

The S T O R Y

Behind the Story

notes from
Jay O'Callahan
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PO Box 1054
Marshfield, MA 02050
800-626-5356
e-mail: jay@ocallahan.com
www.ocallahan.com

Moments on the Road

Oww!

Linda and I are on vacation at the van der Eb's beautiful Harborview Farm, at Orcutt's Harbor, Brooksville, Maine, when I get a pain in my upper back. I can't sit without excruciating pain. I spend the vacation lying on the grass looking at seagulls. Linda and I walk one day and after ten steps the pain is such I can't go on. September comes and, pain not withstanding, time to go on the road.

Mars In Idaho

Joy Steiner, who is incandescent, greets me at the air-



Joy Steiner

port. I love Idaho. After one evening performance, Joy drives me out into the desert to see the planet Mars at the observatory. Mars is at its closest tonight. The observatory is down a dark path and there are no buildings, no cars, nothing but brush and boulders. The observatory is closed. All is silent. Not just dark. Black. Still. We hear the voice of night. Maybe we're on Mars.

Jim May, Mythic Buffalo

The Illinois Storytelling Festival. Jim May's 20th as artistic director. A group of us called the Blue Mountain Buddies have gone on a storytelling retreat for thirteen years. We are performing at the Illinois Festival to honor Jim. Jim is a mythical buffalo. His mind and heart thunder through the universe. Thursday night before we all go off to hear David Holt give a great performance, Jim rushes into the kitchen of the hotel for a piece

of cheese. "You need to eat supper," I say. "What's eating at a time like this," Jim says and is off with a sliver of cheese.

"Herniated" – What An Awful Word

I'm back home long enough for the neurosurgeon to say, "You have a herniated disc in your neck. That's causing your arm pain. The pain will become so great you'll want to have an operation."

"To operate I might have to go in through your throat," the neurosurgeon says. That's it. I don't want an operation. I pray, go to acupuncture. I do cranial-sacral work with Holly Dolben. She's terrific.

I read Simone Weil who says, "Whenever we have some pain to endure, we can say to ourselves that it is the universe, the order and beauty of the world, and the obedience of creation to God which are entering our body. After that how can we fail to bless with tenderest grati-



Jim May

tude the Love which sends us this Gift."

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HIGHLIGHTS

MOMENTS ON
THE ROAD

35TH WEDDING
ANNIVERSARY

TED O'CALLAHAN
IN PATAGONIA

Moments on the Road, *continued*

Where'd That Herniated Disc Come From Anyway?

I dread the plane ride to California because sitting up is so painful. I'm lucky and get an exit row. On the plane I read a book my friend, Barbara Wall, gave me. "Healing Back Pain" by John Sarno. Dr. Sarno says some back pain, including a herniated disc, can be caused by emotional trauma, usually repressed anger. Sarno says just knowing the cause is psychological is enough to start the healing process. Two to six weeks he says. I know I got angry on vacation and kept it under wraps. There is hope!

Stella Adler Strides The Platform

I perform for Ann Buxie's Tales by the Sea in Malibu Beach, California, then give a weekend workshop at Wanna Zinsmaster's in Los Angeles. Wanna has made an art of life. Her condominium is filled with art, giant balls, interesting books, and musical instruments.

Saturday night it's Karen Rae Kraut's turn to tell to the group. Karen Rae sweeps into the living room. She seems to grow as she enters. "I am Stella Adler," Karen Rae announces. "I will be your drama teacher for three years. If you want to perform on the platform you must

have size. Size!" Karen Rae Kraut has summoned up a character so large the room rings with her energy. We are riveted. "You must use language," Karen Rae goes on as Stella Adler. "We don't have language in America. That's why we resort to the method. We need to bend and groan because we don't have language! With Shakespeare the language does the work." An electric moment.

Out of the Ashes of Hiroshima Comes Hope

Central Michigan University hosts its first storytelling festival. Fortunately they have expert advice of a wonderful storyteller and amazing person, Sheila Dailey Carroll.

I perform the "Pill Hill Quartet" to a good audience of 450. After me comes Eth-Noh-Tec, Robert Kituchi-Yngojo and Nancy Wang. They tell three charming folk tales. They move with the grace of dancers. In their fourth and last story, "Takashi's Dream," the mood changes. It is about a survivor of the Hiroshima bomb blast, a hibakusha. Robert becomes Takashi Tanemori, still bitter forty years after the Hiroshima atomic bomb blast and bent on revenge. Takashi holds an imaginary steering wheel and is driving over the San Francisco Bay bridge.



Robert Kituchi-Yngojo and Nancy Wang. Photo by Nita Winter.

Suddenly, in our imaginations, we are standing in the ashes of Hiroshima. Nancy steps up on a box and sings America the Beautiful. Takashi stops his car and is captivated by the beauty of a butterfly.

Takashi is changed by the butterfly and forgiveness begins. The whole performance is stunning and beautiful. NancyENTC@aol.com

The Shoe Box

The next morning I rise early to give a nine a.m. workshop as part of the Central Michigan Storytelling Festival. Two angels, Karl and Ann Zinn, who have helped me out innumerable times, drive me through the dark, silent streets to a downtown breakfast spot.

Standing in the dark outside the breakfast café is another friend, CMU biology professor Gil Starks. He has a shoe box in hand. The res-

taurant is jammed. About forty people and only one waitress and one cook. We order but it will be a long wait. "I'm starved," I say. Gil opens the shoe box. There are bowls of oatmeal inside. "Steel cut oats," Gil says. We eat. Who cares if it's crowded.

On Wisconsin

I'm performing at "Caring for the Caregiver" in Eau Claire. It's run by David Schifeling, a surgeon who works with cancer patients. He welcomes the arts in the healing process. Ah, science you have a heart.

It's ironic that this has been the most painful and yet one of the happiest times of my life. I've mended.

The Latest on Laura O'Callahan



Laura O'Callahan, who received her Masters at Gallaudet University with highest honors, is now a freelance interpreter living in Natick, Massachusetts. In Laura's free time, she is busy as an artist. Laura and Jay have worked together at the Wang Center in Boston, at the Illinois Storytelling Festival, and of course Laura illustrated HERMAN AND MARGUERITE. Laura's email is:

Lauraeocallahan@hotmail.com



Laura O'Callahan interpreting at the Illinois Storytelling Festival

Patagonian Moment

BY TED O'CALLAHAN



Ted O'Callahan, my son, has been leading National Outdoor Leadership School expeditions (NOLS) all over the world for years. He is pictured above with friends in an ice tunnel on a Patagonian glacier. Ted's full text is available on the website, www.ocallahan.com

We were three days hike from the Caratera Austral—the dirt road that keeps pushing further and further into Patagonia. We are making our way up the Valle Leones to the ice fields that feed the Leones River. Tonight we have come on a campo. The ranch sits on a flat just below a steep crooked ridgeline, dense with trees. The grass is brilliant green and clipped short by sheep and cows. Gorgeous trees are scattered about. It is a fairy land.

We have been invited for dinner. Four of us head over, leaving the others on their own so as not to overwhelm or take advantage of the generous invitation—18 unannounced is too much.

The group that crosses to the house includes Mauricio, a Chilean, from Patagonia, familiar with both campo and town life; KG, a Kenyan who has led expeditions all around the world; Sarah, a New Englander who has transplanted to Wyoming;

and me, a New Englander who came to Patagonia first 11 years ago as a student and now returns to lead.

The house has a low wooden fence but cows and sheep are free to wander in the back door. Jorge and Sandra Washington are there to welcome us. They have lived here for two years. They met when Jorge returned from several years of being a shepherd and ranch hand in Idaho. Sandra grew up in Coyhaique, much of her family is still there. Jorge's father lives a couple days down the valley. They are so obviously happy together it gives the campo a bit of its fairy tale quality.

Decorations in the Compo

We are brought into the house through a long low room that is essentially an attached shed. It is stacked high with firewood and being dark and cool seems like it would be a useful refrigerator much of the year. The main room is a simple square with counter space and some shelves in one corner, a table in the opposite corner and the real center of the room is a stove with benches around it. Around the top edge of the wall there are images from what must have been a wildlife calendar that have been cut apart to maximize decorating potential. KG explains which type of rhino or elephant or crocodile is in each picture.

Jorge serves us maté, a traditional tea drunk from a gourd through a metal straw. Dinner is what they would have had if we hadn't arrived: a reheated tray of mutton, tomato salad, and homemade rolls. They eat what they have grown.

My not eating meat is a marvel

accepted graciously, and balanced well by Sarah, Mauricio, and especially KG being ecstatic to get meat—something they miss even just three days into the expedition. We tell stories all around—Jorge explaining the US to Mauricio better than any of us have managed yet. KG telling stories from his previous visits to Patagonia, describing his visits to tiny towns where he became a celebrity simply for being the only black person any of the residents had ever seen. Jorge and Sandra tell of a mountain lion that has been attacking the cattle, and of preparing for the long winter. When the winter comes, there are times when they don't see anyone for months at a time. The radio only gets reception at night.

Every Story Becomes a Communal Effort

All our talking is done by sharing words around—no one person can manage enough words in both English and Spanish to say everything they might want. Every story becomes a communal effort. While the level of fluency around the table isn't that high the feeling is extraordinary. Something can happen when people have spent extended time in isolated places, each

person comes to be understood as precious. And despite giving so much food and drink Sandra and Jorge make us feel we are the ones being generous. And to see KG and Mauricio be such gracious guests makes it obvious there is quite a bit of skill and learning to doing it truly well. That and pure pleasure in the process. So though it is simple—tea, talk, dinner and though there isn't any one story that will stand out forever, for a few hours we have no desires beyond what is happening in the room.

I don't know Mauricio, KG, Sarah, Sandra, or Jorge all that well. I get a wonderful bright glimpse of them in that evening. And I love the thought that like the radio messages, the threads of our travels knot together for a moment and will be something simple and right gently shaping who we are and where we go.

Sandra and Jorge Washington on their ranch in Patagonia.



35th Wedding Anniversary

Thirty-five years! Linda's amazing. She smiles, laughs, cries. She is as steady as the earth and has the strength of a lion. Linda, Missouri born, finished Oberlin College and debated which coast to go to. Thank goodness she decided on the east coast. She came and got her masters degree at Harvard and began teaching in Newton, a Boston suburb.

In 1967, I was teaching in Boston and acting in an amateur production of A Thousand Clowns. My leading lady said that she wanted me to meet a lovely woman from St. Louis. So my leading lady gave a party and I brought a date. My hostess drew me aside and said, "I'm having another party. Don't bring a date!" At the next party I came alone and met Linda McManus and fell in love with her great blue eyes. In a matter of months I asked her to marry me and was so stunned when she said yes I didn't know what to say. Now, thirty-five years later I know what to say. "Hooray!"



*Thank goodness she came East.
Photo by Beverly Hall Photography.*



*Bruce Cowan and Carol
Cowan of Nantucket
Harbor Cruises.*

Nantucket Cruises

Two people I greatly admire are Bruce and Carol Cowan. They live in Nantucket and run Nantucket Harbor Cruises. They're dear and longtime friends. Unless you're wealthy, you need imagination and pluck to live on Nantucket. They have plenty of both and if you get there you must take a harbor cruise on the Anna W II.

Langstaff/O'Callahan Concert

I had a wonderful time performing with John Langstaff at "A Sunday Afternoon of Songs and Story" last November. I waited twenty years to do that concert with John. I can't wait to do more.

John Langstaff gets everyone singing. Photo by Wiesy MacMillan.



Month Long Run at Studio Arena Theatre

Great and moving" – drama critic Richard Huntington of the Buffalo News said of "Pouring the Sun" and The Pill Hill Stories. Eight shows a week for four weeks. Phew! The 650 seat Studio Arena is a marvel. I loved it all.

IN BRIEF

Andrea Lovett's CD, FOLKTALES FROM THE FOREST, *crouches and leaps like a tiger. Or a frog. Andrea's stories are full of surprise, charm and fun. In one of her stories, she's joined by Bob Reiser; also one of the funniest storytellers I've ever heard. If you and the family are headed somewhere, take Andrea along. love2tell2@aol.com*



Lani Peterson's CD, STORIES FROM WITHIN, *is superb. Lani's first story is about her journey from psychotherapist to storyteller. Her stories are poetic and beautifully told. The story about her post college journey to the hometown of Charles Dickens is exquisite. Lani@Leadershipstories.com*



Carol Burnes' SUDDENLY SINGLE *at the King's Head Theatre in London got rave reviews. Burnes weaves poetry and storytelling into a brilliant performance. "It's moving, brave and wonderfully funny." - The London Times. Carol_Burnes@worldnet.att.net*



I am so excited about Marni Gillard's nearly-completed book TELL YOUR WAY HOME that I have to tell you about it now. It is a book about making art from our traumatic and triumphant memories. We can all do this. This book, by a wise woman, will help in the process. This book is for everyone. I hope it's translated into forty languages. marnigillard@earthlink.net

