill Cosby. He is thought of as a comedian, but he is first and foremost a storyteller. He tells stories that are very funny. Another famous storyteller is Garrison Keillor. And that about exhausts the list of storytellers that mainstream America has heard of.

But the times, they are a 'changing. There is a storytelling revival that is going on throughout the country and throughout the world. This revival began in 1973 when Jimmy Neil Smith, a high



school journalism teacher and the Mayor of Jonesborough, Tennessee, heard a well-told tale by Grand Ole Opry star, Jerry Clower, on his car radio. Smith was inspired and thought, why not start a storytelling festival right here in Jonesborough? He invited some pioneer storytellers who performed in the courthouse square, using hay bales and wagons for a stage. Audience and performers totaled fewer than 60 people, but this was the birth of the Annual National Storytelling Festival. This Festival is now the storytelling equivalent of the "world series." Every year on the first weekend in October, more than 10,000 people descend on the one-block town of Jonesborough to hear the grand masters and the world-famous superstars of storytelling.

This is the event that sparked the renaissance of storytelling that is going on in this country and around the world. There is now a storytelling association in every state of the union. Within each state there are storytelling guilds. Florida has 17 of them. And one of those 17 is right here in Fort Myers. It is the Tamiami Tale Tellers, which meets on the third Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Grand Court on College Parkway. (To get the whole story, please call 481-0552.)

This year, Bill Harley, a storyteller, won the 2007 Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Recording for Children. Bill Harley has been famous in the storytelling world for over twenty years. His winning a Grammy is an indication that the world of storytelling is not such a small world after all. And it is getting bigger all the time.

5-Minute Impulse

By Alex Carvellas

It was one of those rare items that sits on the desk in the Book Nook and rarely gets touched: a beautifully bound book with carved designs on the cover, and wonderful etched illustrations throughout. But the language is not easily identifiable, nor the subject matter. So it was a surprise to me when someone began studying it carefully. "Do you know what language it is written in?" I asked. "No, but I wish I did," she replied. "It's such a beautiful book though, I feel I just must possess it." Because it's a special book, it cost more than the others, so when I gave her the price, it made her hesitate. Finally, after a long struggle, she announced that she had made her decision to buy. Could I hold the book for her while she took care of something in the library? It would take about an hour for her to return. I told her she could pay for the book later and that she could use the time to decide that she was not just buying it out of impulse. "But that's exactly what I wish to do," she said, "buy the book on impulse. You see all of my life is highly regulated. Every move I make is planned well ahead. Buying books on impulse is the only fun I allow myself." Five minutes after she left the Nook, she returned, paid for the book, and began to leave with it. "What happened; you said you would be back in an hour?" I asked. "I came back earlier because I was starting to change my mind about wanting the book after all," she replied.

Periodically, the reference staff selects collections to highlight. The current display is "TV on DVD." This is a new selection of television series that are now available on DVD. They are displayed on the low shelves in the reference area. Check them out!