IN HER OWN WORDS:
CONNIE REGAN-BLAKE, THE FOREMOTHER
OF THE FESTIVAL-BASED AMERICAN STORYTELLING REVIVAL

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BY
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

Dissertation entitled

CONNIE REGAN-BLAKE: IN HER OWN WORDS

RECLAIMING COMMUNITY HISTORY

THROUGH THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF THE FOREMOTHER

OF THE FESTIVAL-BASED AMERICAN STORYTELLING REVIVAL

Presented by Milbre E. Burch

A candidate for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of the matriarchs – my mother, Milbre Blake Currey Burch, my maternal aunt Dr. Jean Wilbur Currey and my maternal grandmother Florence Mabel Gregg Currey – whose life stories taught me to be fierce and funny, compassionate, inquisitive, smart as a whip, loyal and loving. And to my paternal grandmother, Jemima Elizabeth Travis Burch, whose stories I barely know, but whose DNA I have passed on to another generation.

It's dedicated, too, to my daughters, Katherine Blake Burch-Hudson and Elizabeth Travis Walker Burch-Hudson, two young women from whom I have learned much from the moment they arrived on the planet. I'm honored to be their mother, and I know they will carry the next generation of stories forward into the future.

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The Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews (1997-2000), collected on digital video by F. Berkley Hudson and myself, are the property of the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Profound thanks to Lloyd E. Cotsen for his support and his faith in believing that a journalist and a storyteller were just the right people to assemble the storytelling materials for the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. And for saying to us that the collection of interviews and resources for the CSP might be the most important thing any of the *three of us* ever accomplished in our lives, though it would be a hundred years before anyone knew that.

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ABSTRACT

"IN HER OWN WORDS: CONNIE REGAN-BLAKE, THE FOREMOTHER OF THE FESTIVAL-BASED AMERICAN STORYTELLING REVIVAL"

Milbre Burch

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This ethnographic and historiographic study is grounded in archival interviews with Connie Regan-Blake (b. 1947), the foremother of the festival-based American storytelling revival, found in the Cotsen Storytelling Project (CSP) at the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. As co-director of the CSP (with Berkley Hudson), I created the archive of ninety interviews with storytellers from 1997-2000; Regan-Blake's are among the first to be transcribed. I analyzed the CSP and later interviews, looking for thematic and rhetorical recurrences and information about Regan-Blake's life within the revival. She read and responded to the study; her responses were incorporated into this dialogical work.

The study uncovers Regan-Blake's significance as a feminist artist and leader striving for inclusivity in the storytelling movement, as the unnamed artistic director of the National Storytelling Festival in its first decade, and as an advocate for the national storytelling organization since its inception. It interrogates the impact of a masculinist dominant discourse on Regan-Blake's development and on her pioneering career in "the Folktellers" – a tandem touring partnership with her cousin Barbara Freeman (b. 1944). It examines her emergence as a solo artist, mentor and activist despite her exclusion from the institutional history of a festival she shaped and her eventual marginalization on its stages, and her significance in the revival today. The study points the way to future scholarship on women within the revival, opens up the CSP to further research, and provides a basis for more inclusivity within the revival's myth-making and its artistic and economic practices.

FRONTISPIECE

From "Why We Tell Stories" by Lisel Mueller¹

Because the story of our life
becomes our life

Because each of us tells
the same story
but tells it differently

and none of us tells it
the same way twice

Because grandmothers looking like spiders
want to enchant the children
and grandfathers need to convince us
what happened happened because of them

and though we listen only
haphazardly, with one ear,
we will begin our story
with the word *and*

¹ From Lisel Mueller, "Why We Tell Stories," *Alive Together – New and Selected Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 150-151. A Pulitzer Prize winning poet (and translator), Mueller, was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1924 and came to the U.S. in 1939. Her poem can also be found in its entirety at <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/lisel-mueller/why-we-tell-stories/> Accessed online 14 March 2014. I first read it on the back cover of the fall 1986 issue of the *National Storytelling Journal*; I found the photocopy of it in my story files 28 years later, in March of 2014.

CHAPTER ONE: Unspun Threads

Introduction

In August of 1998 as part of a commission from the Cotsen Children's Library to capture a "slice of life" of the festival-based American storytelling revival, my husband, Berkley Hudson, and I conducted an oral history interview with storyteller Connie Regan-Blake, the unsung Foremother of that revival.¹ What follows is an emic study of Regan-Blake's endeavors within that revival, as well as her exclusion from its history as told in its most public institutional narratives. Her untold exploits are the unspun threads of this chapter's title.

An etic reader might ask, "What is the festival-based American storytelling revival?" for, despite its now forty-one year history, the storytelling performance renaissance that organized itself around the birth of the National Storytelling Festival in October of 1973 remains under the radar of the vast majority of Americans. Throughout this study, I use the terms "festival-based American storytelling revival" or "storytelling performance renaissance" or "revival movement" to refer to the emerging community of storytellers – from oral narrators to platform performers – and their supporters and audiences who gravitated toward one another after the founding of the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

¹ All told, we conducted over seventy-five "seed" or short interviews and sixteen

Though I acknowledge them as significant contemporary verbal arts phenomena, I do not see urban story slams like the Moth² or radio programming like StoryCorps³ as astral bodies within the gravitational pull of the festival-based storytelling revival. Instead, I believe the Moth and StoryCorps emerged more recently in aesthetic parallel universes, and I believe that border crossing between these universes will benefit all the participants in those storied worlds.

Jimmy Neil Smith, the celebrated founder of the National Storytelling Festival, would like to claim credit for inspiring a worldwide storytelling revival including these recent and better-known-to-popular-culture-consumers phenomena. In a recent email he wrote me:

Around [an] old farm wagon in Courthouse Square in 1973, the Storytelling Revival was born, and it has spread across America and the world... During the past two decades, a New Age of Storytelling, a new narrative order, has

² Launched in 1997, the Moth is a not-for-profit organization "dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling." Its catch phrase is: "True Stories Told Live." Established in urban club settings across the country, it also has an effective nationwide radio presence via National Public Radio, and a web presence via Internet podcasts. It received the National Distinguished Service Award from the National Storytelling Network (NSN) in 2011. For more see: <http://themoth.org> accessed April 14, 2014.

³ According to its website:

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide people of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives. Since 2003, StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 45,000 interviews with nearly 90,000 participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.

For more, see: <http://storycorps.org/about/> accessed April 14, 2014. StoryCorps founder Dave Isay has also edited several print collections of the archived interviews starting with *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project*, (New York: Penguin, 2008).

emerged—led by new story pioneers. There has been an explosion of opportunities and possibilities for the age-old tradition of storytelling... The Storytelling Revival is over, and the Story Revolution has begun. And although it was the Storytelling Revival that has given us the Story Revolution, new stories, new leadership, and new opportunities in storytelling are emerging, from the Moth to branding to web radio... Look at all we have inspired!⁴

But there is no evidence that the purveyors of the Moth sought inspiration in upper east Tennessee before producing live shows in urban centers and broadcasting them via Internet podcasts. And despite its privileging of (often-fictionalized) personal narratives in the last twenty years of its programming, the National Storytelling Festival has not been cited by StoryCorps founder Dave Isay as the stimulus for his oral history collecting or the National Public Radio programming or print collections that have been spun off from StoryCorps interviews. To the current generation of storytelling pioneers and celebrants of the beauty and power of verbal arts, the trail-blazing paths carved by Smith's founding of the National Storytelling Festival or by Regan-Blake's storytelling artistry, Festival directing and revival community leadership have been eroded by time and erased by obscurity.

An emic participant-observer of the storytelling renaissance, Caren Schnur Neile attributes the erasure of the revival movement from public awareness to storytelling's marginalization in the wider world of American popular culture consumption. She writes: "With few notable exceptions, the U.S. culture industry has failed to acknowledge the legitimacy of adult performance storytelling since the art form's resurgence in the 1970's"

⁴ Personal email from Smith on April 17, 2014. Used by permission.

(2).⁵ Neile identifies several factors contributing to that failure including storytelling's identification with education and with folk art, its association with children, its nature as a co-creative art form, and "ignorance of the art on the part of the theater-going public, critics and theater owners, based, in part, on that of storytellers" (4). She concludes that the result of this marginalization is "that artists with extraordinary skill are virtually invisible to the U.S. culture industry" (4). My current study is, in part, an attempt to make the invisible visible, broadening the culture's knowledge of Connie Regan-Blake and her significance in the American storytelling revival as well as furthering public interest in the Cotsen Storytelling Project archive.

Terms and Concepts in Play in the Study

To ease the reader's entry into a narrative set in the context of the storytelling revival, I have drawn upon the work of folklorists, librarians and performance studies and storytelling studies scholars to define some of the terms encountered herein. It seems appropriate to begin with the concept of storytelling itself. In her essay in *Teaching Oral Traditions*, storyteller and children's librarian Carol L. Birch writes that storytelling is:

A primarily oral-aural event, with visual components, between an intentional speaker and an acknowledged listener for the purposes of witnessing, affirming, or participating in the unfolding of a narrative that has a beginning, middle, and, if not an end, a pause, break or resting place. This broad view seeks to encompass

⁵ Caren Schnur Neile, "A Place at the Hearth: Storytelling, Subversion and the U.S. Culture Industry" (paper presented at Media in Transition: MIT 4 conference, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, May 6, 2005), 2-4, accessed February 19, 2014, <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit4/papers/neile.pdf>. For more on Dr. Neile, one of founding editors of *Storytelling, Self, Society*, visit her website, accessed February 19, 2014, <http://publicstoryteller.com/author/publicstoryteller/>.

the variety of storytelling events – from gossip over coffee in a kitchen to stories told on a stage with sound amplification and dramatic lighting...(312).⁶

In its inaugural issue in 2004, the founding editors of the peer-reviewed journal *Storytelling, Self, Society* also sought to define storytelling as a distinctive art form:

Storytelling is...an artistic process that works with what we may call the technologies of the human mainframe – memory, imagination, emotion, intellect, language, gesture, movement, expression (of face and of body) and, most crucially, relationship in the living moment – person-to-person or person-to-group (Sobol, et al. 3).⁷

These carefully crafted statements bring the reader into the neighborhood of a live storytelling event, though the descriptions stop short of evoking the metaphorical front porch on which a co-creative experience takes place between teller and listener. To achieve that visceral understanding, a gifted teller, inspired to share a well-crafted story, must perform in the presence of an engaged audience member in a setting conducive to their shared exchange.⁸ I trust that the reader has engaged at least informally in such an exchange with a friend, a relative, a teacher or a stranger.

How does one account for the emergence of a storytelling revival? In his 1998

⁶ Carol L. Birch, "Storytelling: Practice and Movement," *Teaching Oral Traditions*, Ed., John Miles Foley, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1998), 308-317.

⁷ Joseph Sobol, John Gentile, and Sunwolf, "Once Upon a Time: An Introduction to the Inaugural Issue," *Storytelling, Self, Society – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* 1.1 (Fall 2004), 1-7.

⁸ For more on the elements and workings of a live storytelling event, see Robert A. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events," *The Journal of American Folklore* 82.326, (Oct.-Dec. 1969), 313-328.

history of the movement's first twenty years, folklorist, performance studies scholar and storytelling revival insider Joseph Sobol situates it within Anthony F. C. Wallace's definition of revitalization movements "defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (qtd. in Sobol 6).⁹ In the introduction to their 1998 collection of essays on issues within contemporary storytelling, Carol L. Birch and Melissa A. Heckler note that the revival "has its roots in the oral and literary traditions" (10).¹⁰ But Heckler reminds us, "the oral and literary traditions do not have the same value systems" (15);¹¹ the dominant discourse values "individual authorship above community authorship, particularly in that community authorship is oral and the individual authorship is literary" (20).¹² She asserts that within oral tradition cultures, "Words, images, metaphors of a told story are subject to many changes over time. While every indigenous oral tradition is different, still a principal concern of most seems to be the use of the oral tradition as a flexible means of communication, which creates in each telling a dialogue between perceived concerns of the past, present, and future" (22-23).¹³ Of the ethical challenges of telling stories from cultures other than one's own, she writes:

⁹ Joseph Sobol, *The Storytellers' Journey* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁰ Carol L. Birch and Melissa A. Heckler, "Introduction," *Who Says? Essays on Pivotal Issues in Contemporary Storytelling* (Little Rock: August House, 1996), 9-14.

¹¹ Melissa A. Heckler, "Two Traditions," *Who Says? Essays on Pivotal Issues in Contemporary Storytelling*, Ed., Carol L. Birch and Melissa A Heckler (Little Rock: August House, 1996), 15-34.

¹² *ibid*, 20.

¹³ *ibid*, 22-23.

Spiritual colonialism may underlie the ease with which people from European-derived cultures take from other cultures and give nothing in return, yet expect payment for individual authorship based on their work with that culture... Perhaps the world of storytelling would benefit equally from exposure to indigenous cultures and from exposure to the values of oral traditions (22).¹⁴

To capture the diversity of tellers within the revival (and their various motivations for participating in it), Sobol states,

Though most storytellers promote the revival of an art form presumed to have flourished in an ideally imagined past, many tellers are also eagerly importing traditions and repertoires that were not part of their own particular backgrounds. Still others are performing nativistic exercises, selectively representing in their storytelling the traditions of their own ethnic ancestors, yet often, quite naturally, wielding those traditions on behalf of explicitly contemporary political and cultural programs (7).¹⁵

And he describes the scope of performance genres flourishing under the revival banner:

Within the past twenty years, a national – to some extent, even an international – community of performers has placed itself under the banner of a self-conscious storytelling revival. Although their actual practices cover a wide range of performance conventions – from a variety of ethnic traditional storytelling styles,

¹⁴ *ibid*, 22.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 7.

to stand-up comedy, to theatrical impersonation, to autobiographical performance art, to oral interpretation – these contemporary performers share in the invocation of ancient traditions and roles as a common signifying framework (2).¹⁶

Since its earliest days, the revival community has acknowledged its debt to narrators grounded in oral cultures. In her 2006 study, storyteller, collector and librarian Margaret Read MacDonald writes: "The term 'traditional storyteller' usually refers to tellers whose repertoires were passed down from others and who share their tales within their own communities" (199).¹⁷ But she goes on to suggest that such a designation is no longer clear-cut, writing:

We assume a traditional teller to be one to whom the tales have been passed down orally from others in the culture. Yet traditional tellers often expand their repertoires from many sources.

We assume that a traditional teller is sharing tales passed on within his own culture. Yet tales cannot be confined. If a teller hears a good tale from another culture, his storytelling instinct may well be to add that tale to his repertoire.

We expect a traditional teller to reside within his own cultural home yet in

¹⁶ *ibid*, 2. Sobol goes on to suggest the scope of the movement: "In all fifty states of the United States, in Canada, in many countries of Western Europe, and in Australia, professional storytellers have multiplied in public schools, libraries and state-funded community arts programs" (2).

¹⁷ Margaret Read MacDonald, *Ten Traditional Tellers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 199.

today's world, people travel widely and often spend their lives far from their own cultural roots (202-203).¹⁸

Of tellers within the revival who did not grow up in predominantly oral cultures, MacDonald writes:

A large and thriving storytelling movement exists today whose tellers seek out tales from many cultures, create their own imaginative stories, shape personal stories, and draw from literary sources for material. We call these tellers "revivalist tellers." This term notes the fact that many of these tellers breathe new life into tales found frozen in print. They "revive" the tales (199).¹⁹

Editor and folklorist William Bernard McCarthy edited a 1994 collection of essays about both traditional and revivalist tellers of "Jack tales,"²⁰ which captures the

¹⁸ *ibid*, 202-203.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 199.

²⁰ William Bernard McCarthy, Ed., *Jack in Two Worlds – Contemporary North American Tales and Their Tellers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). In his preface to the book – which storytelling studies scholar Wendy Welch (2006) calls "the first scholarly book to approach the storytelling revival" (35) – McCarthy calls the revival a "conscious cultivation of storytelling as a North American traditional art form. This cultivation of storytelling has its roots in the Federal Writers' Project of the 1930s and has flowered into a garland of annual festivals stretching from Jonesborough, Tennessee, to Whitehorse, Yukon" (x). Invoking the midcentury Federal Writers' Project as one of the revival's deep roots, grounds the movement in everyday storytelling, that is life histories and personal narratives shared informally in social settings as opposed to performances in a ticketed public event. At the time of the Federal Writers' Project, the study and collection of informal narrating was usually the domain of male collectors and male narrators. This often meant the exclusion of women collectors and women narrators, for whether the tales being told were personal narratives or mountain *märchen*, story-swapping sessions among oral narrators were often sex-segregated. And though fairy tales or wonder tales are genres associated with female narrators, the "Jack Tales" studied in McCarthy's essay collection tend to be told most

uneasy alliances between folklorists and revival tellers or purveyors of revival storytelling events. In that volume McCarthy co-wrote an essay with folklorist Ruth Stotter, stating: "A quiet revival in storytelling has been going on in the United States for at least half a century, but during the 1980s the revival produced an explosion of professional storytellers and storytelling festivals " (153).²¹ Describing revivalist storytelling practices, Stotter and McCarthy continue: "Professional and nontraditional tellers assume complete autonomy in story selection and delivery style, limited only by their experiences, imagination, and availability of audiences willing to provide performance opportunities" (155).²² Yet, the two conclude:

Among revivalist tellers, just as among traditional tellers, there is great variety in performance style, interpretation, digression, texture, and performance-audience attitude... A teller may use a lot of body movement and space or many remain seated... The same story retold by different tellers may be humorous or scary.

Despite changes, however, it does seem that in a revivalist storytelling context as

often, though not exclusively, by men to male audiences. The reader is reminded that roots of the festival-based revival extend in many directions. By neglecting to mention the influence of settlement house teachers, librarians, camp and church counselors who kept storytelling alive in America by consciously organizing storytelling events for children since before the turn of the twentieth century, McCarthy erases a group of female pioneers who cultivated the revival's roots fifty years before Roosevelt. The pattern for excluding women from the history of American storytelling was set long before the first National Storytelling Festival took place in Jonesborough, Tennessee in 1973.

²¹ Ruth Stotter and William Bernard McCarthy, "The Tellers and the Tales – Revivalist Storytelling," *Jack in Two Worlds – Contemporary North American Tales and Their Tellers*, Ed. by William Bernard McCarthy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 153-167.

²² *ibid*, 155.

in a traditional context the storytelling event, the experience of an audience listening to a narrator, remains remarkably consistent" (155).²³

In her 1998 book-length study of tellers and their tales, folklorist and storyteller Kay Stone reminds us that in storytelling studies, "narrator" refers to "the actual storyteller in a living tradition, not the fictional narrator in a work of literature."²⁴ In describing revival tellers, Birch prefers "platform storyteller to professional storyteller. This new term suggests a kind of storytelling that may not be ...culturally bound; it suggests that the primary cultural identification of the teller may not be the same as that of the story...[and suggests] some degree of formality and distance between teller and listener that has to be bridged" (315-316).²⁵ Within this study I have used the term "oral narrator" to refer to traditional tellers from oral cultures. I use the term "platform teller" interchangeably with "performance storyteller" and "revival teller" to describe myself and other tellers who come from outside predominantly oral cultures, including tellers whose parents or grandparents lived within oral cultures, but whose own lived experience bridges orality and highly literate, even electronically based, cultures.

Marginalizing Women (and Others) in a Marginalized Art Form

Unfortunately, just as the U.S. Culture Industry has failed to acknowledge performance storytelling, the institutional narrative of the storytelling revival as told in National Storytelling Festival publications and on the website of the Festival's producing

²³ *ibid*, 155.

²⁴ Kay Stone, *Burning Brightly – New Light on Old Tales Told Today* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1998).

²⁵ Carol L. Birch, "Storytelling: Practice and Movement," 315-316.

organization has failed to acknowledge the contributions of its foremother or to credit the roster of pioneers who worked with her (and Smith) to produce the Festival, form the national storytelling organization and welcome the emerging revival community to make its homeplace in Jonesborough, Tennessee. During our Cotsen Storytelling Project (CSP) interview, Regan-Blake had this to say about having a chance to reclaim the parts of the storytelling revival's history that have been left out of its creation myth:

I appreciated so much having the luxury of going into detail about some of those early days...What's happened with the story...of the storytelling revival...has been reduced down to a sound bite... For me, reducing it to a sound bite...does such a disservice to all of the people that were involved.

It's the difference between opening a magazine and seeing a picture of someone's hand, and reaching out and holding someone's hand [in real life]. Because the story of the revival is so full and so real and so human. All of these people's lives, their generosity in coming to the Festival for such low pay, their willingness and enthusiasm to tell other people about storytelling...

It's important that we know [the fuller story], because not really knowing, or people knowing and telling and listening again and telling again the [sound bite version] of this revival is almost a travesty. For a whole association to be about storytelling and for us not to have...our own story being told, is a shame. So I'm encouraged by this. And I think that there are other people out there too that really want to be telling the story of this revival and letting that be a story that's told from main stages (CSP/CRB, Transcript 2, pages 83-85).

Because of the patriarchal nature of American culture, Laura Mulvey reminds us, a woman who stands before an audience as a performer places herself in front of the not-so-funhouse mirror of the male gaze.²⁶ Ruth Behar notes that the same thing happens to a female researcher: "Women writers, even when they are supposed to be addressing women, write for men; or at least they write with the haunting sense of being overheard by men, and certainly with the inescapable knowledge of having already been defined in men's words" (5-6).²⁷

Performance storytellers like Regan-Blake choose material from many sources – literature, legend, lore and their own lives. Heckler notes "it is precisely the storyteller's work to explore a story and make a personal relationship with it" (29),²⁸ thus even a folk or fairy tale in a storyteller's repertoire can be read as a kind of auto/biographical performance. Thus, when performance studies scholar M. Heather Carver writes about women's auto/biographical performance, her words can be applied to the work of platform tellers utilizing any story genre:

Women's autobiographical performance is risky business...inherently fraught with the complexities of the relationship between history and representation – between what happened and what is remembered and performed... For women to even begin to write the autobiographical "I" acknowledges that we can be the

²⁶ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

²⁷ Ruth Behar, "Introduction: Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture*, Ed., Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5-6.

²⁸ Melissa A. Heckler, "Two Traditions," 29.

subjects of our own stories and thus expands traditional notions of whose voices may take center stage (15).²⁹

This feminist researcher writing about a feminist storyteller is performing risky business of her own: the business of recovering the story of a revival's foremother, a subversive act in the face of the dominant discourse.

Like their sisters in other contemporary live entertainment fields – female actors, directors, theatre managers and producers, playwrights, comics, and solo performers – Regan-Blake and other women in the festival-based American storytelling revival have been marginalized in professional practice. Regardless of the magnitude of their contributions to the field, women's standing in the festival marketplace has been undermined and their threads in the narrative tapestry of this storytelling festival-centric movement have been consistently, if quietly, unraveled or unspun.

Despite its biological fluidity and its illusory performativity, gender as a social construct is a "regulatory ideal" wielded by a heteronormative dominant discourse to keep men and women at the opposite ends of a (hierarchal) binary continuum and to erase all the biological gradations and gender identities that lie between those seemingly opposite poles.³⁰ The pressure brought to bear on women by such a dominant discourse is certainly visible in the lived experience and narratives of Regan-Blake. However, gender is but one of many markers used to sideline the contributions of verbal artists in the

²⁹ M. Heather Carver, "Risky Business – Exploring Women's Autobiography and Performance" in *Voices Made flesh – Performing Women's Autobiography*, Ed., Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather Carver (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), 15.

³⁰ For more see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

festival-based storytelling revival. Marginalization of various storytellers linked to the intersection of biological sex/gender identification, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, regional location, repertoire and performance style is also based on the grounding of the revival in that dominant discourse. That discourse, combined with the location of the revival's homeplace in upper east Tennessee, privileges these respective genres, performance styles and perspectives: humorous personal narratives, delivered standing³¹ at a microphone by male, Euro-American, heteronormative, Christian, middle aged, middle class, Southern or Eastern storytellers.

Sidelined in the Festival Marketplace and Excluded from Revival History

To contextualize my current study of storytelling revival's Ur-Mother Connie Regan-Blake, I have documented the hiring practices of the National Storytelling Festival – the storytelling revival's most prominent marketplace – from 1973 to 2013.³² That event's hiring practices have shaped the standards for most if not all of the festivals that have come after it. The data I collected shows that female storytellers, like their sisters in

³¹ Please see the graphs in Appendix A for data, based on a study of the tellers featured at the National Storytelling Festival from 1973-2013, that support this statement.

³² In 2012, Susan O'Connor, the Director of Programs at the International Storytelling Center (ISC), which produces the National Storytelling Festival, sent me a list of all the tellers that had appeared at the Festival from 1973 forward. She indicated that the list, naming tellers by year, had been assembled by volunteers and was not considered to be completely accurate or comprehensive. She let me know that the historical papers of the national storytelling organization had been donated to the American Folklife Collection of the Library of Congress (LOC) in Washington, D.C. In the course of several email exchanges with Jimmy Neil Smith, ISC's then-Executive Director, I was put in touch with Valda Morris, a staff person at the LOC, to let her know of my interest in doing research on the International Storytelling Center collection. In November of 2013 I visited the American Folklife Center and photocopied all the programs within the archive so that I could update the list I had been given.

playwriting,³³ have sometimes been marginalized by female artistic directors and other producers/programmers of storytelling festival events, starting with the National Storytelling Festival.³⁴ But decisions made by female arts administrators must also be considered within the context and the influence of a male-privileging dominant discourse.

Marginalization at the National Storytelling Festival has not only affected women storytellers economically, but also has abetted their eventual erasure or complete exclusion in the popular history³⁵ and the myth-making of a revival within which they have been significant pioneers. Happily, women storytellers and their practices do appear in feminist folklore studies and in the field of contemporary storytelling studies scholarship.³⁶ Emic observer Wendy Welch writes: "Most examinations of feminist or female storytelling are within the private sphere to which the understanding of women's

³³ See Emily Glassberg Sands' 2009 study entitled "Opening the Curtain on Playwright Gender: An Integrated Economic Analysis of Discrimination in American Theater" (Master's Thesis) Princeton University Department of Economics.

³⁴ The results of my research are found in Appendix A to this study. There eleven graphs show the representation of gender, race/ethnicity, and regional base of featured storytellers at the National Storytelling Festival from its inception in 1973 to the 2012 festival. See, too, Wendy Welch's essay on "Perceptions of Inequality: Women in the Art and Business of Storytelling" in *Women in Storytelling – The Proceedings of the Third Annual University College of Cape Breton Storytelling Symposium 1999*, edited by Afra Kavanagh. Sydney (Nova Scotia: University College of Cape Breton Press, 2000), 13-31.

³⁵ See references to the history of the storytelling revival as retold by a number of important community leaders at the 2012 National Storytelling Conference later in this study.

³⁶ See "Visions for Storytelling Studies: Why, How, and for Whom?" by Jo Radner, Joseph Sobol, David Novak, Karen Dietz, Gioia Timpanelli and Doug Lipman with additional comments from Elizabeth Figa, Craig Roney, and Yusi Wang in the inaugural issue of *Storytelling, Self, Society* 1.1 (Fall 2004), 8-27.

storytelling has been largely relegated. For this reason, much of the scholarship fails to apply to the context of women who earn their living from telling stories."³⁷

Add to the lack of data on storytelling platform performance the tendency of (male) folklorists to privilege (male) traditional storytellers in their research and eschew or disdain research on female storytellers from either oral culture or revival traditions. The combination of these factors set the stage for the marginalization, erasure or exclusion of women across the board – from both folkloristic research and revival historiographies. As a storytelling revival insider, I have been interrogating this marginalization of women through my own lived experience for thirty-five years. Now, as an emerging scholar of storytelling studies, I am interrogating it (and the marginalization of others in the movement) through research as well.

Purpose of this Study and Research Questions

At this writing, there exists no dissertation-length, emic investigation of the work of storyteller Connie Regan-Blake, the unmistakable, yet unsung, foremother of the festival-based American storytelling revival, that attempts to document both her significance to the revival and her erasure within its history. The purpose of my dissertation is to provide such a study, drawing on primary research and secondary sources and a web of qualitative methods. First and foremost, the study is grounded in a

³⁷ Wendy Welch, "Identity Authority, Artistic Authority, Markets and Meaning: Contemporary English-language Storytellers Examined" (PhD diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2006), 281.

series of Cotsen Storytelling Project (CSP) interviews recorded August 18-20, 1998 with Connie Regan-Blake.³⁸

Throughout this study, I ask these questions:

- (1) What suppressed, erased, or ignored information illustrating the breadth and depth of the American storytelling revival and the significance of Regan-Blake's part in it can be unearthed in the CSP interviews and in other materials pertaining to her?
- (2) How has a masculinist dominant discourse influenced Regan-Blake's lived experiences as a storytelling pioneer, and how does that influence manifest itself in her CSP interviews, and elsewhere in writing about her? Can the impact of a dominant discourse which devalues her as a woman and a storytelling artist be seen to have confined or driven her work, as reflected in her oral histories, personal narratives and topical responses to interview questions?
- (3) How have Regan-Blake's contributions to the National Storytelling Festival, the national storytelling organization and the storytelling revival community – despite her exclusion from their combined histories – impacted the movement in its present state in 2014, and in its looking toward the future?

My study is largely – but not completely – bounded by the time period covered in Regan-Blake's narratives from the year of her birth in 1947 until our final CSP interview in

³⁸ The Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews (1997-2000), collected by F. Berkley Hudson and myself, are the property of the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

1998. Evidence of my subject's significance to as well as her marginalization within the American storytelling revival is embedded within these narratives which cover her formative influences as a verbal artist, her career history, her work on behalf of the National Storytelling Festival, the national storytelling organization, and the revival community, her artistic practices, and the beliefs about storytelling that have shaped her and her legacy within the storytelling revival movement.

My husband, Berkley Hudson, and I conducted and documented the CSP interviews as part of an archival project commissioned by Lloyd E. Cotsen for the Cotsen Children's Library housed at Princeton University.³⁹ On more than one occasion during our collection process we had the opportunity to do a short "seed interview" before a more lengthy, in-depth session, or to conduct a short follow-up interview following a lengthy one. That was the case with Regan-Blake. My examination of her narratives was drawn from all the CSP sessions with her, keeping in mind that these sessions were recorded sixteen years ago. At times I have interwoven the CSP interviews with material published before or collected since. To analyze the narratives, and to interrogate the impact of Regan-Blake's lived experience on the storytelling revival today, I have considered events occurring in the storytelling revival community since 1998 as well.

In "Woman as Subject, Oral History as Method," Katherine Jensen notes that "the practice of doing follow-up interviews gave women time to think about those parts of their past that had before seemed unimportant or simply very ordinary" (85). In anticipation of this study, I conducted further oral history interviews with Regan-Blake at

³⁹ We were commissioned to conduct this archival collecting by Lloyd E. Cotsen, founder of the Cotsen Children's Library, starting in the fall of 1997. We finished our work for the collection in 2000.

our annual retreat in September 2012.⁴⁰ Since then she has continued to answer my questions about her experience via phone call and email. In fact, she has read these chapters and commented to me about them in a number of dissertation dialogues.

I have also drawn on recordings made at the first National Storytelling Festival in 1973 and at the National Storytelling Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2012. In addition, I have recalled conversations from our retreat meetings in the late eighties or early nineties. And I have excerpted Regan-Blake's comments, recorded in the spring of 2014, during our dissertation dialogues about what I have written here.

To my reading of the CSP interviews – enacted live at the time they were conducted, and revisited through historical texts created by video documentation and print transcriptions⁴¹ – I bring an ear and eye tuned to my own experiences as a woman

⁴⁰ I first met Regan-Blake around the time I was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1984. We also came into contact at about the same time at an early National Storytelling Conference on the campus of Washington College Academy, a private high school five miles west of Jonesborough, Tennessee. In 1987, she and I became members of a professional storytelling retreat group, first meeting at the Blue Mountain Center in the community of Blue Mountain Lake outside Albany, New York. At this writing, we have been friends and respected colleagues for nearly thirty years.

⁴¹ There is no small paradox in trying to pin the utterances of a storyteller to the page, or confine her presence to a screen. To experience a performer through a fixed form is to flatten the three-dimensionality of a live exchange into the two-dimensionality of a textual reference. Like reading a printed page, watching a video is no longer a dialogical exchange, but instead the act of consuming a fixed text. Therefore, by no means am I privileging the archival recordings or the print transcriptions from the Cotsen Storytelling Project over the live interviews and performances that I witnessed sixteen years ago. For a storytelling studies scholar, all three experiences – live, recorded, and textual – are useful. A transcript allows for word searches where a conversation does not; repeated viewings of a video allow the scholar to include in her observations the paralinguistic communication that may fill in the gaps between the words in any exchange.

I acknowledge that in revisiting Regan-Blake's words and her saying of them via recordings and transcriptions sixteen years after the fact, I have conjured a distance of time and technological remove. By stepping back from my own participation in the conversations, I have gained an analytical perspective. At the same time, because I retain

and a professional storyteller, to my interactive relationship with Regan-Blake, and to the idioms or registers (Foley 7) of both her narratives and the storytelling revival movement. As an emic researcher, I embody an audience member who is "aware of other stories that [I] have previously been told, and simultaneously other 'stories' that [I] have personally been involved in...that will add extra meaning to the present choice of narrative, or particular choices of words or images that [she may] use" (Gunnell 11).⁴² Those "other stories" include considerable knowledge of Regan-Blake's personal and performance history and her storytelling-related endeavors offstage; of her print, audio and video publications and of other documents including significant correspondence, articles; and of other materials by and about her in popular and scholarly media.

From these variegated threads I have spun a whole cloth exploration of "identifiable themes and definable issues" (Jensen 86) found in Regan-Blake's experiences and narratives, including the impact of her exclusion from revival history, "leaving a written record for an otherwise undocumented, underrepresented, and misrepresented social history, and as a means of giving other women an opportunity to evaluate their own historical contributions" (Jensen 86). By documenting Regan-Blake's narratives and demonstrating her importance to the establishment, growth, reach and significance of the American storytelling revival despite her erasure from its history, I am

the embodied memory of the live encounters with Regan-Blake, the recordings evoked those remembered exchanges, sometimes poignantly, bringing back features of the exchange that an observer/listener who had not conducted the interviews might miss.

⁴² See Terry Gunnell, "Narratives, Space and Drama: Essential Spatial Aspects Involved in the Performance and Reception of Oral Narrative" in *Folklore* 33 (2006) Electronic Journal. <www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol33/terry.pdf>; Internet; accessed 2 May 2011.

pointing the way to future scholarship on women storytellers within the revival, opening up the Cotsen Storytelling Project to further research, and providing a basis for more inclusivity within the storytelling revival's own myth-making and its artistic and economic practices.

Researcher's Positionality: the Lens of Lived Experience

What positions me to embark on such a study? As a participant-observer of the American storytelling revival for more than three decades, I have played a number of roles in its ongoing development: freelance touring, teaching and recording artist; storytelling event producer; platform teller on the National Storytelling Festival stage; member of the board of directors of the national storytelling organization; national storytelling conference steering committee member, plenary speaker/moderator, workshop leader and Legacy Project organizer;⁴³ National Storytelling Network "Circle of Excellence" Oracle Award winner; local, regional and national storytelling community activist; "accidental ethnographer" and storytelling revival archivist as one of the creators of the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University; contributor to popular and trade storytelling publications; and emerging scholar of storytelling studies via my work as a contributor and performance review editor of the

⁴³ For a handful of years starting in the early 2000s, the NSN's national conference included the Legacy Project, an unbudgeted interactive activity for conference attendees meant to produce something to leave behind in the city where the conference was held. In 2007 when the conference was in St. Louis, NSN's local planning partner was the Gateway Storytellers, a St. Louis-based guild. With the assistance of Gateway member Rosemary Wilson, chair of the local executive committee, and Kind Crone Productions staff member Mary K. Green, I spearheaded an effort to revamp the Legacy Project by finding funding to bring schoolteachers from the beleaguered St. Louis Public School System to the conference free of charge.

peer-reviewed journal, *Storytelling , Self, Society*. Some of these roles have placed me at center stage, and others have relegated me to the margins of the movement.

My experience from multiple perspectives confirms that storytellers' life stories are embodied in their life's work onstage regardless of the genre of story they are telling; Michael Wilson agrees "*all* acts of storytelling are, to a greater or lesser extent, simultaneously acts of both autobiography and fiction" ("Some Thoughts," 24). Their life stories are reflected, too, in their storytelling-related endeavors off stage, so that the collective history of the storytelling movement is firmly embedded in the diverse narratives of pioneering individuals. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (2008) assert, "oral history is the interplay between individual memory and collective memory" (qtd. in Madison, 38); Kamala Visweswaran concurs that "the autobiographical is not a mere reflection of self, but another entry point into history, of community refracted through self" (137). Until now, the popular history of the storytelling revival and the knowledge of its tellers, audiences, supporters and event producers have been made the poorer by the lack of refraction through and appreciation of women revivalist storytellers' contributions and lived experiences.

Della Pollock writes that "the oral history interview is a bounded event that asserts the "competency" of the primary teller to tell a particular history" (3). As this study demonstrates, Regan-Blake is extremely competent to recount her experiences and to account for the significance of her contributions in establishing, expanding and diversifying the American storytelling revival. Knowing the fullness of its history – for better or worse – strengthens any community, and the individuals within it are heartened by having been seen more fully and heard more clearly as makers of that history.

Visweswaran notes the impact of hearing one's voice included in the discourse for the first time: "The process of narrating a personal experience that can be understood as part of a shared history of community memory is also empowering not only for the speakers, but also for listeners" (139). That was certainly true for Regan-Blake and me during the Cotsen Storytelling Project collection process sixteen years ago, and in conversations since.

Justification

Why attend to this particular woman's experiences? Connie Regan-Blake has won national recognition from her peers within the festival-based American storytelling revival. Along with eighteen of her colleagues from the first wave of talent featured at the National Storytelling Festival, she was named a member of the National Storytelling Network (NSN)'s Circle of Excellence⁴⁴ in 1996, the first year that such an honor was given. She was the first individual to receive NSN's Distinguished National Service Award in 2001; the award had been initiated only the year before, and its first awardee was a municipality, the Town of Jonesborough, Tennessee, home of the National Storytelling Festival. She is also winner of a 2006 "Lifetime Achievement" Award from NSN.⁴⁵ Regan-Blake has appeared at the National Storytelling Festival seventeen times in forty-one years; this makes her the second-most-often featured female storyteller in the

⁴⁴ The Circle of Excellence Oracle Award is the National Storytelling Network's equivalent of an Oscar.

⁴⁵ Traditional teller Ray Hicks was the first NSN Lifetime Achievement awardee in 1996. National Storytelling Festival founder, Jimmy Neil Smith, received the honor in 1999. Though she was originally nominated in 2000, it would be seven more years before Connie Regan-Blake, the festival's unnamed artistic director from 1975-1984, would receive this recognition in 2006.

history of the Festival. In fact, she is the only teller who has been onstage – either as a performer or an emcee – every year since the Festival's inception in 1973.⁴⁶ Additionally, she received the 2009 B. B. Maurer Folklife Scholar Award given by the West Virginia Folklife Center in Fairmont; that award honors those who have made an outstanding contribution to the preservation and perpetuation of Appalachian cultural heritage.

At the time of the Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews, Regan-Blake had toured both nationally and internationally with her performing partner, Barbara Freeman, for twenty years before disbanding in 1995. Together they appeared at music, folklife and storytelling festivals and reading, education, library and storytelling conferences, and schools in 47 states. In addition, by 1998, they had performed in twelve countries including England, Belgium, Canada, the Philippines, Korea and Japan. In 2001 she founded the Ray Hicks Fund, and has overseen many of its fundraising activities and community projects ever since. As a solo performer, Regan-Blake has been featured at the Glistening Waters Storytelling Festival in New Zealand, has led numerous storytelling workshops at the Hollyhock Retreat Centre on Cortes Island in Canada, and has gathered and told stories for Bead for Life, a non-profit development organization, in Uganda. Her impact as a performing and teaching artist and as a cultural worker has been demonstrated all over the world.

The Timeliness of the Study

Why conduct this study now? Time is of the essence if the archival interviews in the Cotsen Storytelling Project are to be used in dialogical research of any kind. In 1984

⁴⁶ Admittedly, her performance in 1973 was in the open swapping session as stipulated in the festival program; she and her cousin were the only two women to tell in any capacity that weekend. But she has been either an invited teller or an official emcee at all the subsequent festivals to this day.

when I was swept up in the second wave of talent to wash over the National Storytelling Festival stage, I was thirty-one years old, and my role models among the first wave tellers were five to thirty-five years my senior. Twenty-nine years later those of us who are still living are the community's elders. My work in shaping the archival Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library was motivated by a desire to capture the life stories and contributions of the storytelling revival's participants for future generations while most of the first wave tellers were still available to share their stories. In the years since the collection project ended, twelve of our seventy-five informants have died.

I entered graduate school in 2007 specifically so that I could contribute to a small but growing body of contemporary storytelling studies scholarship from an insider's perspective, reflecting on my own lived experience and those of the tellers included in the Cotsen Storytelling Project archive. The years I've invested in becoming a scholar-artist have been turbulent ones for the storytelling revival community, but recent events⁴⁷ suggest that a new generation of tellers, audience members, event organizers and storytelling studies scholars stand ready to grapple with an inclusive telling of the movement's history, and to go forward toward a more expansive future. At age sixty, I am compelled to begin this investigation and to tell stories that have long been overdue while I can still do so in dialogue with my remaining interviewees. Once upon a time for this particular study is now.

The Cotsen Storytelling Project

⁴⁷ Recent developments in the community are touched on in the conclusion of this study.

Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet writes that oral life history "aims, by means of a coherent and global process to account for the whole of [Regan-Blake's] life experience until the moment of the interview...[encompassing] not only the temporal and causal organization of facts and events considered significant, but also the value judgments that make sense of this particular life" (77). She notes, too, that often the oral historian "who asks for an autobiographical narrative has been, in effect, commissioned by an institution" (78).

Commissioned by Cotsen Children's Library founder Lloyd E. Cotsen to capture "a slice of life" from the storytelling revival community, the CSP interviews were not intended to elicit whole life stories from the storytellers, but rather to survey their formative experiences with regard to story, their career paths to professional storytelling performance, their performance practices, their motivating beliefs about the power of storytelling, and thoughts about their legacies to the storytellers who followed them.⁴⁸ Short or seed interviews lasting 20-40 minutes were often conducted during the storytellers' downtime at a festival, or after a performance at another kind of venue. Long interviews ranged from several hours to two or three days, and were usually conducted in an interviewee's home or in another location suggested or agreed upon by the storyteller. Whether a given interview was brief or extended, we posed these questions:

⁴⁸ Tracy C. Davis notes: "The types of questions asked in the collection of oral history by Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Keonig, for example, validate the importance of the female life cycle in the artist's life and invite commentary from the women...on how their personal experience relates to a world view, and how both are rendered into playtexts and productions" (65). This line of inquiry made me aware that the questions we asked for the Cotsen Storytelling Project did not explicitly interrogate the female (or male) life cycle.

- When did you first become aware of story? When did story start to matter to you?
- What was your path to storytelling?
- What is your process of lifting a story off the tongue or off the page?
- Why do you tell stories? Why is storytelling important?⁴⁹

Berkley Hudson and I were both present for the filming of most, but not all of the CSP interviews or performance shoots.⁵⁰ Filmmaker Fran Burst Terranella accompanied us on occasion, though we shot most of the nearly 200 hours of footage ourselves.

Spinning Methodological Threads

Liz Lerman says: "Ask a difficult enough question, and you will need more than one discipline to answer it" (25). Tracy C. Davis writes: "the pluralistic approach of feminist history...constantly seeks to question the traditions by which knowledge becomes accredited, often rejecting both the traditions and the knowledge thus generated" (76). She further states: "By historicizing the silence (and silencing) of racial minorities, ethnic subcultures, and classes in any culture, we articulate what is known by women to

⁴⁹ Later in our collection process, we added another question (one we did not ask of Connie Regan-Blake in 1998):

- How do you want to be remembered in 100 years?

⁵⁰ In September of 1997, I conducted the initial shoot, at the Blue Mountain storytelling retreat in Isle of Palms, South Carolina. In 1998, Berkley Hudson conducted a solo shoot with Donald Davis in the storyteller's hometown of Waynesville, in Hayward County in western North Carolina; I was also not present for Hudson's interviews with youth tellers at the 1997 National Storytelling Festival.

Hudson and I conducted interviews together in Orlando, Florida at the 1998 annual conference held by the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS); the following year, though we were not present, the Cotsen Storytelling Project arranged for filmmaker Marco Williams, a professor from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, to shoot footage of performances at the NABS conference in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

exist but is unspoken or unspeakable in the dominant tradition" (66). These writers' assertions set the stage for my drawing on a web of feminist methods – feminist historiography, oral history collection and narrative analysis, auto/biographical performance and critical ethnography – as needed to gather, analyze, reflect upon and interpret the experiences, accomplishments, beliefs, and legacy, described in Regan-Blake's interviews.

In attempting to deepen and diversify the record of storytelling revival history by investigating Regan-Blake's personal history, I took some of my methodological cues from feminist historiography.⁵¹ Davis writes: "Neither feminism as a political theory nor feminism as a methodological practice of history is a fully formed, unitary vision: both are emergent and multifaceted, and consequently innumerable and irreconcilable theoretical variations are discernable" (65). Those variations compel me to consider other voices, not just my own, in recovering women's history in the storytelling revival; thus I have drawn on and included transcripts from emails from, interviews with, and presentations by other members of the revival community.

Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen state that "to practice...historiography means to look beyond the record of 'what happened' to analyze how and why such records are constructed" (1), compelled by "the postmodern recognition that even on the rare occasions that facts and events themselves are verifiable, the narratives through which we order those facts and events are necessarily subjective" (1), concluding that "history is a complex and contested act of cultural memory" (2). To my mind, even individual

⁵¹ I suggest that theater studies and performance studies would themselves be deepened and diversified by welcoming contemporary storytelling more fully into the broad world of human performance modes to be studied, taught and practiced.

memory is not a monologue; it is an always evolving, sometimes splintering cacophony of remembered voices, images, and experience filtered through multiple perspectives, subjectivities, personal truths and layers of constructed meaning. Cheryl Glenn reminds us "postmodern historiography attempts to decouple the link between 'objectivity' and 'truth'" (387), attempting not "to supplant the master narrative...with a 'mater' narrative...Rather...to investigate a number of deeply contextualized narratives in an attempt to bring a fuller, richer – different—picture into focus" (388). She asserts that

Writing women (or any other traditionally disenfranchised group) into...history...can be an ethically and intellectually responsible gesture...to address silences, challenge absences, and assert women's contributions to public life. Such a gesture, particularly one that interrogates the availability, practice, and preservation (or destruction) of historical evidence, simultaneously exposes relations of exploitation, domination, censorship and erasure (389).

My primary research has exposed some of the power relations behind women's marginalization and erasure in the field of performance storytelling; looking at the influence of the dominant narrative on Regan-Blake's life and her Cotsen Storytelling Project narratives is part of my study. Canning argues "that history is not the past but a narrative about that past, one that comes to stand in for that past" (231), noting, too, that "history as both a discipline and a practice has not particularly encouraged women to be seen and to see themselves as full-fledged professional practitioners" (228). Nonetheless, as a feminist researcher I approached Regan-Blake's narratives as "historiographical moments that reveal the processes of transforming the past into history and that blur the boundaries between historiography and dramaturgy" (228), trusting that, as Canning

writes, "transforming understandings of past practices and how they are historicized can, in turn, transform future practices, making history something that can change the world" (233).

Matthew Craig Mitchell and Margaret Egudo note that "narrative is inherently multidisciplinary...[and] lends itself to a qualitative enquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories" (2). They cite Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993) in asserting "narrative analysis...takes the story itself as the object of study. Thus the focus is on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives through examining the story, and [its] linguistic and structural properties" (2). Like Jensen, I expect to use "some of the techniques of content analysis to look at the shape of recurrent themes in the interviews" (86). She notes "researchers look for major themes, key words, and indices of behavior and belief and make an initial list of major and minor categories" (70). She continues: "every attempt is made to look for critical incidents, points of tension and conflict, and contradictions to help in interpreting the data" (70). Chanfrault-Duchet has found that "refrains can be heard on the tape, and recurrences – relations among facts, events, and comments – can be discerned in the transcript. These elements come to shape the meaning system that governs and informs the [narrative]" (79). JoAnne Banks-Wallace observes, "thematic categories and story function are derived by paying attention to the words or phrases women use to tell a story" (418). She also urges "reviewing stories for conspicuous absences and silences," noting that "culture-based assumptions...the composition of the audience...and power dynamics within the larger society...are three important causes of conspicuous absences and silences" (419). Anna

Deavere Smith concurs: "The not-said is as important as the said" (39).⁵² While not attempting a strict socio-linguistic analysis of the interviews, I examined Regan-Blake's narratives both for their descriptive content and for the recurrent themes and phrases, absences and silences that they contain.

Elliot G. Mishler speaks of reconstructing "the told from the telling" (95), that is, identifying the narrative sequences – the told – embedded in the discourse – that is, the telling – delivered in response to the interview question. Because of the nature of our questions, sessions with the storytellers called forth narrative in varying forms: oral history, personal narrative or topical responses. D. Soyini Madison defines these terms thus (*italics below are hers*):

- (1) *Oral history*...is a recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life or lives of individuals who remember them and/or experienced them; (2) *personal narrative*...is an individual perspective and expression of an event, experience, or point of view; and (3) *topical interview* [provides] the point of view given to a particular subject, such as a program, an issue or a process. (28).

Throughout the interviews in the archive, the storytellers' answers to the first of the questions asked – "when did story first begin to matter to you?" – led to topical responses and personal narratives recounting family history and relationships, formative experiences as well as reflections on family and community values. Answering the second of the questions – "what was your path to professional storytelling" – interviewees described career paths that moved both toward and away from the

⁵² Anna Deavere Smith, *Talk to Me – Listening Between the Lines*, 39.

community narrative of the storytelling revival. Questions three and four about artistic practice – the storytellers' motivations for telling stories or their beliefs about the importance of storytelling, as well as the interviewees' sense of their legacies – elicited topical responses that were sometimes interwoven with snippets of personal narrative.

Dwight Conquergood writes: "ethnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human creators. They must work with real people, humankind alive, instead of printed texts. Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books" ("Performing as a Moral Act" 66). Susan Geiger asserts: "a life history is generally distinguishable from other kinds of oral documentation as 'an extensive record of a person's life told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography'" (Langness qtd. in Geiger 336). Though, again, I did not attempt to shape a full life history from the Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews with Regan-Blake, I feel enormous responsibility as the official reporter of her narratives within this study. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai caution "because it involves at least two subjectivities, that of the narrator and that of the interviewer, oral history adds a new dimension to the concept of work 'by' women. A story or statement that, in its oral form, is 'by' the speaker very often reaches the public in the form of a text 'by' the scholar, whether as a life history or as excerpts used by a scholar to illustrate a line of argument" (2). They continue: "narrators typically are not true partners in the process [of oral history]. Whatever control they exercise during the interview, when they are able to negotiate the terrain, usually ends once the session is completed" (2). Conquergood,

Gluck, Patai, Jensen and other feminist scholars⁵³ persuade me that inviting Regan-Blake to reflect on my editing and interpretation of her narratives is important, as Jensen asserts, "not simply as a political obligation to avoid exploiting our sisters for professional purposes, but in a more positive sense to make women subjects rather than objects of women's history" (86). Thus I have engaged in a dialogical approach from feminist critical ethnography: whenever possible, not only have I asked Regan-Blake to reflect on my editing and interpretation of her narratives, but also I have referenced our dialogues in the body and/or the conclusion to my study. Judith Stacey claims that there can never be a feminist ethnography given "the limitations of cross-cultural and interpersonal understanding and representation" (116). Made wary by her assertion that "feminist researchers are apt to suffer the delusion of alliance more than the delusion of separateness" (116), I went forward knowing that "while there cannot be a fully feminist ethnography, there can be ...ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives" (117).

Geiger asserts: "If feminism is understood as 'the theory of women's point of view' (MacKinnon, 535), and if feminist method is understood to be 'the collective critical reconstitution of meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it,' (MacKinnon, 543) it is readily apparent that this theory must account for and encompass the diversity of that experience" (335). Of the central elements of the diverse forms of feminism itself, Joey Sprague writes:

⁵³ See especially *Women's Words – The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), and *Women's Oral History – The Frontiers Reader*, edited by Susan H. Armitage with Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

While feminists are a very heterogeneous group and we disagree on many issues, there are two things on which we have consensus: (1) gender, in interaction with many other areas like race/ethnicity, class, ability, and nation, is a key organizer of social life; and (2) understanding how things work is not enough – we need to take action to make the social world more equitable. That is, the call to progressive social change is a central commitment of feminism (*Feminist Methodologies*, 3).

Madison also grounds critical ethnography in "an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain...The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they could be for a specific subject; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity" (5). That commitment to feminist social action, especially in the study of an occupational community of which I am part, imbues my efforts as a feminist researcher. My feminist lens is reflected in Madison's description of "a form of critical postmodernism...[that] argues that the interlocking web of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and racism is neither abstract nor isolated but...is interpenetrating and ubiquitous as it interacts at varying levels and degrees in regulating our everyday lives" (91). At the outset of this study, I believed that the intersection of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and racism as well as stylistic and regional preferences fuel both the privileges and the biases that Regan-Blake and other women in the revival have experienced. Analysis of her narrative confirms these factors at work.

By selecting and interviewing our subjects in the Cotsen Storytelling Project archive, Hudson and I created a new body of knowledge about the experiences, practices and beliefs of dozens of American storytelling revival pioneers. In conducting and sharing a study grounded in the CSP interviews with Connie Regan-Blake, I have extended that knowledge, providing a basis not only for future scholarship using the CSP materials, but also for transforming future ethical and economic practices, and for bringing a more intentional approach to gender parity within the world of the American storytelling revival.

Literature Review

For a thirty-year veteran of storytelling performance practice to transform herself into a storytelling studies scholar is no small metamorphosis, and detailed engagement with existing scholarship has been an enormous part of that process. To conduct this study I am indebted to the work of (largely feminist) scholars from intersecting disciplines: storytelling studies, fairy tale studies, folklore and oral history, narrative analysis, feminist performance, critical ethnography and historiography. Thus, my literature review surveys emic and etic studies on the origins and history of, and issues of concern to, the contemporary American storytelling revival, as well as inquiry into the storytelling practices of women platform and traditional tellers in formal, public settings.

For the light that they may throw on the marginalization or exclusion of women storytellers in those settings, I have also looked at relevant studies examining paradigms of women as tellers of, and objects of, traditional and personal tales inside and outside the contemporary movement, including folkloristic examinations of women's everyday uses of personal narrative and other genres of storytelling, their preferred content, contexts,

performance styles, and attitudes toward their fellow tellers and listeners. Finally, my review includes selected scholarship on methodologies that will assist in my gleaning revival history from Regan-Blake's personal narratives, and interpreting and reflecting on the information therein.

Storytelling Studies, Folkloristics And Fairy Tale Studies:

On Revival Origins & History & Issues within the Community

The emerging field of storytelling studies and (especially feminist) folklore scholarship provide two areas in which women appear with some regularity as scholars, narrators or subjects. Folklorist Richard Gerald Alvey (1974) studies a century of organized storytelling⁵⁴ for children in the United States, finding that those in charge of "organizing" storytelling during this period were (chiefly female) librarians, camp counselors, public and religious school educators, and settlement house workers whose intention was to promote literacy and the acculturation of immigrants and other marginalized people through storytelling. The influence of these storytelling standard-bearers is felt even today as library, recreational, educational and cultural venues still welcome storytellers.

Drawing on Alvey, Claudia March Wischner (1991) considers the roots of the contemporary storytelling revival, anticipating Joseph Sobol's book-length study (below) by several years, and interrogates the performance practices of several "new

⁵⁴ Organized storytelling refers to the consciously scheduled performances of stories presented in formal settings, whether in libraries or schools, concert or festival or other venues.

storytellers."⁵⁵ Grounding herself in scholarship by Kay Stone, Ruth Stotter and others, as well as the historical performance practices of Ruth Sawyer, Marie Shedlock, Gudrun Thorne-Thompson and Augusta Baker, Wischner frames a discussion of the new tellers' diversity of performance styles and audience interaction, but does not engage the topic of gender equity within the contemporary community.

Librarians Carol L. Birch and Melissa Heckler (1996) investigate contemporary storytelling performance ethics and practices from the vantage point of storytelling revival insiders, furthering the development of a critical language that acknowledges the diverse audiences, tellers and types of material found in the revival. The essays in this volume explode any sense that storytelling is a simple, unchanging expressive practice in which excellence is easily attained, and contest any sense that its skillful use has no grounding in real life choices and ethical concerns, nor has any impact on those whose stories have been collected, studied, or told. One of the pivotal issues it does not address is the marginalization of women within the contemporary revival, but it does depict many areas of cultural study within which storytelling practice has deep roots and far-reaching tendrils.

Communications scholar Lindsay M. Brown (1997) focuses a cultural studies lens on the contemporary storytelling revivals in Canada and the U.S., astutely examining how and why storytelling has been revived, reified, commodified, institutionalized and transformed by the contemporary movement. Despite a few factual errors in her

⁵⁵ Wischner uses this phrase to describe revivalist tellers "who have begun telling since the 1960's" (1). She interviewed Heather Forest, Marcia Lane, Michael Parent, Peninnah Schram, Laura Simms, Ed Stivender and Diane Wolkstein for the dissertation, and also identifies Connie Regan-Blake, Brother Blue, David Holt and Spalding Gray within this designation.

reporting,⁵⁶ Brown displays dispassion as an etic observer, rigor as a scholar of cultural studies, and a willingness to point out the emperor's sartorial shortcomings, all of which made this work edifying.

A storyteller-turned-folklorist, Joseph Sobol (1999) provides a history of the occupational community of tellers that came together in the first twenty years of the festival-based American storytelling revival, capturing the emergence of various significant outreach initiatives and trends radiating from the center of Jonesborough, Tennessee. He names and acknowledges women pioneers who joined Jimmy Neil Smith in shaping the festival, the national storytelling organization, and the revival community. My study will bring one such woman out of Smith's shadow and place her experiences, her endeavors in and outside of Jonesborough – and her exclusion within the history of a revival that she pioneered – at center stage.

Introducing a collection of essays on *Women in Storytelling*, Afra Kavanagh (1999) questions the parallels between women's ability to control stories – particularly their own – and an increase in their political power (5). In Kavanagh's collection, Wendy Welch (1999) contests the popular but (she finds) unverifiable belief that females outnumber males in the contemporary storytelling profession in the Western countries she studied. Noting that women are less likely than men to make a living as festival

⁵⁶ Brown identifies Ray Hicks as "a small-time Tennessee farmer" when he lived his whole life on Beech Mountain near Banner Elk, North Carolina (128). Writing in 1997, she states that Hicks "has performed at every National Storytelling Festival since its beginnings in 1973, as well as other festivals in the U.S. and abroad" (129). In fact, Hicks missed four festivals between 1973 and 1997, and he was famously loath to leave "the Beech" much less to travel abroad. The exception was attending the celebration in Washington, DC at which he and his cousin Stanley Hicks received recognition as National Heritage Fellows. Later in her thesis, Brown identifies Jon Spelman as "a Vietnam vet turned war-story teller" (148), though he did not, in fact, serve in the armed forces, but instead interviewed veterans for his work on war stories.

storytellers, she finds that strong female characters⁵⁷ are often featured in the traditional and personal tales told by (male and female) festival tellers. Since men rhapsodizing about folktale heroines or remembered strong women family members is unlikely to make room for more actual women on storytelling stages, I submit that women storytellers have work to do in controlling their own stories, and in engaging male tellers to join them in an intentional effort to introduce gender parity to festival settings.

Educator Stephanie L. Hinton (2001) investigates the growth, function and fiduciary stability of American storytelling organizations, and articulates some of the storytelling community's professional concerns – artistic and economic – based on journalistic coverage, interviews with tellers and writings of essayists, folklorists and scholars. Despite a less than rigorous approach to her subject, she rightly queries whether or not the institutionalization of storytelling strategies to fit the National Storytelling Festival's conservative agenda threatens the art form's diversity (an issue of commodification taken up by some of the writers below), and anticipates the difficulties that followed when the national storytelling organization split into two entities – an entity devoted to producing the National Storytelling Festival⁵⁸ (and outreach projects) and the National Storytelling Network – in 1998.

⁵⁷ Preference for an oral female avatar over an actual female teller reminds this writer of the Guerilla Girls' poster which asks: "Do women have to be naked to get into the MET Museum?" and notes that "Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." To view a copy of the 1989 poster, see <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/ggirls/doc13.htm> Accessed online 26 September 2013.

⁵⁸ According to an email from Jimmy Neil Smith on April 6, 2014, the name of the festival-producing entity (following the split in 1998) went through a number of changes:

During the restructuring process, the proposed organization that would *not* serve members was referred to as the COO...the Center Outreach Organization. The

In a study of English storytelling revivalists, Simon Heywood (2004) challenges the folklorist's skeptical, slantwise view of revival culture (48). He finds that revival tellers in the United Kingdom – many of them middle-class, educated, politically committed sorts (49) – are not primarily interested in reifying storytelling as exotic (58), or in reenacting a nostalgic pre-industrial culture with which they have no first-hand familiarity (59);⁵⁹ though they may evoke nostalgic trappings – costumes worn, or pub settings preferred – as a secondary feature of their performances, they are interested primarily in integrating storytelling into contemporary contexts (59) for sociable interaction (60), utilizing and innovating a traditional verbal art form in aesthetic ways

COO inherited the original charter of NAPPS, and [the National Storytelling Network] created a new organization. We both agreed that [the National Storytelling Association or] NSA gave birth to two organizations.

As soon as the restructuring was approved, the COO leadership changed the legal name of the organization from NSA to the Storytelling Foundation International [SFI]. When SFI was coming close to opening the new “National Storytelling Center,” it became clear that we had to avoid confusion by naming both the organization and the place the International Storytelling Center...

There has been a mistaken perception by some that the COO was only a Jonesborough-focused entity, only a producer of the festival, but in fact, we included in COO's name the word “outreach” to reflect the work that COO would be doing beyond Jonesborough and the Festival. For example, that would eventually include training for the United Way of America and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, affiliations with the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, and, most recently, ISC's efforts to help the tiny African country of Comoros build a community-based storytelling agenda. I am now leading the work in Comoros as a contractor for ISC who received the funding before I retired (Personal email from Smith on April 6, 2014. Used by permission).

⁵⁹ Based on his own experience, folklorist and storyteller Simon Heywood reports that the “storytelling revival feels less about re-creating the distant past than surviving the immediate future. Many of a professional storyteller's audiences have no benevolent interest in storytelling, and none in romantic sociopolitical conservatism, and success depends on entertaining them on their own terms without it. Some storytelling revivalists sustain full-time careers in these unforgiving circumstances for decades” (62). This is as well stated an emic observation as any I have seen concerning the in-the-trenches experience of a revival storyteller. Folklorists, take note!

(60), and capturing a participant experience not unlike the one achieved in traditional communities (60).⁶⁰ In the face of Carl Lindahl's negative assessment of revival storytellers, Heywood's rigor as a folklorist and his acuity as an emic participant-observer makes him a welcome addition to the still-shallow pool of scholarship by artist-scholars from within the contemporary revival.

Storyteller and educator Patrick Ryan⁶¹ (2006) critiques the contemporary storyteller's created performance persona or mega-identity (315) – particularly an assumed "Celticity" (313) that has no basis in the teller's life except as a marketing tool. This false identity, he feels, leads to an artificial, easily reproduced and commodified style (322) of telling made popular in festival settings, negating genuine storytelling (325).⁶² His later reworking of this topic (2008) identifies three (male) writers – novelist

⁶⁰ Heywood writes: "Storytelling revivalists insist (through disavowal) on describing their motives, experiences and understandings in surprisingly unexceptional terms; the experience that they describe appear to differ surprisingly little from more mature and integrated vernacular *milieu*...although revivals may never achieve precise formal, stylistic and historical continuity with source traditions...they nevertheless may genuinely revive a basic participant experience" (60).

McCarthy and Stotter (1994) found the same to be true in America: "It does seem that in a revivalist storytelling context as in a traditional context the storytelling event, the experience of an audience listening to a narrator, remains remarkably consistent" (155). So, one wonders, where's the beef?

⁶¹ Ryan is an Irish-American artist-scholar living in the UK, and though the "genuine storytellers" he mentions by name are also based Across the Pond, he makes some pointed if coded references to the American revival (e.g. "The Storyteller in Context," 72).

⁶² With just a whiff of a masculinist, anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, anti-theatrical cabal, Wilson (*Storytelling and Theatre*, 63) and Ryan strengthen their arguments against what they consider to be the self-conscious inauthenticity of contemporary tellers by evoking fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes who conceptualizes "genuine storytelling... [as a] contrast to what he sees as dominant forms in contemporary telling" ("The Storyteller in Context," 65).

Gianni Celati, fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes, and fantasy writer Philip Pullman – as arbiters of genuine storytelling, that is to say, storytelling that invokes an experience of liminality (77) for speaker and listener, rendering the teller invisible in service to the tale (85). Though I share Ryan's dismay that the commodification of festival storytelling has limited the wider culture's appreciation of storytelling (67), I am troubled not only by his disparagement of storytellers striving to make a living from their art, (72) but also by his seeming lack of consciousness about gender. Framed as it is in an unexamined Euro-American male privilege,⁶³ this essay was one of the first to motivate my study of women storytellers whose endeavors have been erased, in part, by those who demand invisibility as the hallmark of authenticity. The need for a storyteller's invisibility proclaimed by a man in the limelight of practice and scholarship seems disingenuous.

In his book-length study Michael Wilson (*Storytelling and Theatre*, 2006) details the development of the contemporary storytelling revival in the UK,⁶⁴ examines the elements of contemporary storytelling as an art form (9), and the difference between storytelling and acting (46). He devotes a chapter to platform performance, which critiques putting storytelling on display as high art (60) in ways that distance the teller from the paying audience and from the community at large. Believing that the

⁶³ Ryan closes his essay with a quote from Philip Pullman: "A storyteller should be invisible... and the best way to be sure of that is to make the story itself so interesting that the teller just disappears" (Pullman, qtd. in Ryan, 85). Invisibility is perhaps more advisable and more easily accomplished when the storyteller is a male novelist writing for the printed page, than when the storyteller is a flesh-and-blood woman standing before a flesh-and-blood audience. See Mulvey concerning the eroticized response to women performing before a male gaze.

⁶⁴ Despite his UK focus, Wilson includes American teller Michael Parent among his seven informants.

commodification and commercialization of storytelling performance loses sight of the art form's democratic roots and original subversive intention (63),⁶⁵ Wilson challenges the artifice of platform settings, especially the negative effect such a setting can have on a traditional teller (65); his concerns resonate with the skepticism of other writers (see Ryan above) who charge revival tellers in particular with being "inauthentic." In a lecture that same year Wilson ("Some Thoughts," 2006) examines how Ryan's concept of mega-identity is expressed not only on teller websites but also in a teller's preamble (introductory remarks), performed story, and coda (remarks made at the end of the telling) in performance settings. He ultimately concludes, however, that a teller's clear sense of identity is crucial to the success of a storytelling event, and that while one may strive for invisibility, one's attitudes or *Gestus*, will always be visible (23) to a discerning audience.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ For the scholars (and the storytellers) here and abroad who are mystified by the impact of these opposing forces in American society, Schlesinger writes:

Capitalism and democracy began as allies in the revolution against monarchy and feudal aristocracy, and they continue to share a faith in individual freedom, popular sovereignty, limited government and equality before the law. In America capitalism includes democracy, and democracy includes capitalism. Yet the two creeds point in different directions [...] those most firmly attached to democratic values exhibit least support for capitalism and those most firmly attached to capitalist values exhibit least support for democracy (qtd.in Lindahl, "Introduction," xxviii).

⁶⁶ Given that Ryan embodies an adopted UK identity and actively works on the UK festival circuit, and Wilson is a Professor of Drama at Falmouth University (in Wales), I am intrigued by the former's anti-performance-persona/anti-bourgeois stance, and the other's anti-theatrical bias with regard to contemporary storytelling performance. Yet I am grateful for their rigorous interrogation of storytelling performance at a time when storytelling studies is still an emerging field, and particularly for the analysis they have given to what contemporary storytelling performance is and is not, and how the identity of the teller is embedded in her/his words used before, during and after a performance. I look forward to further conversations with both.

On Women Storytellers' Practices and Other Gendered Paradigms

Linda Dégh's (1969) book-length study, a major work of folklore scholarship, looks at the interrelatedness of oral folk narratives, their creator/performers and their participant audiences in a village in Hungary, assessing the social role and cultural values of narration. Her chief informant for this study was Mrs. Zsuzsánna Palkó whose advanced age, poverty, illiteracy, and backbreaking labors did nothing to detract from her rich imagination, prodigious memory and verbal skill as a narrator.⁶⁷

Mark Azadovskii's (1926) monograph, "A Siberian Tale Teller," translated by Dow in 1974, brought an important study within the reach of an English-speaking audience. Building on theses emerging in the Russian school of folkloristics during the early part of the twentieth century, Azadovskii and his predecessors anticipated the turn from textual studies to the study of performance-in-context taken by Georges, Bauman and others fifty years later. Reading this study in conversation with the work of American feminist folklorists (see below) underlines the reading across differences and biases that a male folklorist must do to arrive at conclusions concerning women's storytelling strategies.

Several feminist scholars have observed women storytellers' partiality to wonder tales over other story genres in everyday as well as platform telling, a preference that has had economic implications in the contemporary storytelling revival. From her dissertation onward, folklorist-turned-storyteller Kay Stone (1975) surveys women in folktales and queries the responses of (tellers and) listeners to these tales. Her (1998) book-length

⁶⁷ In 1954, Mrs. Palkó received the distinguished title of Master of Folklore from the Hungarian government (187).

study of professional storytelling in North America (Canada and the US) benefits from her dual perspectives as trained folklorist and experienced storyteller (xiii) for she situates her informants in their consciously formed professional communities.

Delineating terms⁶⁸ used (sometimes differently) by folklorists and revival tellers, she investigates the practices of revival tellers who favor fairy tales, here called wondertales, in their repertoires (xv).⁶⁹ Her study articulates the four streams of tradition that still feed the storytelling revival: oral tradition (15), library and educational storytelling (17), theatrical storytelling (20) and therapeutic and spiritual storytelling (22). Her nuanced, stereoscopic inquiry of the friction between folklorists and revivalist practitioners,⁷⁰ finds mistrust on both sides of an unnecessary schism. Her (2008) book collects thirty years' worth of her essays on women and fairy tales outlining her own trajectory as a feminist

⁶⁸ In clarifying her terminology, Stone makes this observation: "*Traditional Storytelling*...usually takes place in more casual contexts than do organized storytelling events, though it can be just as formal and performance-centered. That is, oral narration...can be much more than casual 'kitchen table storytelling'" (ix).

⁶⁹ Stone notes: "Women are strongly associated with storytelling, as tellers of tales and as tale characters. It is no accident, then, that wondertales have caught the attention of feminist scholars who have discussed the importance of gender in traditional stories" (6).

⁷⁰ Stone also acknowledges: "In writing this book I had to discard my own biases about authenticity and authority in order to appreciate the verbal artistry of tellers who were not, in purist folkloric thinking, 'traditional' performers, even when they described themselves as such" (xvi). Able to interrogate things stereoscopically as a folklorist and teller, she is curious:

why [revival tellers] felt compelled to identify themselves with an oral tradition, however vague even when it seemed 'wrong' from a folkloric viewpoint. I also began to question why it had been so important for folklorists to use their scholarly authority to deny authenticity to nontraditional performers, even when folklorists themselves continue to be influenced by nineteenth century romanticized notions of oral tradition (xvi-xvii).

For me, this statement was the first crack in the ice that has formed a frosty mirror within which tellers and folklorists see each other (and themselves) reflected.

scholar interested in the production and reception of fairy tales, the usefulness of the fairy tale genre in contesting female identity, the creative process itself, and the interrelated world of fairy tale and dream state.

Ruth B. Bottigheimer's *Fairy Tales and Society – Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* (1986) contains essays by Stone, Karen Rowe and Bottigheimer herself that address contemporary storytelling practice, the female voice in fairy tales, and women as silenced subjects in both story and society. Stone champions the artistry in traditional tales and their ongoing relevance to traditional tellers in predominantly rural settings, nontraditional urban tellers in library and educational settings, and neo-traditional tellers in concert and festival venues. Rowe investigates the paradigm of silenced women in ancient and antiquarian texts and what may be learned from voiceless women's improvised communication strategies, including spinning, or weaving a tapestry as a secret dispatch to be decoded by another woman; she writes, too, about the re-appropriation of voice by women fairy tale writers in European literary salons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A link established long ago between women's storytelling and women's traditional handwork, women's transmission of specialized knowledge and embodied creativity, and women and fairy tales still endures today. Bottigheimer's essay embroiders threads stitched in Rowe's: the silencing of both real and storied women, and the appropriation of tale spinning by men like Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, noting that talkative women spelled trouble to the romantic nationalists of the folklore movement in nineteenth century Germany. Recent scholarship has revealed that the Grimm Brothers' study of folktales was entirely dependent on often-unacknowledged

women collectors and women informants, and a close reading shows that their selection and adaptation of the tales often reinforces the ideal of a silent (and suffering) woman.

Joan N. Radner (1989) compares two versions of an Irish oral tale emphasizing the role of women in service to men within a patriarchal society, and illustrates how such a narrative can be bent to the will of a gifted teller using coded language to indirectly convey misogynistic or feminist leanings. Radner and Lanser's (1987) article further investigates the strategies of coding⁷¹ in folklore and literature, and how it enables women to express ideas and attitudes that run counter to the dominant culture's status quo. Radner's book-length anthology (1993) of essays explores feminist coding found in women's folk culture, including essays by Susan Gordon and Stone on their own contemporary performances of wondertales.

Radner (1996) introduces a special issue of *Women and Language* containing essays on the artistic aspects of women's narratives in diverse communities, and women's use of oral narrative for resistance, healing, and empowerment (1). Essays therein by Stone interrogating fairy tales, Tamara L. Burk on collaborative telling across generations, and Manu S. Kurian and Linda Pershing on communicating across difference helped to frame my thinking for this study.

Clodagh Brennan Harvey (1989) queries the scant role of women found in research on the Irish storytelling tradition,⁷² attributed to an historical lack of female

⁷¹ Among the coding strategies Radner and Lanser used by women tellers and writers are appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization and incompetence – all designed to embroider feminist messages into speech that is unintelligible to dominant culture members but clearly understood by other women.

⁷² Referencing Delargy, Harvey writes: "There are certain long-standing and generally-accepted notions concerning the role of women in the tradition, including the

folklorists sympathetic to the concerns of women in their research. Access to sex-segregated settings is also a factor in the lack of data about women's traditions in Ireland where the customary context for storytelling was nightly visiting among neighbors, often in same-sex groups (112). Historically women's domestic responsibilities restricted their freedom to participate in visiting (113). And the work they are tasked with at home – feeding children and getting them to bed – was easily disrupted by the intrusion of a male documentarian (123). Still Harvey finds that her four female informants had met in sex-segregated gatherings to talk among themselves and share fairy stories and other genres of folklore (114), and most told publicly at festivals, on the air, or to folklore collectors when asked to do so (116). She notes that the activities of male folklorists impacted these tellers immensely (119),⁷³ and that their favoring of male priorities, concerns and involvement, and their privileging of male styles and story content had gone a long way toward accounting for the lack of data about – and the unfounded bias against – women narrators (120).⁷⁴

ideas that women generally participated less than men and that they were inferior narrators, at least of more structurally-complex tales, to the men" (111).

⁷³ Noting the retirement of a folklorist who had collected from her, one of Harvey's informants said: "When [he] left this place, I think the old stories went with [him]" (119). Finding (accessible) settings conducive to story sharing and an audience of willing listeners remain integral to nurturing oral traditions as well as their performance-based study.

⁷⁴ For example, Harvey learned that seasonal nomadism by women taking their cattle into the highlands during the summer provided an outside-the-box, women-only setting for handwork like spinning, knitting, butter-making and storytelling – perhaps even the telling of tales normally not sanctioned for women to tell; but women storytelling in such settings had not been observed at the time of Harvey's writing, she believes, in part, because women collectors in Ireland were such a recent phenomenon (120-121).

In their auto-ethnographic dissertations, Cristy West (1997) and Heather Forest (2007) provide emic investigations of female storytellers' creative processes: the former in a self-directed storytelling apprenticeship through two artist residencies, and the latter in an exploration of the nature of her own creative process in creating socially conscious work. In the course of her emergence as a storyteller in educational and healthcare settings, West observes and contrasts the contemporary storytelling movement in the UK with the one in the US, noting that the American revival has more readily embraced a commercialization of storytelling. Gender is foregrounded in her study through her use of fairy tales to address and resolve issues with her mother. Developing a performance – based on her travel diary written during a time of war in Israel – Forest discovers commonalities between a verbal artist creating a complex tale and a change leader crafting a change vision. For a feminist researcher, creating a narrative is always coupled with crafting a change vision.

An emic researcher, Wendy Welch (1999) explores the shortcomings of her own biases about the low-income population she served as a storyteller-in-residence. She devotes her auto-ethnographic dissertation⁷⁵ (2006) to issues of identity, authenticity, artistry, individual and community ownership ethics, and marketing practices of the storytellers. In a chapter on how tellers find or construct their stories, Welch addresses how gender is portrayed in a sampling of storytellers' recorded personal stories (285)⁷⁶ as

⁷⁵ Though not an interviewed informant in Welch's study, I am quoted more than once in her dissertation.

⁷⁶ Welch writes: "Both men and women mold their repertoires in ways that reflect modern approaches to gender. Men may tend to be cautious of the 'unrequited love' sagas and would do well to be careful when relating stories of violence toward women, children

well as instances of sponsor censorship or pushback against women tellers' gendered repertoires especially when they portray strong women (292).⁷⁷

Since its inception in 2004, the peer-reviewed journal, *Storytelling, Self, Society*, has published critical essays on storytelling performance and the use of applied storytelling in the U.S. and abroad, as well as interviews with authors, storytellers and scholars, and book and performance reviews. In a special issue devoted to women, Kavanagh (2010) asserts that women have brought their historical role as familial story keepers into public realms as storytelling scholars who advocate for the ethical use of story in applied settings and situations (91). She credits feminist viewpoints and women's involvement in applied storytelling in the medical, communications, therapeutic, and ethics professions as helping to shift the worldview of Westerners away from objectivity and materialism toward a valuing of feelings, connections, and communities.

Within the critical essays on performance storytellers and the performance reviews themselves⁷⁸ in *Storytelling, Self, Society*, female scholars and female storytellers have been well represented. An examination of those reviews highlights some of the performance strategies used by women tellers, determined, in part, by a misogynistic culture and a conservative, capitalistic marketplace. Emerging as it has in the last ten

or animals. Women telling 'love gone wrong' stories or tales involving violence toward women, children and animals may find the audience more accepting" (296-297).

⁷⁷ Welch also notes: "Women narrating tales of powerful women are more likely to experience censorship than men telling the same stories, or stories of powerful men" (297).

⁷⁸ I was the performance review editor for *Storytelling, Self, Society* from 2009-2012, and the last five of the reviews noted herein were generated during my tenure.

years with an editorial board⁷⁹ dominated by sensitive men and strong women like those favored in feminist folktale collections, *Storytelling, Self, Society* has provided a strong corrective for the erasure of women's contributions – at least in scholarship about the storytelling revival.

On Orality, Oral Theory, Verbal Arts and the Storytelling Event

Because my current study is based on an archive of historical interviews conducted prior to my entering graduate school, my exploration of scholarship in the areas of orality, oral theory, the study of verbal arts and the storytelling event has been a forensic exercise. That exploration was intended to bring me up to speed in historical and contemporary scholarly conversations and practice, to equip me to critique my own process in collecting the Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews, to finesse my interviewing techniques for future reference, and to contextualize my interpretive findings within a larger body of research. It has also acquainted me with the diverse and ancient pedigrees of oral performance within various cultural groups.

In his introduction to *Teaching Oral Traditions* (1998), John Miles Foley takes the long view of orality in human culture, writing: "If we superimpose the history of our species on an annual calendar, the advent of writing occurs only in the month of December...[The oral tradition has] served as the exclusive vehicle for verbal art through the first eleven months of our 'species year' and... remains the principal channel for

⁷⁹ The first co-editors of the journal were Joseph Sobol and John Gentile. Their editorial board included Caren S. Neile, Sunwolf, Elizabeth Figa, Janice DelNegro and Ann Scroggie. The first advisory board consisted of Pamela Cooper, John Miles Foley, Betsy Hearne, Andre Heuer, Terry Lee, Doug Lipman, Margaret Read MacDonald, Hilde Lindemann Nelson, Vivian Gussin Paley, Jo Radner, Craig Roney, Gail Rosen, Peninnah Schram, aura Simms, Ruth Stotter, Brian W. Sturm, Gioia TImpanelli, and Jack Zipes.

artistic discourse for most of the world's inhabitants" (2-3).⁸⁰ Foley devoted a lifetime to developing and furthering the ideas proposed by Millman Parry and Albert Lord.

Parry and Lord's Oral-Formulaic Theory turned the study of classical, medieval and contemporary epic poetry from a study of literature to a study of oral tradition performance. After searching for centuries for proof that epic poems like the "Illiad" and the "Odyssey" were fixed on the page by a single writer named Homer, contemporary scholars recognize the emergent quality of such poems, improvised individually on the tongue by gifted story singers from a vast body of culture-specific material known to them and their audiences. Lord (1960, 2000)⁸¹ articulates some of the oral strategies – in use since the Homeric poets and found still today among Balkan epic-singers – for composing, learning and transmitting such epics. Parry and Lord's collaboratively constructed Oral-Formulaic Theory anticipates both the ethnopoetic effort to capture artistic verbal performances within their cultural contexts on the page, and the emergent qualities of performance (unique to a given telling by a given teller to a given audience in a given context) that Bauman would express (xxi). Foley (1995), in turn, continues Parry and Lord's efforts to release oral performance from literary assumptions (xii) and to create vocabulary. For instance, Foley writes: "What Bauman refers to...as an 'interpretive frame' I prefer to call the performance arena, understanding by that term the locus in which some specialized form of communication is uniquely licensed to take

⁸⁰ John Miles Foley, Ed., "Introduction," in *Teaching Oral Traditions* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1998), 2-3. I was Foley's student in an Oral Tradition Seminar at the University of Missouri in the spring of 2011.

⁸¹ Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960, 2000).

place" (8).⁸² Thus Foley strives to span the space between oral-formulaic theory, performance-centered theories of verbal arts (xiv), and Tedlock and Hymes' studies of the ethnography of speaking (17).⁸³

In everyday storytelling across the kitchen table and in more elevated performance settings, a social arena is constructed to make room for the co-creative act of story sharing. Robert A. Georges (1969) names the necessary elements within that arena to allow for a storytelling event to take place: a teller, a listener, a tale and a context for the sharing of that tale. He delineates the storytelling event's communicative aspects, its social uses and functions, its dependence on the presence and interaction of both speaker and listener, and its uniqueness based on the particularity of a given time, place, context and set of participants.⁸⁴ Richard Bauman (1977) lays out the performance keys (special codes, figurative language, parallelism, paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeals to tradition, and disclaimers of performance) utilized by traditional narrators (16). The patterning of performance genres, acts, events and roles recognized within specific communities (31), the emergent quality of performance particular to the goals and competencies of a given speaker utilizing a given text before a given audience within a given context (38) are all elements that distinguish performance as a mode of speaking (3).⁸⁵ In Bauman's subsequent book-length study (1986) focusing on (male) storytellers in

⁸² John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 8.

⁸³ *ibid*, xiv and 17.

⁸⁴ Robert A. Georges, "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events," *The Journal of American Folklore* 82.326, (Oct.-Dec. 1969), 313-328.

⁸⁵ Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1977.

context and (male) storytelling strategies like lying, joke-telling, and comic narratives, he addresses the impact of a shifting context (from fishing camp to festival setting) on a teller's narrative, given the interdependence of narrative event and narrated event within the narrative performance.⁸⁶ But what he does not address is the impact of gender on the researcher, the speaker, the audience, the assessment of competency, the recognition of genre, or the accessibility of context in a given display of verbal arts, and Patricia Sawin (2002) takes him to task for it.⁸⁷ Walter Ong's (1982) treatise on the primacy of orality – even in a culture that privileges the written word and the printed page (and now the screen) – examines the restructuring of consciousness that accompanies the onset of literacy (93) when a culture stops relying on memory and begins to rely on written records to keep its folklore and its history (96).⁸⁸

On Women's Verbal Arts in Traditional and Everyday Storytelling

As Judith Butler has theorized, gender is constructed by culture and performed within – and beyond – cultural bounds.⁸⁹ Studies by feminist scholars about women storytelling in informal settings help to illuminate gendered preferences for stories, styles and audience interaction modes as well as audience reception in more formal settings

⁸⁶ Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event – Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

⁸⁷ Patricia E. Sawin, "Performance at the Nexus of Gender, Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's Verbal Art from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance." *The Journal of American Folklore* 115.455 (Winter, 2002): 28-61.

⁸⁸ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy – The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

⁸⁹ Again, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

(though not every study included here fits this description). Ruth Stotter, a revival storyteller as well as a folklorist and educator, (1994) has been publishing essays in popular and scholarly storytelling journals and newsletters since the early eighties, urging contemporary tellers to investigate the cultures that produce stories they may be drawn to tell, and to comprehend the challenges of "revitalizing" traditional tales pinned to the page by collectors, translators and editors who may have their own agendas. Her volume of collected essays, *About Story*, is an accessibly written primer for storytellers who are dedicated to going deep in their preparation for telling a story from the oral tradition.

William Bernard McCarthy (1994) edited an anthology including eight Jack Tales⁹⁰ transcribed from actual performances by Anglo-Appalachian traditional⁹¹ and Anglo revivalist⁹² tellers. Interpretive essays by (Anglo) folklorists⁹³ familiar with their

⁹⁰ Jack of Beanstalk fame is the scrappy hero of a cycle of traditional wondertales -- American mountain Märchen -- brought to this country by immigrants from England, Scotland and Ireland. His stories are told from one end of Appalachia to the other. Lindahl writes: "The Jack of oral tradition is sometimes a character shared by adults but [due to obscene and scatological elements] off-limits to children, enjoyed among men but largely concealed from women" ("Introduction," xiv).

⁹¹ The traditional tellers include Ray Hicks, Frank Proffitt Jr., Maud Gentry Long, and Marshall Ward. All but Maud Gentry Long were featured at the National Storytelling Festival at least once.

⁹² The revivalist tellers include Leonard Roberts, Donald Davis, Bonelyn Lugg Kyofski, and Stewart Cameron. Of this group only Donald Davis has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival.

⁹³ In part one on traditionalists Joseph Daniel Sobol writes about Hicks; Carl Lindahl about Proffitt; Cheryl Oxford about Ward; and Bill Ellis about Long. In part two on revivalists McCarthy writes about Roberts; Sobol returns for an essay on Davis; Kenneth A. Thigpen writes on Kyofski, and Kay Stone on Cameron. Ruth Stotter, W.F. H. Nicholaisen, and McCarthy provide overviews of the book's two sections.

work introduce the tales.⁹⁴ The folklorists' essays wrestle in glaring or subtle ways with the ongoing tension between folklorists and the storytelling revival community. For instance, a not-fully-articulated double standard with regard to financial recompense is present in McCarthy and Stotter's (1994) essay about revival tellers.⁹⁵ Apparently traditional tellers who shape and craft their own tellings from material passed on to them may accept payment for their storytelling without compromising their authenticity, but nontraditional revival tellers working for hire who appropriate, adapt and use traditional material (usually found in secondary sources) are seen through a very different lens. Overall, the essays in this collection capture folklorists' queasiness with revivalism, and particularly their tendency to sit in judgment over the desire of revival storytellers to hone their tales against the twin flint-stones of conservatism and innovation.

Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik's (1985) collection, *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*, contains three essays that helped tune my ear to the gendered nature of storytelling practice and story preference as seen by women researchers: Margaret Yocom concludes that women storytellers encourage a mode of social interaction wherein everyday narrating accompanies handwork, and within which the listener is

⁹⁴ A Euro-centric companion to MacDonald's more diverse *Ten Traditional Tellers* (2006), this folklore-driven collection acknowledges the nuanced continuum between traditional and revivalist storytelling (the latter being seen as inauthentic by folklorists in the first twenty years of the revival) and provides a model for ethnopoetically translating orally performed stories to the printed page. The women were outnumbered by men 3:1 (as subjects) and 2:1 (as essayists) in this anthology. I remain appreciative of the inclusion of two female narrators (compared to six males) and three female scholars (compared to six males) at the same time that I am remain critical of the privileging of male voices as tellers and writers within this work.

⁹⁵ McCarthy and Stotter write: "Although many traditional tellers are also paid for their services, this discussion restricts the term *professional storyteller* to paid nontraditional revivalist performers" (155). This distinction is made in a paragraph on who is entitled to adapt and tell traditional tales.

expected to deepen a collective bond by sharing her experience in response to the stories she has heard. Stone queries forty-four participants, ages nine to sixty eight, about their memories of and responses to fairy tales, and finds that few of the men could recall fairy tales at all, whereas her thirty-eight female respondents remembered not only having read or reacted to fairy tales, but also remembered the stories themselves (130). Karen Baldwin determines that the women in her family excel in descriptive narrative asides, whereas the men tell linear, action-filled family stories, but that both elements are required to create a complete family narrative (151).

Debora Kodish (1987) contests the absence of gender consciousness in male folklorists' accounts of their first encounters with informants, for she finds in the researchers' accounts an unspoken subtext of sexualized conquest (575). She compares male "discovery" narratives to the recollection of a female informant to whom an unexpected visit by a stranger seeking a story or song was an interruption of her daily chores, given that those chores must still be performed once the folklore had been collected (576). She rightly charges that suppression of gender consciousness has impacted field experiences and the collection, selection and production of texts as well as history and theory in the field (577).

In Kristin Langellier and Eric E. Peterson's (1992) review of research on everyday storytelling strategies, Kalcik, Jenkins and Hall, Robinson, Yocom and others note that women share everyday stories of the commonplace, tales chosen "for their emotional interest rather than action" (160). These researchers note, too, that by sharing the floor and taking turns rather than competing for the limelight, female narrators maintain a horizontal status rather than a hierarchy within the group interaction. Langellier and

Peterson take a communications approach in their book-length study of everyday storytelling (2004), examining family storytelling as a strategy of small group culture, and investigating three case studies of everyday storytelling practice involving digital storytelling, breast cancer narratives and autobiographical performance. In each of these cases, they interrogate the various uses of storytelling: to make sense of experience, establish identity, engage in social interaction and partake in cultural conversations. Throughout their study the researchers query how everyday storytelling is embodied in a system of relationships; how it is situated by the contextual restraints of language, history and culture; how it is shaped by discursive regularities particular to the participants; how oral narrative can be legitimated and critiqued based on whether it normalizes or transgresses societal expectations (8). They address gendered aspects of everyday storytelling, finding that in family storytelling gender and generation influence the different tactics family members use to "do family" through narrative speech acts (94). They find, too, that within the genre of illness narratives, or pathographies (189), that emerged in the 1950's, breast cancer survivor narratives sometimes contest and critique the tellers' and the listeners' narrative and therapeutic desire for a tale that offers a beginning, middle and (happy) ending (191).

Margaret Read MacDonald (2006) interrogates the use of the term "traditional teller" to identify her ten informants. She notes that all of them are currently sharing stories beyond their original family and community settings, bringing them in touch with new story material from outside their cultural or ethnic traditions. Writing in that volume about the impact of gender in the telling of stories, riddles and jokes by three elderly siblings (a woman and two men) in the researcher's home village in Hungary, Ilona Nagy

(1999) concludes that, in this case, birth order more than gender seemed to affect the similarities and differences in this storytelling trio's repertoires. Kira Van Deusen (1999) finds that the unemployment, alcoholism, and violence in Siberian women's lives were mirrored in their telling of traditional tales about women neglected or abused by fathers or husbands. MacDonald (1999) explicates the multiplicity of ways in which storytelling functions both linguistically and socially for groups and individuals. Dégh (1999) searches for the distinctive aspects of contemporary women as everyday tellers, and of their repertoires for female audiences, finding that they favored three story genres in home or community settings: the *märchen* or wondertale; "girl-raising tales" meant to humorously instruct ideal feminine behavior and, more recently, personal stories (583). These genre preferences link together centuries of women's storytelling.

Introducing a collection of essays on the feminist practice of oral history, Gluck and Patai (1991) acknowledge that feminist oral historians must look beyond gender to consider the centrality of their informants' other identity markers particularly race and class (2), and to be mindful of the imbalances of privilege and power between themselves and their informants (3). Several essays in the anthology – by Anderson and Jack, Minister, Etter-Lewis, Borland, Chanfrault-Duchet and Stacey – were aimed at reading across differences, by improving women's ability to hear one another across various identity-marked or "lived experience" borders, and were integral to my efforts to edit and interpret the narratives of Regan-Blake.

Methodologies in Review

In this study, not only am I drawing on the work of scholars from multiple fields, but also I am basing my analysis of Regan-Blake's narratives on feminist oral history

strategies and narrative analysis as well as critical ethnography and feminist historiography methods. Thus my literature review includes scholarship on these methodologies.

Feminist (and Other) Oral History Collection and Narrative Analysis

Kathryn Anderson, et al., (1987) critique the tendency of oral historians to privilege activities over feelings and values, two historical domains of women. These feminist oral historians advocate reformulating their questions and interview goals to accommodate those subjects, in an attempt to uncover unspoken (and often unconscious) aspects of women's practical knowledge (106), both complicating and deepening interpretive possibilities. They note, rightly, that women's stories challenge male norms, standards and concepts (113) – an idea that remained unexplored by male researchers like Labov (see below) ten years after their study was published – and provide a window into their experience of marginalization (116). Anderson and her cohort's strategies, including an interdisciplinary approach to oral history collection and interpretation, take into account the mirroring effect of society on individual and individual on society, knowing that just as social and historical settings impact a woman's experience, her actions and consciousness of that experience shape ongoing social institutions (119).

Langellier (1989) sorts out several theoretical perspectives on personal narrative, bringing many conversations to the same table, and providing my study of the Storytelling Project interviews a place to sit among ideas that informed my reading. She summarizes and critiques research that looks at oral narrative as story-text (244), as emergent performance (254), as conversational interaction (256), as social process (261) and as political praxis (266), and the hierarchal assumptions that have previously

devalued personal narrative as an area of study, partly because of its association with the ordinariness of everyday speech acts among women and other marginalized groups. She concludes that any one narrative study draws from a multitude of positions.

William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's (1997) socio-linguistic model for analysis of narratives identifies these elements – (a) orientation (delineating participants, place, time and initial behaviors described in the narrative), (b) complicating action, (c) evaluation (by the narrator concerning the significance of the event), (d) resolution and (e) coda – in the recapitulation of lived experience. Though helpful to my understanding of how personal narratives can unfold, the study seems to be rooted in male narrative norms. Labov's second essay (1997) in the same issue of *Journal of Narrative and Life* focuses on a single, "serious" personal narrative about matters of life or death (397). At the heart of this essay are a number of masculinist assumptions about narrative including the concept of "reportability" (404) – the "most reportable event" (406) being a lived experience that is compelling enough to hold the listener's interest to the end, or to require the speaker's automatic reassignment of the floor (after a conversational break) to complete the narrative of that event – and his conclusion that an effective narrator must report events as objective⁹⁶ experience without emotional references. Thus, Labov's research returns my attention to unexamined yet gender-biased evaluations of personal narratives that deem women's storytelling strategies to be deviant ones.

Nicole Y. Pitre, et al., delineate the "double-hermeneutic" aspects of critical feminist narrative inquiry – that is, initially exploring stories to understand individual and

⁹⁶ Geiger writes: "Feminist scholars have revealed that notions of objectivity themselves are androcentric, and that the higher levels of abstraction assumed to represent a 'true' picture of 'reality' often represent neither truth nor reality for women" (338).

collective experiences within (119), and then exploring it to highlight the role of outside forces and conditions that enable or constrain the narrators' identity, agency, voice and reflexivity (120). This is the approach I have taken in reading Regan-Blake's narratives: first examining her stories as they are situated in personal experience and relationships, then examining the role of dominant discourses in shaping both her experiences and her narratives.

Critical Ethnography

D. Soyini Madison's (2012) chapter on "Methods," particularly the section on "Memory and the Oral History Interview" leads me back to Bauman's distinction between the narrated event being told and the narrative event of the telling itself (34); the need for poetic transcription which attempts to capture some of the pauses and phrasing that mark the way a story is told; and the twin subjectivities in play when the researcher attempts to interpret what her subject has said. Madison cites Langellier and Peterson's (2004) description of four entry points for interpreting oral history interviews – embodiment, situated constraints, discursive regularities and legitimation/critique (37) – offering me vocabulary to consider using.

E. Patrick Johnson's (2008) emic interrogation of oral histories of "Black Gay Men of the South" offers the model of a researcher who had been doing decades of accidental fieldwork within his own community before embarking on his study, as well as an example of the shape my study could take. Wayne Brekhus's (2003) etic ethnographic study of Gay men in suburbia provides not only a second model for writing up my completed study, but also an illustration of research that reads and writes across difference. Finally, in gathering and publishing several of Dwight Conquergood's most

important of essays, Johnson (2013) enables me to ground myself more deeply in the considered practice of deeply reflexive critical ethnography, and, thus, to commit myself to a dialogical approach.

Knowing that the line between auto/ethnography and auto/biography is sometimes finely drawn, I also returned to works by feminist performance studies scholars to prepare myself for this study. In their introduction to *Voices Made Flesh – Performing Women's Autobiography* which excerpts and examines the work of contemporary women performers, Lynn C. Miller and Jacqueline Taylor write: "encounters between live performers and live spectators always have political and social consequences, all the more so for performers whose access to the stage and to authority has been hard won" (3).⁹⁷ They continue: "We can safely say that until a life is shared through writing or performance, it does not exist at all, or at least it does not resonate in the broader realm of public consequence" (3-4).⁹⁸ And they remind us: "women can now speak publicly and perform, but they do so, still, against considerable odds" because "women, in all our diversity of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, physical and mental ability, age, and circumstance, continue to confront certain common barriers and conditions" (6).⁹⁹ These editors "takes particular interest in the ways that women...continue to struggle to find a

⁹⁷ Lynn C. Miller and Jacqueline Taylor, "Editors' introduction" in *Voices Made Flesh – Performing Women's Autobiography*, Ed. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather Carver (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), 3. Readers who are interested in women's auto/biographical performance may also want to see Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (London: Palgrave, 2008), as well as investigating the work of Omi Osun Olomo/Joni L. Jones, Tami Spry, Terry Galloway and Brenda Wong Aoki among others.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 3-4.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 6.

powerful and embodied voice, one that permits them to function as authors of their own experience" (7).¹⁰⁰ Regan-Blake's determination to hold on to her powerful and embodied voice, and to author her own experience can be found in her narratives throughout this study.

Feminist Historiography

Tracy C. Davis (1989) asserts that cultural histories of popular performers and genres provide a rich field in theatre studies (61), that male-constructed representations of gender and sexuality foreground eroticism in the feminist study of performance history (60), and that class distinctions also impact the presentation and reception of performance, making attention to them indispensable in writing history as well (61). She reminds us of the impact of the male gaze on women performers when she writes: "The importance of theatre as a medium of culture, the social context of performers and performance, and assumptions inherent in the 'unrevised' versions of history are all issues central to the study of public figures (particularly women) whose livelihoods depended on the observation and approval of private individuals (particularly men) (64). Feminist endeavors in historiography recover data about women's practices and contributions in the field of performance, and strive to revise an existing asymmetrically gendered history by publishing individual and collective biographies of women, and reclaiming overlooked texts and writer/performers currently left outside the canon (63). Female performers of any kind stand in for all women living within the boundaries of a male-dominated society and culture (68). A move toward parity in women performers' status

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 7.

embodies a move toward parity for other folk marginalized by the dominant discourse as well.

Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (2010) encourage an interdisciplinary, poly-vocal exploration of theatre and performance studies by historiographers willing to push past Western canons and to welcome previously "unhistoried" populations (2) to join the conversation. Charlotte Canning (2004) asserts that feminist performance itself is a way of experiencing, framing and recording feminist historiography to include gender, race, class, and sexuality and, ultimately, reframing a view of the past and rewriting history. In their work, these historiographers suggest several models for drawing history from women's stories, and drawing women's stories into history.

Chapter Summaries

Within chapters one through six, I unearthed *the told*, that is, the coherent text of the narrative shared by the interviewee about her formative experiences and career paths within the revival, as well as her artistic practice, and beliefs about the importance of storytelling. Through the narrative I documented Regan-Blake's significance within the revival. I also noted any phrases or themes depicting her exclusion or marginalization due to the influence of dominant forces on her experience. While I sifted through the rich soil of *the telling*, that is, the teller's performance of her story, I examined the paralinguistic aspects of her discourse, any notable impact of the setting on the interview session, and the teller's interactive response to the interviewers found within the ongoing discourse. Finally I submitted my text and my interpretations of our conversations to Regan-Blake and held dialogues with her about them, including her responses in my study.

Chapter One details my purpose in spinning an account of the American storytelling revival through the experience of a woman storyteller, and the research questions I addressed through both primary and secondary research concerning Regan-Blake. My justification and my methodologies are also outlined herein. It contains a literature review on contemporary storytelling in America during the first twenty-five years of the revival (1973-1998) and beyond, as well as related feminist studies of women's oral narrative performance and pertinent works on feminist folklore and oral history collection, critical ethnography, and historiography. That literature addresses issues of intersectionality that have traditionally impacted the inclusion and appreciation of women as verbal artists in everyday and platform performance settings. The chapter also provides information about the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library, the primary research base in which my study will be grounded.

Chapter Two lays out and contests the existing creation myths about the birth of the National Storytelling Festival, the national storytelling organization, and the contemporary American storytelling revival. It also provides examples of the erasure of women's efforts within the revival as the history of the festival and organization came to be told in print. The Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews (and later conversations) with Regan-Blake, including an interview session with her former touring partner Barbara Freeman, open a narrative door into the birth of the contemporary American storytelling revival as experienced by its first major player.

Regan-Blake's narratives in this section illuminate the influence of family storytelling, books and creative play on her development, and her pioneering efforts in a storytelling-based literacy program for preschoolers at the Chattanooga Public Library in

the early seventies. This chapter points toward the moment when Regan-Blake's organizational, artistic and personal skills met an opportunity to nurture and shape the National Storytelling Festival from its early infancy to the end of its first decade as its unnamed artistic director and board member of a new national storytelling organization. In historicizing these events, I also interrogated the narrative cues revealing Regan-Blake's response to the marginalization she encountered as a woman in a patriarchal culture, and to the masculinist privilege that shaped the revival storytelling community.

Chapter Three captures the founding of the Folktellers, a tandem storytelling partnership that took Regan-Blake and her cousin Barbara Freeman all over the country and then all over the world. As a pioneering duo of touring storytellers with no map to follow, the two became cartographers and explorers. Together they pieced together a work life, blossoming as artists even as they planted seeds for how to live on the road in close quarters with a performing partner. As this part of her narrative conveys, by the third annual National Storytelling Festival, Regan-Blake was firmly entrenched in its programming and production.

Chapter Four examines how the Folktellers – Regan-Blake and Freeman – became the outreach arm of the National Storytelling Festival and the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling. Their touring allowed them to identify and engage numerous other storytellers from numerous performance traditions in what became a tightly knit professional community. With their shared pedigree as library workers, the two were able to cross borders and make connections with performing artists, librarians, educators, folklorists, record producers and others.

They pioneered innovation in storytelling performance while championing the importance of traditional arts in the revival.

In Chapter Five Regan-Blake reminisces about the changing face of the Festival, the board and the revival community she helped to found. This section also explores how, in the years after she left the national storytelling organization board, she found her working relationship with Jimmy Neil Smith – a creative kinship, really – curtailed, and the significance of her endeavors on behalf of the festival excluded from the revival narrative. She summarizes changes during the first twenty-five years of the movement via a collection of festival ephemera.

Chapter Six examines the end of the twenty-year-old partnership Regan-Blake enjoyed with Barbara Freeman. After dissolving the partnership with the same ethics of care that had built it, Regan-Blake faced the challenge of going solo. She opened doors into a number of new adventures, collaborations and venues: collaborating with a chamber music trio, creating personal stories that include racial issues in the U.S., and working with women in Uganda through her partnership with the development organization, Bead for Life. It also considers Regan-Blake's ongoing relationship with traditional teller Ray Hicks and his family. Her dedication to the Hicks family laid the groundwork for rallying community support to make concrete improvements to the Hickses' homestead in response to the family's end-of-life needs.

Chapter Seven details what I learned about Regan-Blake, the festival, the national storytelling organization, the revival – and my own experiences within it – by analyzing her narratives, and interrogating her erasure within the history of the American storytelling revival. This study allowed me to illuminate Regan-Blake's embodied

resistance to the hegemonic confines of a now forty-one-year-old American storytelling revival. I strove, as much as possible, for a dialogically infused interpretation of her efforts and of the lingering mark that she has made on the movement and its occupational community. Beyond documenting the endeavors of this woman, I laid the groundwork for future scholarship on other neglected pioneers within the revival, raised the profile of the archival Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library as a resource for future studies, and provided a basis for more inclusivity within the revival's own myth-making and its artistic, economic, and scholarly practices.

CHAPTER TWO: The Ties that Bind

Introduction

The first part of this chapter describes and contests the androcentric creation myth about how the very first National Storytelling Festival spontaneously birthed the American storytelling revival. I examine the collaborative effort that, in fact, went into growing the new Festival, forging a national storytelling organization and attracting an emerging community of tellers, listeners and supporters and show how the identities of those collaborators have been minimized, conflated or erased in any institutional narrative publicly provided by Festival staff.

That intentionally incomplete narrative¹⁰¹ sets the scene for my argument that Connie Regan-Blake is the uncontested foremother of the Festival's growth, expanding its pool of talent, fanning the flames of interest in the organization, and identifying potential members of the revival community. I focus the second half of the chapter on her backstory: the formative experiences and early career moves that laid the foundation for her ground-breaking work as an artist, a Festival artistic director and community organizer.

The American Storytelling Revival's Well-Known Creation Myth

As the story goes, something audacious and remarkable happened forty-one years ago in Jonesborough, Tennessee. That's when a high school journalism teacher invited a Southern humorist to headline a festival intended to bolster the sagging economy of the

¹⁰¹ In an email to me this spring, Jimmy Neil Smith wrote: " Connie and I have had one or two similar conversations over the years, but nothing happened on my end" (Personal email from Smith on April 17, 2104. Used by permission).

oldest town in Tennessee.¹⁰² Thanks to the efforts of that entrepreneurial hometown boy, backed by civic boosters and a Nashville talent agent, a packed audience came to see an evening of entertainment by Jerry Clower and Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. And on the next day, a ragtag assortment of after-dinner speakers, one all-day talker, and a much smaller audience hungry to listen to (and tell) stories assembled in the rolling hills of Washington County in upper East Tennessee. According to this legend, the contemporary American storytelling renaissance marks its birth with this inaugural National Storytelling Festival in October of 1973. The revival has claimed Jonesborough as its holy city, and anointed Festival founder Jimmy Neil Smith as the patron saint of storytelling.

For the better part of four decades, the Festival founder, the town, the press, and Festival enthusiasts have transmitted this creation myth, recounting how Jimmy Neil Smith heard Mississippi comedian Jerry Clower on the car radio one night while driving students home from printing the Science Hill High School newspaper in Johnson City. Hearing one of Clower's humorous tales, Smith envisioned presenting the raconteur in

¹⁰² Jonesborough was founded in 1779, seventeen years before Tennessee became a state. Since the area was at that time under the jurisdiction of North Carolina, it was named for North Carolina legislator Willie Jones, a proponent of that state's western expansion. That expansion movement temporarily pushed North Carolina's border over the Appalachian Mountains that now separate western North Carolina from eastern Tennessee. In 1784, Jonesborough was made the capital of the State of Franklin (named for Benjamin Franklin), the first attempt at statehood outside the thirteen colonies. For a time two governmental bodies administered to the needs of residents since North Carolina still claimed governance. In 1796, Jonesborough became the first town in the new state of Tennessee. The town was the center of the abolitionist movement in the South during the Civil War, and starting in 1820, a Quaker editor began publishing the first periodical dedicated solely to abolition, *The Emancipator*, there. Tennessee later joined the Confederacy, but many citizens favored the Union cause. Today Jonesborough is the county seat of Washington County. For more see: <http://www.historicjonesborough.com/history/history-introduction-jonesborough-tn.php> accessed online 25 March 2014.

concert as the anchor event for a storytelling festival to boost the flagging fortunes of Jonesborough, his beloved hometown. Along with teaching high school, Smith was a budding restaurateur and a future Jonesborough mayor, so he was well connected in the town and understood the importance of a revenue stream. With the Jonesborough Civic Trust behind him and a roster of good ol' boy after-dinner speakers, one honest-to-goodness oral narrator and bluegrass musicians of varying statures to fill out the weekend's offerings, Smith did just what he imagined. He invited Clower for a well-attended headline event in the David Crockett High School auditorium. Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys (from Kentucky) joined the Avery County Cloggers (from North Carolina) at Clower's concert on Saturday night. Tickets were \$3.00 for adults and \$1.50 for children. That night boasted an audience of a thousand people.

Smith arranged for the placement of a makeshift outdoor stage – a flatbed hay wagon – on a side street across from the Jonesborough Courthouse downtown to present the rest of a small pool of (Euro-American, Southern, male) hired talent to tell stories the next day. All of the events on Sunday were free to the public. Clower's Nashville-based agent, Tandy Rice, provided three of the Sunday afternoon speakers: Middle Tennessee State University professor Bob Abernathy, retired U.S. Representative (D-Arkansas) Brooks Hays, and Nashville banker Jesse Safley, who emceed the outdoor event. The Toe River Valley Boys (from North Carolina) and Jan Looney, a female folksinger (from Tennessee),¹⁰³ played between the speakers. The Avery County Cloggers appeared again, along with demonstrations by local arts and craftspeople. According to the Festival

¹⁰³ Jan Looney was the only woman whose (non-gender specific) name was in the program.

founder, traditional teller Ray Hicks came to be included in the lineup after Smith "called some of my friends...at East Tennessee State University...They had been doing research in ballads and...mountain singing and songs in western North Carolina. And I said, 'You know any storytellers?' And he said, 'Yeah, you oughta have...Ray Hicks.'¹⁰⁴ He's a good storyteller."¹⁰⁵

In his book, Sobol identifies Smith's source for the referral of Ray Hicks as East Tennessee State University folklorist Thomas Barton. Sobol notes that Hicks's Folk-Legacy records were another recommendation for his selection (104). He writes that Hicks "belonged to a family of folk artists who had been visited by folklorists for decades because of their extraordinary repertoires of traditional tales, ballads, instrumental tunes, and folkways" (104). He continues: "[Hicks] had no telephone, and Smith had to make arrangements through a neighbor, Ed Presnell, to talk to Hicks on the Presnell's phone. Like many traditional mountain people, Ray is shy but obliging and dislikes saying no to a personal request. But he had never before told stories outside of his local area or at any kind of outdoor festival" (104). Thus, the talent was secured, and the National

¹⁰⁴ Born on Beech Mountain in North Carolina in 1922, Hicks was the scion of several generations of storytellers and ballad singers whose work has been collected by Richard Chase and Frank Warner from the 1930s onward. His dialect was studied by the makers of the PBS special "The Story of English," and his work was profiled by Gwen Kinhead for *The New Yorker*. Hicks was awarded a National Heritage Award in 1983. Before his death in 2003, he had appeared at the National Storytelling Festival twenty-three times. Rosa, his wife, sometimes appeared on stage with him to perform ballads, and often sold herbs and dahlia bulbs on the festival grounds. Hicks's presence as a traditional artist authenticated the National Storytelling Festival from its inception, but, to the organization that developed to produce the festival, Ray Hicks's contribution to the event's allure went largely unexamined at the same time that it was being fully exploited.

¹⁰⁵ From the October 1998 CSP interview with Jimmy Neil Smith (12).

Storytelling Festival was born – and with it, as the story goes, the American storytelling renaissance was spontaneously generated.¹⁰⁶

This version of the story reaches to the Library of Congress website today.

Searching for "The National Storytelling Festival" among its holdings shows this citation:

The National Storytelling Festival

A Local Legacy

Almost 30 years ago, a Jonesborough, Tennessee, high school journalism teacher was listening to his car radio with a group of students. They heard a funny tale about raccoon hunting told by storyteller Jerry Clower. This experience gave the teacher, Jimmy Neil Smith, an idea: He would start a local storytelling festival.

Around 60 people showed up for the first one in 1973 (Library of Congress website).¹⁰⁷

The note continues:

Today, Jonesborough is the home of the National Storytelling Festival, which attracts more than 10,000 visitors every October...The National Storytelling Festival is the oldest and most respected gathering devoted to the art of storytelling anywhere in America. This unique event has influenced a national revival of the storytelling art (Library of Congress website).

¹⁰⁶ In "On the Road with the Folktellers," his 1980 cover story profile of Connie Regan-Blake and Barbara Freeman for *New Age* magazine, Rex Weyler quotes Freeman's irreverent version of the Festival creation myth: "The festival was organized by Jimmy Neil Smith...He got the idea while listening to a story on the radio, so the joke is that the National Storytelling Festival was conceived in the back seat of a Chevy!" (31).

¹⁰⁷ Since 1000 people attended the Clower concert the night before, this reference to the much smaller audience identifies the Sunday afternoon event as the true beginning of the National Storytelling Festival. The distinction between the two events was clear to those in attendance – including Jimmy Neil Smith – from the start.

Influencing a revival and establishing a Mecca for storytelling pilgrims were, in fact, unexpected dividends for the backers of the first event. Smith says:

At that moment, we were in the midst of this...restoration and preservation of old Jonesborough... The event was actually not focused on storytelling. That wasn't the purpose. I mean the storytelling...was the topic... Why we did the festival was to celebrate our history and our heritage in Jonesborough, to bring more... attention to our little town, the oldest town in Tennessee (8-9).¹⁰⁸

Whatever the intentions of the founder and the funders for that first event, the civic trust and town merchants were delighted with the Festival's potential to attract tourists (and tellers) to Jonesborough. Smith says: "We knew instantly that it was a special event and that it would happen again and again and again. [But we] didn't realize really that we were igniting a revival of interest in storytelling. And certainly not knowing that we were igniting a movement that would lead to the reemergence of the professional storyteller."¹⁰⁹

An article in a Jonesborough newspaper published March 22, 2010, reinforces the fact that Smith was more a patron saint of his hometown, than of storytelling. Journalist Karen Swing writes: "When Jimmy Neil Smith, founder and president of the International Storytelling Center, created the idea for a storytelling festival, he said he wasn't dreaming of a great festival."¹¹⁰ The reporter then lets him speak for himself: "The first festival

¹⁰⁸ October 1989 CPS interview with Jimmy Neil Smith, 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Karen Swing, "Telling the Stories of Jonesborough" in *The Herald and Tribune* (22 March 2010).
<http://www.heraldandtribune.com/Detail.php?Cat=HOMEPAGE&ID=58579>

wasn't born out of a love of storytelling,' said Smith of the 1973 event. 'The first festival was born out of a love for our community.'"¹¹¹ It took the artists in the storytelling revival community, and perhaps even the revival's foremother, about twenty years to realize that Jonesborough came first, storytelling as an art form came in second, and storytelling practitioners came in a very distant third.

Contesting the Creation Myth

Only one name comes to the fore in the constant retelling of this male-centered creation myth – found in Festival literature, in news articles, on the Library of Congress website, on the web site of the Festival's producing organization, and on the tongues of storytelling revival audience members – obscuring female interventions from the festival's and the revival's earliest days. Despite women's erasure from the publicly told creation myth of the National Storytelling Festival, the national storytelling organization and the storytelling revival, Smith has privately named a number of women who have had a significant hand in shaping, expanding and diversifying all three from very early on. In an interview with Sobol,¹¹² Smith admits that he would not have so much as christened the first-time event with its ambitious moniker – the National Storytelling Festival – if it hadn't been for a woman's encouragement to do so. He said: "Actually the name that I would probably have chosen, if I had chosen a name myself, without naming it anything quite so bold and presumptuous as the National Storytelling Festival...I would have probably called it the Bugaboo Springs Storytelling Festival. There is a Bugaboo

Accessed online 7 April 2014.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² Joseph Sobol, *The Storyteller's Journey*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Springs real close to Jonesborough..." (78). However, before baptizing his brainchild with its now famous appellation, Smith consulted Carolyn Moore, a writer, preservationist, founding member of the civic trust, and one of his staunchest supporters, to ask whether or not she thought it was too presumptuous to name it "the National Storytelling Festival." In Sobol's book, Smith describes his exchange with Moore:

She looked down, and thought a minute, and then she looked up and asked me, "Well, is there anything like it anywhere else in the country?"

And I said, "No, as far as I know, this is the first festival devoted exclusively to the art of storytelling anywhere in the country."

And her eyes kind of sparkled and she said, "Let's be presumptuous" (78).

In the scenario described by Smith, Moore includes herself in a collaborative creation story when she uses the word, "Let's."¹¹³ But Moore's name does not survive in Smith's institutional accounts of the Festival's naming. In the national storytelling organization's own publicity materials, however, all names recede except his. Any other individual character in the story is conflated into an amorphous, ungendered "they." For instance, here is a retelling of the Festival naming story from the 1988 National Storytelling Festival program:¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Thanks to Sobol's history of the revival, the names of several women whose pioneering efforts helped secure the brand and the future of the festival have been retained.

¹¹⁴ A copy of the 1988 National Storytelling Festival program, from which I am quoting above, can be found in the International Storytelling Center collection at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. This program was published during my tenure on the Festival's board; I have a photocopy in my research materials.

It was very nearly named the Bugaboo Springs Storytelling Festival back in early 1973 when the civic leaders of Jonesborough contemplated their first storytelling festival.

Is there any such event anywhere in the country, they queried.

"None that I know of," answered the high school journalism teacher who had conceived the idea.

"Then let's call it the *National* Storytelling Festival."

The schoolteacher, who later became town mayor, was Jimmy Neil Smith...(4).

Carolyn Moore played another significant role in that first Festival event – ensuring that Ray Hicks would appear, by carrying him there from his home on Beech Mountain. Regan-Blake remembers: "Carolyn...and her husband, Rick...had known Ray for many years...Rick taught school ...at Appalachian State University [in Boone, North Carolina near Hicks's home outside Banner Elk]. And so they were the ones that had brought Ray down" (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 21).¹¹⁵ Regan-Blake (then Connie Regan) and her first cousin, children's librarian Barbara Freeman (then Barbara Wright), came from Chattanooga to attend the first Festival. That Friday night, they met Smith and

¹¹⁵ In a recorded dialogue about the first four chapters of this study conducted on March 31 2014, Regan-Blake told me that something she had heard from the Moore's children at a recent gathering made her doubt her memory of their driving the Hickses to Jonesborough, thus the question of whether or not Moore and her husband transported them to the first Festival bears more research. Carolyn and Rick Moore did house the Hickses in the first years of the Festival, but it eventually became the couple's habit to return home after Hicks's Saturday afternoon Festival performance. Bringing members of the Hicks family down Beech Mountain to Jonesborough and back became a much sought-after experience by Festival volunteers.

Moore whose daughter would host them over the weekend. Moore also made sure that they met Ray Hicks when the Festival was done.

The Saturday night concert by Jerry Clower filled the high school auditorium, but the outdoor event on Sunday in downtown Jonesborough attracted a much smaller crowd of listeners¹¹⁶ seated on hay bales facing the hay wagon parked near the courthouse.

Regan-Blake and Freeman would volunteer to tell stories themselves during the "Swappin' Yarns" session¹¹⁷ following the featured performers. In doing so they were the only women to tell at the Festival. Here's how that portion of the event is described in the 1973 National Storytelling Festival program:¹¹⁸

SWAPPIN' YARNS

More storytelling fun with

BOB ABERNATHY, BROOKS HAYES, Master of Ceremonies, Mr.

JESSE SAFLEY and YOU

An opportunity for YOU to tell tales and spin yarns with the masters...

¹¹⁶ As Connie Regan-Blake remembers it in her CSP interview, around a thousand people came to the local high school on Saturday night, but only about thirty-five attended the afternoon event the next day (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 20-22).

¹¹⁷ Regan-Blake – then Regan – would tell her adaptation of *The Brave Little Indian* by Bill Martin, Jr. (Kansas City: Tell Well Press, 1951), and Freeman – then going by her married name, Barbara Wright – would tell *Tikki Tikki Tembo* by Arlene Mosel (New York: Henry Holt, 1968). Both of these texts were picture books by award-winning authors, popular with young children. Regan-Blake's adaptation of "The Brave Little Hunter," attempted to erase what she recognized were its most egregious stereotypical markers. But a recording of the afternoon's events suggests that the text she delivered was still problematical by today's more politically correct standards. In 1973, we all had a long way to go toward representing diversity.

¹¹⁸ Again, I photocopied the 1973 National Storytelling Festival program from the International Storytelling Center collection at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.

on the west steps of the Jonesboro Courthouse.

The Festival ended with the swapping session, and the two cousins lingered afterward to share stories and to walk around Jonesborough with Ray and Rosa Hicks.

What happened on the stage that day was unforgettable – both bad and good. Captured on a recording of the afternoon's proceedings,¹¹⁹ Safley's emceeing style was insulting, and the tale-telling by Abernathy and Hays was more suited to an Elks Club dinner than a mixed gathering of men and women, since it consisted of genial musings, personal or political anecdotes, and mother-in-law jokes. Ray Hicks, however, was the real deal when it came to telling stories.¹²⁰ Descended by blood, marriage or storytelling tradition from the four families – the Hicks, the Wards, the Harmons and the Presnells – who supplied the better part of the material for two volumes of mountain märchen¹²¹ published by folklorist Richard Chase in the nineteen forties, he brought an unmistakable authenticity to the storytelling event. As Hicks began to tell an Appalachian folktale, "Jack and the Heifer Hide," emcee Safley repeatedly heckled him to speak more directly into the microphone, saying at one point: "You're telling 'The Heifer's Tale' and I'm going

¹¹⁹ In the summer of 2013, Smith sent me a copy of an audio recording made at the Sunday afternoon's events in 1973. In an email in anticipation of my receiving the CD, Smith wrote: "When you listen to the CD of 40 years ago, the event was rather horrifying in some ways. However, you will see just how far the Festival and storytelling have come in that period" (Personal email from Smith on July 24, 2014. Used by permission). He was right.

¹²⁰ In her 1988 article on Hicks for the *New Yorker* magazine, Gwen Kinkead writes: "The unpainted frame house he lives in, the oldest on Beech Mountain, was built by his grandfather, and Ray Hicks, the eighth generation of his family to live in these mountains and tell stories, was born in it..." (33).

¹²¹ The word märchen has been incorporated into the English-speaking folklore lexicon from German; it is translated variously as "fairy tale" and "wonder tale."

to kick yours, if you don't get closer to the mic!"¹²² Undeterred by Safley's rude interruptions, Hicks transported his listeners out of Jonesborough and into the hardscrabble Appalachian landscape that he and his scrappy folktale avatar knew intimately.¹²³

Hearing Hicks for the first time that day, Regan-Blake became both his mentee and his advocate. By the next year she had also befriended Jimmy Neil Smith, and championed the fledgling Festival. Through her unfolding friendship with Smith, she would become the Festival's unnamed artistic director by 1975. The artistic-kinship ties that would bind her to both men evolved through several iterations, and endured for decades.

The second National Storytelling Festival in the fall of 1974 featured an all-Euro-American, Southern roster of tellers. The program lists five men – Tennessee/Virginia historian Paul Fink, Tennessee Ole Medicine Show enthusiast "Doc Randall" Hoard, Kentucky folksinger and poet (who in 1984 became the state's poet laureate) Lee Pennington, North Carolina humorist Wiley Rutledge and North Carolina traditional teller Marshall Ward. The program also identifies two women as tellers: Regan-Blake billed as the "children's storyteller" and Alabama journalist and true ghost story collector Kathryn Tucker Windham. According to Sobol's history:

The second National Storytelling Festival was held entirely in the Jonesborough historic district. Without a big-name drawing card, it was held in parlors, on front

¹²² From the audio recording of 1973 National Storytelling Festival.

¹²³ Admittedly I am imagining that Hicks's live audience was transported based on what happened to me as a story listener hearing the recording forty years later. However, Regan-Blake was an eyewitness in 1973, and she confirmed my vicarious experience on behalf of the Festival audience that day.

porches, in church basements, and in the park by the newly rebuilt and resituated Christopher Taylor Cabin. Doc McConnell¹²⁴ was invited to perform his medicine show. He said the event was so small and low in visibility that some of the townspeople accused the organizers of having a "secret storytelling festival" (91). Sobol continues: "Smith's strategy seemed to be to find people who were neither well known nor highly paid but who were passionate about storytelling or could become so. These would indeed form a kind of secret society, a small group charged with a sacred mission" (91).

It was Windham who handed Smith a few dollars to become the first member of a national storytelling membership organization – the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), when Smith's idea for such an association was formalized during a breakfast meeting attended by Regan-Blake, Freeman, Windham, Pennington and Doc McConnell at that second festival. Sobol notes that "Ardi St. Clair (now Lawrence), an editor for the *Tennessee Conservationist* magazine who had written the first published article on the storytelling festival [was also there]. Lawrence recalled that at some point in the meeting everyone looked at one another and said, 'Well – I guess we're the board of directors'" (92-93).

¹²⁴ A tall tale teller and revivalist old time medicine show barker, Ernest Randolph "Doc" McConnell was born in Rogersville, Tennessee in 1928. He appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1974 as an emcee and an unnamed member of Doc Randall Hoard's Ole Medicine Show, but McConnell's first billed appearance there was in 1975. McConnell is the self-published author of *Stuff and Things and Reliable Remedies* (Rogersville: E.R. McConnell, 1973), and appeared on the television show "Hee Haw." He was named to the National Storytelling Network's Circle of Excellence in 1996 and received the NSN Lifetime Achievement Award a year later. In March of 2008, Tennessee Representative John Hood of Rutherford County introduced a resolution to create the office of Tennessee Storytelling Laureate and to name Doc McConnell its first appointee. McConnell died in August of that same year.

Here is the same historical moment retold in the 1988 National Storytelling Festival program:

At the conclusion of the third National Storytelling Festival in 1975, founder Jimmy Neil Smith called together a few of the tellers who had supported and nurtured the festival. "Let's think about forming an association," he said simply, "to support storytelling and storytellers."¹²⁵

And that very weekend, he, along with six others, elected a board of directors, adopted a set of bylaws and became The National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling – affectionately known as NAPPS.

Kathryn Windham of Selma, Alabama, was the first official dues-paying member (1988 festival brochure, 5).

The sentence naming Windham as its first member was deleted in the NAPPS history that appeared in the 1989 Festival program.

The public naming of Smith as the progenitor, Jonesborough as the birthplace, and 1973 as the birth year of an American storytelling revival does a great disservice to storytelling studies scholars, practitioners and audience members alike, for it obscures the true origins of this postmodern reawakening to story. An androcentric, monotheistic creation story – constructed, essentially, as a sound bite – ignores the wider and more

¹²⁵ Again, my source for this quote is the 1988 Festival program. To clarify the chronology, Sobol wrote to me in an email: "The breakfast meeting happened in '74. The non-profit chartering proceeding [was] during the following year, and the first official Board meeting of the actual organization would have been in '75" (Personal email from Sobol on April 3, 2014. Used by permission). In another email in that same exchange Sobol wrote: "1974 would have been the meeting where Kathryn Windham whipped out her five dollar bill to become the first member. I guess what made that such a significant gesture of faith was that it would have been before there was an actual chartered organization to be a member of" (Second personal email from Sobol on April 3, 2014. Used by permission).

inclusive contexts from which contemporary performance storytelling emerged on the tongues of its practitioners in the late sixties. It erases the influence of eight decades of storytelling done by (mostly female) librarians, educators, Sunday School teachers, and camp counselors, and the 1903 founding of an organization called the National Story Tellers' League (now the National Story League) in the early part of the twentieth century. It ignores the rise of solo performance from seeds planted in consciousness-raising groups in the second wave of feminism, and the impact of radical political movements seeking to include disenfranchised voices in any national dialogue, on stage or off.

But Jimmy Neil Smith's love for Jonesborough became deeply entangled with the emerging revival community's desire for a homeplace. Those two deeply felt loyalties, along with the evolving economic interdependence between the National Storytelling Festival's sponsoring organization and its hometown, have focused the storytelling revival's known history chiefly within Jonesborough's city limits, and within the market-driven and ever-narrowing confines of storytelling festival culture. That history overlooks the work being done by individual storytellers in their home communities, in local, regional, national and international venues, and in applications that don't fit the tourist-driven, culturally conservative, nostalgia-powered, capitalistic performance platform that the National Storytelling Festival has come to be.

I contend that the personal narratives of a single pioneering woman capture a much more varied and substantial history of the revival's birth pangs than the Jonesborough-centric creation myth. Regan-Blake's stories not only make clear the significance of her own achievements, but also paint a detailed portrait of how the

community came together as artists, as activists and archivists, and as noteworthy cultural workers¹²⁶ in the world outside upper East Tennessee. This study taps into the uncelebrated narrative of the movement's history beyond the efforts of its Maker, and beyond the geographic, economic and demographic delimiters of its Mecca, to give voice to its often invisible, but indisputable, foremother – Connie Regan-Blake.

The Cotsen Storytelling Project/Connie Regan-Blake Narratives

If the American storytelling revival is to be historicized within the context of the National Storytelling Festival and the national storytelling organization that it engendered, then the unarguable Ur-Mother of the festival-based revival is storyteller Connie Regan-Blake. As becomes clear in her Cotsen Storytelling Project (CSP) narratives, not only was Regan-Blake the master gardener of the first crop of talent that came to the National Storytelling Festival stage, but also she was the sower of the seeds that blossomed into the revival community.

I have organized the second part of this chapter, gleaned from CSP interviews with Regan-Blake, around the impact of family storytelling and extended family relationships on her blossoming as a storyteller. In editing sections of the interview transcripts themselves into a chronology, I have footnoted pertinent asides to material gathered in the body of the study, and included interpretive commentary. My intention

¹²⁶ I am using the expression "cultural worker" as scholar-artist Peyton McCoy uses it:

In the broadest sense cultural work uses language (words, visual art, music, film, and voice) to inform and inspire individuals and communities to transform themselves (Stauffer, 2006). Cultural work can be described as the combined “voice, knowledge, intelligence, and experience of a story [conscious] leader, [facilitator, scholar-artist] to unite a group of people” (Gilliam, 2006, p. v) with a goal of embracing or creating a space that empowers.

For more see: <http://www.theculturalworker.com/test/> accessed online 15 March 2014.

here is to track Regan-Blake's personal narrative of becoming a storyteller, to establish her significance as a pioneering force within the revival, and to respond to the influence of the dominant discourse as it appears within her narrative, all in the name of restoring her place in the revival's history.

A Note about my Reading and Editing of the Transcripts

Actress, ethnographer and theatre scholar Anna Deavere Smith writes: "If we were to inhabit the speech pattern of another, and walk in the speech of another, we could find the individuality of the other and experience that individuality viscerally... The frame of reference for the other would *be* the other" (xxvii).¹²⁷ Deavere Smith's work in this area has influenced me as both an artist and a scholar, persuading me that the best way for a reader to know Connie Regan-Blake and appreciate who she is and what she has accomplished is through her own words, edited or not.

As I re-immersed myself in Regan-Blake's interviews, I became aware of certain expressions or verbal tics in her narrative that I take to be gendered ones. The vast majority of sentences began with a conjunction, often the word "and," for the narrative was an ongoing one. For reading economy I often eliminated the conjunctions "And" or "But," or the transitional filler words "So," "Then," "Now" or "Well" at the start of sentences in the edited transcript. For the purposes of this study I also deleted the phrases "I think," "I believe" and "I remember" if they seemed unnecessary to the point she is making.¹²⁸ Regan-Blake uses the expression "kind of" like "you know" as a rhetorical

¹²⁷ Anna Deavere Smith, "Introduction," *Fires in the Mirror* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), xxvii.

¹²⁸ In the case of the words listed here, I did not use an ellipsis to indicate their absence. I used ellipses only when I omitted longer phrases in condensing the text.

placeholder that allows the speaker's brain to get ahead of her tongue. Thus, I edited that phrase out as I also did false starts and stutters (like "um" or "uh") at the beginning of, or within sentences. At other times, her insertion of the expressions "kind of," "little," "just" and "maybe" in a statement suggested a hesitancy and a distancing, a disqualification of the statement to which it is attached. That is, they seem intended to tone down the statement they qualify, lest the speaker seem too pushy in expressing her ideas. Regan-Blake seems to use "actually" and "really" to argue for or reinforce the reliability of statements she makes. To ease the reader's path, I edited most of these words out as well, though I have kept and analyzed some instances as examples. A formal linguistic study is beyond the limits of this study. I recommend that work to a future linguistic researcher, using these and other of the Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews.

Deavere Smith asks: "What is the relationship of language to identity? What does language, the way we render language, tell us about who we are...on an individual level...on a societal level?" (49).¹²⁹ I know from my own experience that girls born and bred in the American South in the second half of the twentieth century were acculturated to apologize for the space they took up in the world. Whether they comply with or subvert that teaching, it impacts the language they use. They trivialize their own statements in an effort to make themselves appear to be less visible, even as they push

¹²⁹ Anna Deavere Smith, *Talk to Me – Listening Between the Lines*, 49. In her book, Smith describes a conversation she had with a linguist at a party in New York. The two talked about what can be learned about someone "in the very moment that language fails them" (53). The linguist, whose name Smith does not recall, gave her three questions to ask her interviewees "that will ensure that their syntax will change in the course of an hour" (54). The questions were: "Have you ever come close to death? ...Do you know the circumstances of your birth? ...Have you ever been accused of something that you did not do?" (54). Although I have used the middle question in a listening exercise with my performance studies students, this line of inquiry did not come into play in the course of any of my CSP and related interviews for this study.

back against that insistent message to shrink themselves, their words and their needs. I made a note to myself to pay attention to whether Regan-Blake's narratives gave evidence of this acculturation, and to the intrusions of the dominant discourse into her narrative. They certainly did, and some instances of this are discussed later in the study.

Overall, Regan-Blake's expressive vocabulary is, by turns, wide-eyed with its sense of wonder, ethereal with its frequent evocations of charmed meetings and magical interactions, grounded with her mathematician's mind for detail, and measured with a Southern politician's natural diplomacy. She speaks in a drawl that captures both the beauty and the backbone of the Great Smoky Mountains where she now lives just outside of Asheville, North Carolina, not far from the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In most, but not all of the transcripts herein, I have removed my comments, verbal and nonverbal responses, and questions. But throughout the CSP interview process, I performed as women do in conversations with other women, especially in conversations among long time women friends; I was an engaged and responsive listener, cuing my interest in the conversations with affirmative sounds and statements and sometimes engaging in the playful banter with Regan-Blake (and her cousin Barbara Freeman).

At times during our years as co-collectors, my husband pointed out that my listening style was too audible. Later, when I read feminist folklorists describing the gendered way that women respond to one another in conversation and shared storytelling sessions, I began to understand that he and I had had very different training as listeners: he as a male reporter and I as a female storyteller. Still, from what our various interviewees told us at the end of sessions, they appreciated both of us as involved and responsive listeners.

The Settings of the Interviews

The first of our interviews took place during my initial effort as an archivist. As Associate Director of the newly christened Cotsen Storytelling Project, I took a Sony 3CCD Prosumer digital video camera, a Bogen tripod, a Sennheiser microphone and some digital tape with me to the annual Blue Mountain storytelling retreat¹³⁰ in Isle of Palms, South Carolina in September of 1997. There in the presence of esteemed colleagues who were also my friends, I practiced my interviewing skills in several short sessions. These sessions with a group of nationally known storytellers produced the very first recordings of CSP's three-month pilot effort.

The second, longer CSP interview with Regan-Blake unfolded over a few days in August of 1998 and included a joint session with Barbara Freeman, Regan-Blake's first cousin and by-then-former performing partner from the duo, the Folktellers. Later, in anticipation of writing this dissertation, I did a series of short follow-up interviews with Regan-Blake in September of 2012 at our retreat in Lake Lure, North Carolina to revisit or address questions I still had about her process and her practice. Later I heard some of the same material retold on a recording of a 2012 Plenary Session during which she publicly shared her bird's eye view of the birth of the revival at the National Storytelling

¹³⁰ Established in 1987 by Susan Klein, Jon Spelman and Jim May with the assistance of the late Dr. Joyce Hancock (a writer and professor of English at Jefferson Community College in Louisville, Kentucky), the Blue Mountain retreat group took its name from the Blue Mountain Center in the community of Blue Mountain Lake near Albany, New York where the retreat met for its first two years. Its members have called the group variously "Blue Lakers," "Blue Mountain Group," "Blu Mtn" and "Blu Mo" in their correspondence over the decades. At the time of my initial CSP interview, the group included: Klein, Spelman, May, Len Cabral, Barbara Freeman, Bill Harley, David Holt, Beth Horner, Gwenda LedBetter, Jay O'Callahan, Michael Parent, Connie Regan-Blake and myself. Ed Stivender, one of the retreat's original members, had left the group by then. Others have subsequently retired from the gathering.

Network conference (held June 28-July 1, 2012) in Cincinnati, Ohio. Throughout these various recountings, the narrative remains consistent in a way that suggests some aspects have been told and retold over time as befits a professional performer who's been interviewed repeatedly. Finally, Regan-Blake and I also exchanged emails as I worked on this study and engaged in a series of "dissertation dialogues" – phone conversations in which she responded to the first draft of these chapters. In some of those conversations, she shared new information or insights also included in these chapters.

The Intergenerational Call to Story

Deavere Smith reminds us: "character lives in that which is unique (23) and that "an artist brings to the table, by necessity, a personal voice, a cultural voice, which is organic to where he or she once was" (26).¹³¹ Born of middle class, Irish American, Christian stock, Regan-Blake represents the dominant culture in the U.S. during the second half of the twentieth century.¹³² A Euro-American, Southern-born storyteller, she also embodies two-thirds of the trifecta of demographic traits privileged in the storytelling revival community. However, as a woman growing up in post-WWII America, she has lived within the confines of a misogynistic, patriarchal culture and a storytelling revival culture crafted within that dominant discourse frame. An acknowledged feminist, in the narrative she responds to the vulnerability of other tellers, especially traditional Euro-American and indigenous tellers, who have been more overtly

¹³¹ Anna Deavere Smith, *Talk to Me – Listening Between the Lines* (New York: Random House, 2000), 26.

¹³² According to "Demographic Trends in the Twentieth Century," a Special Report of the 2000 Census: "Since 1970 the population of races other than White or Black has grown significantly; however Whites remained the largest race group" (74). See <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf> Accessed online 1 March 2014.

marginalized than she has been – both within the revival and without. Despite this sensitivity to the marginalization of others, her own downgrading as a female is rarely mentioned directly.

Regan-Blake's family stories emerged during our various interviews; still more unfolded when we shot images of family photographs at the end of our 1998 interview session. Her maternal great-grandmother, Rosie O'Donnell, was born on a ship coming from Ireland to the United States. Growing up as a first generation American, O'Donnell met and married "Posie" Daniel, and they raised their family in Tennessee. Their daughter Regina Daniel (called Rena and later Mama T by her progeny) married Samuel Elos "Pop" Freeman, and bore him three sons and a daughter. That daughter, Mary Agnes Freeman, grew up in Nashville and married John Gordon Regan, a native of New Orleans.

The youngest of their three children, Connie Regan-Blake was born in 1947 in Mobile, Alabama, and grew up in Birmingham, Alabama and in Jacksonville, Florida. Thus her formative years were all spent in the segregated South of the pre-Civil Rights era. Her mother's relations regularly extended the cast of characters populating her family landscape. Paternal relatives in Louisiana visited less regularly, but during her college years at Loyola University¹³³ she spent time with them in New Orleans. Though Regan-Blake's face-to-face contact with her father's family was less than with her mother's people, John Regan brought his six older brothers to the table through family stories. In

¹³³ Except for a brief reference to attending Loyola University or (later in the narrative) her father attending a Jesuit high school, Regan-Blake hardly mentions her religious upbringing as a Catholic. In a joint CSP interview with Barbara Freeman, however, she articulates the role that her performing partner's turn toward an evangelical brand of Catholicism played in the dissolution of their by-then twenty-year-long professional partnership.

Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins – How Family Stories Shape Us, Elizabeth Stone
writes:

The family is our first culture, and like all cultures, it wants to make known its norms and mores. It does so through daily life, but it also does so through family stories which underscore, in a way invariably clear to its members, the essentials, like the unspoken and unadmitted family policy on marriage or illness. Or suicide. Or who the family saints and sinners are, or how much anger can be expressed and by whom (7).

Family policies and prejudices were certainly communicated in the tales Regan-Blake heard growing up, as the reader will see below.

The First Place of Wonderment: the Family Dining Table

Regan-Blake's introduction to story took place within an extended family that loved words, stories and jokes, sharing them around the dinner table after the evening meal. Here's how she describes the terrain of her growing up experience:

I was born in Mobile, in Alabama, but very shortly thereafter moved to Birmingham...I lived there until I was nine. I have very distinct memories of...the different places that my father told me stories in that house, and the hole where I was trying to dig to China in the back. But then in 1955 we moved to Jacksonville, Florida. My mom wanted to be closer to her two brothers...in Palatka, Florida.¹³⁴ And my [maternal] grandfather had also moved there.

¹³⁴ Palatka is located on the St. John's River in Putnam County, Florida. The town's name is a corruption of the Seminole word "Pilo-taikita" meaning "crossing over" place. Palatka figures as a setting in "Why the East Coast Has Mosquitoes and Storms," one of Zora Neale Hurston's collected tales in *Mules and Men* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1935), 164-265.

My dad got a chance to be transferred, and so we moved to Jacksonville where I spent the rest of my schooling up through high school. And a lot of time in Palatka. We still had [my cousin] Barbara's family up in Tennessee – another uncle was up there. Those were our three bases: Nashville, Tennessee, Jacksonville, Florida, and Palatka, Florida. My dad was from New Orleans but we didn't get to see his family a whole lot. If we did visit with them, they usually came to Jacksonville to see us. So it wasn't until I went away to college there that I really got to know more of *that* extended family (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 7).

In 1955, John Regan's willingness to move his family from Alabama to Florida to fulfill his wife's desire to be closer to her people, as we say in the South, was no small act of spousal devotion. In fact, Regan-Blake's parents were "happily married...for almost fifty years" (according to her mother's published obituary) until her father's death in 1990. The Regan family's move from Birmingham to Jacksonville privileged proximity to extended family, assuring that their children would grow up in the company of at least one grandparent, uncles, aunts and numerous cousins. Thus, Regan-Blake had frequent exposure to her closely knit maternal relatives, their after-dinner conversations, and the imaginative worlds of a handful of outgoing and creative girl cousins.

But it becomes clear later in her narrative that John Regan's clan was well represented in his sharing of traditional tales and his stories about growing up with his brothers; those tales were the wordsmith's legacy that he passed on to his daughter. When I asked Regan-Blake to address the first CSP question – when did stories first start to matter? – she answered:

Definitely in my childhood. I didn't realize it at the time, and I wouldn't have named it in that way, but I always had a real fascination for words. And my father [was] a real wordsmith. He had...a great manner about him, and ...took great delight in choosing the perfect word for...[the] idea or image he was getting across...[He had] such a delicious sense about...being able to reach into his mind and pick the word, when maybe ten different words would do, but he was able to pick the one that...said just what he wanted to say...When it was even a word that you didn't understand, in the context or because of the rhythm of the word or just the sound of it, you knew what it meant. And I love that.

So I think I had [an] early-on appreciation for words. There is a family story – that I didn't speak, I didn't actually even say full words that were recognizable until I was two years old. And so the family joke is that I now make my living using my mouth and telling stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 2-3).

Regan-Blake recounts that family anecdote in the text of an autobiographical story about a family babysitter.¹³⁵ Told in performance at a third-person remove, it captures the triangular relationship Regan-Blake had as a toddler with her mother and her father, so I include it here:

When [their] youngest child was still not talking at two years old – not even single words – the Mrs. started to get worried. The child would stand up in her crib at bedtime and say: “WA, WA, WA.” And the mother would coach her from the doorway: “Say ‘water’ and I’ll get you some.” [The child would repeat]: “WA,

¹³⁵ The making and telling of “The Mildred Story” will be examined in Chapter Six.

WA, WA,” until the Daddy would come by [and say to his wife]: “Honey, give that child some water” (Unpublished text of "The Mildred Story.")

From this anecdote, there is little doubt that his baby girl was John Regan's darling.

Developmentally speaking, toddlers obtain a vocabulary from five to three hundred words between 18-24 months, with boys often coming to language later than girls. Birth order can also impact how soon a child speaks in a family with multiple offspring, for a toddler can often rely on siblings to "translate" her needs to uncomprehending parents. As the youngest of three children, Regan-Blake may have had help from her sister and brother – or from the girl who worked in the Regan home as a mother's helper – in signaling her needs to the grownups. At any rate, by developmental standards, she wasn't unnaturally late in speaking clearly.

Regan-Blake says more about the everyday storytelling in her household growing up:

[In] those beginning days...one of the ways that I was preparing...for storytelling to be so important in my life was *listening*...I wasn't the one that was regaling people at the dinner table, but I was there and I was listening...We always sat around the dinner table after dinner and we would always talk. And that's when I think my first experience in storytelling really happened.

When I was very young, we had a television, but my dad decided that we were watching [it] too much...so it "broke" one day. I didn't know until years later that actually what he had done was unplug it. But we thought that it was broken, so we didn't watch television for two or three years... That really had an influence on me and words and stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, page 3-4).

Mitchell Stephens asserts that "full-scale commercial television broadcasting did not begin in the United States until 1947,"¹³⁶ the year that Regan-Blake was born. According to the "Television" entry in *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: World Book Inc., 2003), "in 1945 there were probably fewer than 10,000 sets in the country. This figure soared to about 6 million in 1950, and to almost 60 million by 1960" (119).¹³⁷ Meanwhile the Census maintains that the population of the U.S. in 1950 was just over 152 million; by 1960 it was almost 181 million. In those ten years, households with televisions jumped from one in every twenty-five to one in every three. So, John Regan's unplugging of the family's television was a bold act in the face of a new technology embraced by the majority of householders who could afford it. The "broken television" ruse not only privileged face-to-face interaction but also encouraged active rather than passive consumption of stories. These were important "family values" in a household governed by parents who cherished connection with their children and togetherness with their kin.

Regan-Blake notes the effort her parents made to ensure frequent family gatherings and the resulting creative play opportunities, and family story sharing, that these gatherings provided:

[In] my mom's family, there were three brothers and then my mom – four siblings. And we were all very close. And even though we lived in different

¹³⁶ Mitchell Stephens' "History of Television," from the *Grolier Encyclopedia* can be found online at <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/History%20of%20Television%20page.htm>. Accessed 8 February 2014.

¹³⁷ The citation comes from *The Physics Factbook*, an online encyclopedia of scientific essays, edited by high school physics teacher Glenn Elert from his students' research. <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/2007/TamaraTamazashvili.shtml> Accessed 18 February 2014.)

places – one in Tennessee, one in Alabama, and a couple down in Florida – we visited each other on all the vacations. When I think back on that now with the interstate system, even today, it would be very difficult – Easter with four days or five days or Thanksgiving – to be able to travel those great distances. But before the interstate system, we did that.¹³⁸ Family was always very important. And that was a real hub of life for us (CSP/CRB Transcript 1 A, pages 4).

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 enabled construction on the Interstate Highway System to begin, and by the middle of the twentieth century the population in the U.S. had become dramatically more mobile than it had been even a generation before. For those with access to an automobile, extended car trips to visit their kin were a relatively inexpensive way to transport multiple family members to a distant destination. But even with today's highway system, it takes seven and a half hours one way to travel the 450 miles between Birmingham, Alabama where Regan-Blake lived from 1947 to 1955, and her maternal uncle's farm in East Palatka, Florida.

Jacksonville, Florida (to which her family moved in 1955) is only an hour from East Palatka. But even using today's freeways, it is eight hours or 593 miles one way from Jacksonville to where her cousin Barbara Freeman's family lived in Nashville, Tennessee. FM radio was just being introduced in automobiles in the 1950s; minivans with DVD players, and the idea of individual iPods for everyone in the car were the stuff

¹³⁸ President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized the construction of the American Interstate Highway System through his signing of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. Missouri and Kansas have both claimed that their portions of what is now Interstate 70 were the first to be completed. The last section on Interstate from the original plan was completed and opened to traffic in 1992. For more see: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/faq.htm#question10> Accessed 3 March 2014.

of science fiction for baby boomers in their youth. Book-loving passengers not given to motion sickness might be able to read; otherwise, listening to the radio, playing the license plate¹³⁹ alphabet game, singing camp songs, engaging in conversation and storytelling would have been the entertainments of choice on family car trips.¹⁴⁰

Regan-Blake describes the child-friendly atmosphere of those family gatherings:

There were twelve of us cousins...[who] spent a lot of time together. And one of the places that we spent a lot of that time was down in East Palatka, Florida, a very small community on the east side of the St. Johns River. My uncle had...five acres; it was a working farm with cows and chickens and such. They had a huge dining room table. At all these family gatherings, that's where we always sat. We would stay there, and we didn't really run off in different directions. We always wanted to hear each other's stories, hear the old ones again and hear whatever had happened since the last family gathering. Stories were very important to me in that way.

¹³⁹ The state of Connecticut was the first to introduce license plates with ink made reflective by the addition of glass-like beads in 1948. For more see: <http://www.licenseplates.tv/history.html> accessed online 2 March 2014.

¹⁴⁰ My own family drove regularly from Atlanta to visit my maternal aunt and grandmother first in Memphis, Tennessee (770 miles round trip) and then in Columbus, Ohio (1134 miles round trip). The summer I was twelve, my mother took my brothers and me on an ambitious trek across country with three generations of drivers – herself, her mother and her teenaged nephew, who had been recently orphaned and so came to live with us. We drove to California, up through Oregon and Washington and into Canada and then back down through the Midwest (7300 miles round trip) to meet distant relatives, visit tourist attractions of greater and lesser ilk, and see the landscapes of North America that had engendered my forebears. When the six of us were barreling down historic Route 66 in a car without seatbelts, I had no idea how new this kind of mobility was.

There were four of us girl cousins that were very close. Barbara Freeman, who was my partner for all those years [in the storytelling duo The Folktellers], was one of those four. We were close in age, so we did a lot of things together – a lot of horseback riding. And we used to make up stories: we would play radio or play prince and princess, or do Romeo. We would do all kinds of games. There was a lot of imagination there and a lot of creating in our minds (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 4-5).

The romantic pastimes described above were highly gendered activities for preadolescent and adolescent girls in the nineteen fifties and sixties. Growing up amongst a gaggle of girl cousins allowed Regan-Blake's relationship with Barbara Freeman, to develop deep roots. Recently, she shared this sketch of one of their extended family encounters:

Barbara and I were best friends. Everybody in the family loved Barbara. She was so funny. From the adults to the kids, we all wanted to sit next to her at the dinner table – 'cause we knew we'd be laughing hard. [She] has an incredibly rich gift of humor – not just that she can be funny or can tell a joke – it's more that she is funny down in her... bones – it's a natural part of her. It's like – you know when [you're] watching the TV News on CNN or Fox – that crawl that goes across the bottom of the TV screen. Barbara has this crawl going across [her mind] – and all of it is funny. It's like she can just "dip down" anytime and come up with something to make you laugh.

I remember one time her family was driving down to visit us in the summer. We were all bustling around with last minute chores to get the house ready for company and the doorbell rang. All five of us – including my dad – we

raced to the door, and little Barbara – 9 years old – she was standing there all alone. She said, “Just dropped by to say 'Howdy' – howdy!” And she turned around and walked back to the car and they drove off! We were all so stunned – we couldn’t do anything! Well, they drove around the block and they were back in a flash. That was how Barbara was – she could even talk her Daddy into being in on the fun after a 14-hour drive. And for years afterwards – “just dropped by to say 'howdy' – Howdy!” was a family joke.¹⁴¹

In 1980, reporter Rex Weyler profiled Regan-Blake and Freeman in a cover story for *New Age* magazine. Here's how he recounts the influence of extended family gatherings, and family stories on their growing up experience: "They spent the summers together riding horses, running through great green fields of grass, swimming the river, and listening to their fathers tell Irish jokes that had been passed down through the families from further back than anyone could remember" (28).¹⁴²

Regan-Blake picks up that thread:

When I first started telling stories myself full-time, if someone had said, "Well, now, did you hear traditional stories when you were growing up?" I probably would have said no, except for maybe "The Three Bears." It was only later, as I started poring through volumes...of traditional stories, collections from all over the world, that I found several stories that my dad used to tell me as a child... One was "Why the Mouse Hates the Cat and the Cat Hates the Dog." Another story

¹⁴¹ From the unpublished text of Regan-Blake's "Fire on the Mountain" tribute to Barbara Freeman. Used by permission.

¹⁴² Rex Weyler, "On the Road with the Folktellers," *New Age* magazine (July 1980), 26-33 and 62-63.

that he used to tell that I remember was "How the Ocean Got Salty." So there *was* a bit of traditional telling in our family. But most of the stories were family stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 5-6).

The Second Place of Wonderment: The Public Library

There was another place that piqued Regan-Blake's imagination: the Public Library. She remembers:

Looking back, I would never have imagined that I would be making my living telling stories. Even though words were important to me, [and] reading was very important. Third grade – that's when I discovered Walter Farley's *The Black Stallion*,¹⁴³ *The Black Stallion Returns*,¹⁴⁴ *Son of the Black Stallion*,¹⁴⁵ *Daughter of the Black Stallion*¹⁴⁶ and on and on and on.

I became a voracious reader. Everyone at...the main public library knew me, and I felt very comfortable in the library and I went there often. That was a real place of wonderment for me. I don't remember ever hearing stories told in the library, but...written stories became those stories in my head (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 6).

¹⁴³ Walter Farley, *The Black Stallion* (New York: Random House, 1991). First published in 1941.

¹⁴⁴ Walter Farley, *The Black Stallion Returns* (New York: Random House, 1991). First published in 1945.

¹⁴⁵ Walter Farley, *Son of the Black Stallion* (New York: Random House, 2002). First published in 1947.

¹⁴⁶ There is no book in the series with this title. See instead: Walter Farley, *Black Stallion's Filly* (New York: Random House, 2002). First published in 1952. Read about the entire series on the Official Black Stallion Fan Site maintained by Tim Farley at <http://theblackstallion.com/web/books/the-series/> Accessed online 8 February 2014.

The allure of what the *New York Times* called "the most famous fictional horse of the century" to a library-loving, horseback-riding girl child raised in the fifties is not surprising, even though the human protagonist in Walter Farley's *Black Stallion* books is a boy, Alec Ramsey. One recurring female character in the series – an Arabian sheik's daughter Tabari – is introduced into the story line in 1945's *The Black Stallion Returns* but her Middle Eastern location keeps her at a distance from the larger narrative. Another female character – Ramsey's love interest, a female jockey named Pam Athena based on Farley's daughter – appears twenty-six years later in *The Black Stallion and the Girl*.¹⁴⁷ Like the author's daughter, Athena dies an untimely death and is deeply mourned in *The Black Stallion Legend*.¹⁴⁸ By Athena's first appearance in 1971, however, Regan-Blake was already a young woman who had turned her attention back to picture books, and would soon become the foremother of an American storytelling revival.

But it was the stories she heard her father tell that stayed with her into adulthood. I asked Regan-Blake if, as an adult, she ever questioned her father about the provenance of those stories. In fact, she interviewed both parents about the tales they told:

I've got him on tape, telling them... When [Barbara and I] were starting to tell stories... I'd written my mom and dad about wanting to collect some stories from them, and there were some specific stories that I wanted them to tell me. This was actually after I'd already moved to Asheville [North Carolina in 1978]... My dad never did like to travel. My mom traveled a lot – in the sixties, she went with a

¹⁴⁷ Walter Farley, *The Black Station and the Girl* (New York: Yearling, 1991). First published in 1971.

¹⁴⁸ Walter Farley, *The Black Stallion Legend* (New York: Yearling, 2005). First published in 1983.

friend over to Europe...and traveled all over Switzerland and Italy. I got a lot of [my] travel genes from her – she came up to visit me, and she had a wonderful list of...things she wanted to talk about. I got my tape recorder out and...we had a lovely time with it (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 8-9).

The same year that her youngest child (Connie) graduated from college, Mary Agnes Regan left home to make a trip to Europe. She was fifty-six years old at the time. By the end of the turbulent sixties two generations of women sought (at least momentary) liberation from the confines of their culturally constructed role of wife-and-mother. More than one Euro-American, middle-aged, middle class woman left her husband behind to travel in Europe with a sister or a girlfriend, for the same behavior played out between my parents at about the same time. As a college freshman, I had never seen my mother perform such an act of independence, but her mother had modeled traveling around the world on a schoolteacher's salary, and so had laid a clear path for her daughters. Regan-Blake's mother did the same for her. But how can the trope of an adventuring mother and a stay-at-home dad be explained in post-War America?

At the time of America's entrance into WWII, John Regan, completely self-taught as a certified public accountant, worked for the Internal Revenue Service in Mobile, Alabama. When he received news that he had been drafted, he moved his pregnant wife and their son to Nashville to be near her family. Hours before he was to report to boot camp, the news broke that certain divisions of federal employees – his among them – would not be sent overseas. After the birth of his second child, Bonnie, he moved his family back to Mobile where his youngest child, Connie, was born in 1947. Even though he served his country without leaving its shores, John Regan had no desire to see Europe;

this behavior was not unusual among men of his generation. Wherever and however they had served their country – at home or abroad, as civilians or enlisted men – when the fighting was over, they were glad to be able to stay put. And some were content to let their wives go traveling without them, once child rearing was done.¹⁴⁹ If a man was threatened by this prospect, his control of the family income could halt his wife's travel plans. Mary Agnes Regan had a chance to go to Europe with a friend, and John Regan did not object, signaling to his children that travel was an appropriate activity for a woman to pursue. When she had the chance, Regan-Blake would follow suit.

About her stay-at-home father's storytelling tradition, Regan-Blake continued:

I had written [my dad] the same letter...asking him [to tell me stories on tape]. So the next time I went home, I got out my tape recorder and he started telling me things. When we had finished and I was ready to come back up [from Jacksonville] to North Carolina, he said, "Do you want to do some more taping?" It became a wonderful ritual for us.

Every time I went home, he would always want Mom out of the house, so it was only the two of us...I got sixteen hours' worth of him on tape, and then...about two hours on video. On those tapes, I had him tell *our stories*. And

¹⁴⁹ There appears to be something archetypal afoot in these "reversed" behaviors of the wandering wife and the roosting husband. In 1992 author and psychiatrist Allan B. Chinen published *Once Upon a Midlife— Classic Stories and Mythic Tales to Illuminate the Middle Years* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc., 1992), a collection of global folktales that speaks to men's and women's changing developmental needs at midlife. Chinen writes: "Middle tales offer maps of the midlife passage, pictures of obstacles, oases, dangers, and delights recorded by men and women who have survived the journey" (6). In the second part of this collection Chinen includes tales of gender role reversals between a husband and wife. In each, the woman (not always willingly) goes adventuring while the man – because of stubbornness, forgetfulness or imprisonment – cannot move toward his own good fortune without her return and/or rescue.

he told me...incredible things. You know that [idea] that story [can be] a way into people's lives? I think it can be a way into our own family's lives. Because we hear certain stories growing up and we know certain stories because we are living them, but there are so many other things that we don't know about.

To be able to ask our parents or grandparents and ask any of our children, too, for other stories, other parts of their lives. Somehow making it a little more formal, not even with a tape recorder necessarily, but setting aside a particular time...we hear and tell stories that we might not any other time. That certainly happened with my father. I feel like it was a real gift to me and to him, 'cause he was so pleased.

A lot of it was very painful. He was very poor growing up and had a hard childhood. But he had such an incredible memory. I get that gift from him – not so much the memory, but the gift [for] details. He walked me through – it probably took an hour and a half, one of the times that we had – his childhood home...from the lily that was beside the stoop, and how the front door knob was, all the way through the whole house. I have all of that and I'm very grateful to have it. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 9-10).

I asked if her father revealed who told him the traditional tales he passed on. She said:

No, he never did, and I never did ask him how he had heard the stories. His family [was full of] talkers, too. He had six brothers; he was the seventh. They were all a lot older than he was. He was the only one that ended up getting much of an education. Education was very important to the family, but they didn't have the

means to be able even to go to upper-grade school. The boys had to go to work right away.

But they all decided that [my father] Johnny was going to get an education. So the brothers pitched in for that. And it wasn't only pitching in for him to be able to have shoes and clothes to go to school. It was pitching in so that he didn't have to work and bring the money home. So it was a double kind of a gift. He went all the way through high school too, [a] Jesuit high school.

He was a brilliant man...took Latin and Greek all the way through. In his freshman year [of high school], they would give a test to the whole school, and give a gold – literally gold – medal. I've got that gold medal...He [also] won the math test of all the freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and won a solid gold medal for that. It was the first time it had ever happened that either [a] freshman or sophomore had won. He was a very smart man. He had a full scholarship to go to college, but at that point, [he]...could not afford to not work. So he never went to college, but he always continued learning (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 10-11).

In John Regan's growing up narratives, we see that family stories are the stuff of which fairy tales are made: he was a seventh son, the youngest princeling, and much beloved by the rest. He was given special privileges – the chance to finish high school before entering the work force – at no little sacrifice to those investing in him as a family hero. He ventured out into the strange new land of secondary education – an unknown world up till then in his family of origin – and literally brings home the gold (medals). But he turned his back on the fairy tale ending – a scholarship offering him the chance to attend

college – and took his place in the real world by going to work. And just in time, for the year of his matriculation would have been 1929, the year of the stock market crash, precipitating the Great Depression.

Regan-Blake continues her explanation of her father's storytelling prowess (of which she is clearly proud) and makes a connection between the hard times of Depression-era workers in the South and the hard times of their folktale avatar Jack (of Beanstalk fame):

I don't know if he read those stories somewhere or if he heard them from some of his older brothers – they were real jokesters...always pulling tricks...We heard these stories about them...A lot of times I think the stories about Jack – especially the ones that have violence in it – a lot of those stories...have the violence [of] hard times. Jack had such a hard life...[The tellers of Jack tales] made his life so hard so that by comparison, their lives weren't so bad. They could look to Jack and think, "Well, you know, we might not have any food for dinner tonight, but look at what Jack had – he had to kill those unicorns and he got three strops out of his back!" I think of that sometimes when I [remember] some of these stories that my dad told...(CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 11-12).

Hard times and difficult circumstances are borne more easily with a sense of humor.

Regan-Blake describes a prank memorialized as a family story that identifies and discourages a family frailty – alcoholism:

[My father's brothers] were...jokesters on each other. Several...were alcoholics and they worked at breweries there in New Orleans, which was not the best place to be working. But it was...the Depression...and you got a job anywhere you

could. [Uncle] Andrew was working at the brewery and...doing a lot of drinking. He got this [distended] stomach that sometimes people that drink a whole lot [get]. Finally his brothers and his mother said, "You are going to have to go to a doctor about this." In those days, especially in their financial situation, you really did not go to a doctor unless you were practically on Death's door. So he finally agreed that he would go to the doctor.

One of the brothers made the appointment for him and set him up...wrote out where he was to go [see] Dr. Mackelroy, and what building and what room. He walked in, and it was an OB-GYN! Everyone there was pregnant [*laughing*]; it was all women. He said, "I think I'm in the wrong place!" and he left. That was the [type] of stories that we heard, [communicating]...a lot of shame that he was an alcoholic...and yet finding some humor in it too (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 12-13).

Of the unicorn-killing hero in one of the Jack tales Regan-Blake mentions above, Carl Lindahl writes: "Looking...closely at the American mountain märchen, we find that their heroes often possess – if nothing else – just a shred of verbal agency; a power to rename the situations in which they find themselves" (77).¹⁵⁰ That is, of course, one of the main functions of storytelling: verbal art offers the teller a chance to make sense of, or reframe, a difficult experience, to talk it into meaning, so to speak. But rather than making the teller feel better about a real-life challenge in comparison to the sometimes supernatural

¹⁵⁰ Carl Lindahl, "Sounding a Shy Tradition: Oral and Written Styles of American Mountain Märchen," in *Journal of Folklore Research* 38:1/2, *Special Double Issue: Perspectives on the Jack Tales and Other North American Märchen* (Jan. –Aug. 2001), 68-98. The iteration of the Jack tale cited by Lindahl has the unlikely, if suggestive, name "Stiff Dick."

obstacles experienced by Jack, Lindahl asserts that mountain märchen provide the teller and listener with an opportunity to vicariously defeat a unicorn that might get the better of them in real life. He observes: "Jack was one of many who spoke for the aspirations of the struggling... [Appalachian people] who, when they could win no other way, won through the justice of the Märchen..." (80).¹⁵¹

Seen either way – as someone worse off or better off than the teller – the Southern Appalachian folktale hero named Jack enjoyed an enduring role as a trickster/fool who triumphs. My experience as performer and audience member, my conversations with other women tellers, and my listening to Ray Hicks talk about his wife's irritation with Jack¹⁵² all lead me to think that the character's appeal is largely a masculinist one. When Jack pits himself against female villains – for instance the witches in "Sop Doll!" or the adulterous housewife in "The Heifer Hide" – the unruly women get their sometimes-fatal comeuppance. The frequently murderous competitions between Jack and his brothers, or between Jack and another male character, as well as his misogynistic behaviors towards the women he encounters, make his adventures more problematic for women tellers and listeners – including Rosa Hicks – to embrace.

Perhaps because Jack tales were in her father's folktale canon, Regan-Blake accepted the trickster as a family folktale hero, adding "Big Jack and Little Jack" to her

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² See Rosa Hicks's critique of Jack's character, captured second-hand in a CSP interview, and cited by Ray Hicks on page 89 of my article, "Learning to Listen to An All-Day Talker," *Storytelling Self, Society – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* 9.1 (Spring 2013), 77-104.

repertoire.¹⁵³ Eventually she added another story that could be said to depict Jack later in life or else might depict his absent father – "Wicked John and the Devil."

Like Jack and Wicked John, John Regan's brothers embodied the trickster tradition. Elizabeth Stone writes: "The family's first concern is itself, but its second realm of concern is its relation to the world. Family stories about the world are usually teaching stories telling members still at home the ways of the world according to the experiences its elders have had. Often the news is not good" (7). The news from her uncle Andrew Regan's kin was that his alcoholism was shameful, even in a family where "several brothers were alcoholics." By going to some length to send Andrew to an OB-GYN's office filled with brooding women, his brothers comment as much on his manhood as his alcoholism: because of his inability to control his passion for alcohol, he sports a distended belly. Thus, he is pregnant with his addiction, and Andrew's brothers have assigned him a new identity – that of a woman who's been "knocked up" – making his inferiority to his prank-playing, flat-bellied (and in some cases similarly alcoholic) brothers. It was not unusual for this kind of masculinist "ball-breaking" to go unchallenged in the generation of Regan-Blake's father and his brothers. Regan-Blake's recounting of her uncles' elaborate prank – followed by her own laughter – suggests that her loyalty to her father's family stories trumps her being offended by the latent misogyny of the prank.

A Hunger for Education and a Passion for Travel

¹⁵³ Versions of "Sop Doll" (pp 76-82), "The Heifer Hide" (pp 161-171) and "Big Jack and Little Jack" (pp 67-75) can all be found in *The Jack Tales* edited by Richard Chase (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1943). "Wicked John and the Devil" (pp 29-37) is in *Grandfather Tales— American-English Folk Tales* also edited by Chase (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003).

Like her father, Regan-Blake had a hunger for education (and an innate ability in math), and like her mother a yen for travel and adventure. These twin traits eventually led her to an unusual path – that of a touring storyteller – and kept her moving on that path for over forty years. Scholars from many fields agree that storytelling is tied to meaning making, and it is clear from the narrative below that Regan-Blake's lived experience comes into sharper focus as she tells her own story:

As I was growing up...I was not really out there [as a performer]. I'd never been in a play or would never have imagined myself on stage. I went to college in Math. I had planned to get my doctorate in Mathematics. My ideal life at that time was to be able to work with NASA, sending people up to the moon and to other planets. I had planned on that. Actually now...I...send people to the moon in different ways, I guess.

I went to college majoring in Math, and after a year, realized that I was not [going to]...excel in the way I had thought...I didn't have quite the knack for really doing cutting-edge research, which is what I had wanted to do...Other areas started calling me away from Math...[and] I decided to major in Political Science...I thought that I'd be a lawyer. People say that Political Science is a pretty good background for storytelling. But again, I didn't know that at the time.

I did very well in school, and had a lot of friends... We did role-playing... There were...scenarios...that went on, and we would add to 'em every time we saw each other in class or at a party or something...[chuckling] Gosh, I haven't thought about this in...years. I went to Loyola University...and our mascot for the basketball team was a wolf. One day...I had said something about... "I know the

wolf..." We didn't really have a real wolf; it was someone in a costume. But I got to talking to [my friend]...real tongue-in-cheek about this wolf...For a long time...[my friend] would ask me about the wolf, and I'd tell him all the adventures that the wolf had gone on, and how he was over at the Audubon Zoo...across Saint Charles Avenue from Loyola University...I had this whole fantasy world built around this wolf and his adventures...¹⁵⁴

I remembered later on that in high school I had several friends [who] used to do play-acting...in the mornings... We had several skits...in our homeroom... The word started spreading throughout the whole high school. So on different mornings, different groups from different homerooms would be brought in, and we would do these plays. I guess maybe I wasn't quite as shy about that kind of thing as I sometimes think of myself in my childhood. But again, still not thinking I would ever perform, or that that would be a big part of my life. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 6-9).

The Path to Storytelling: M.O.R.E. Adventures

The second question in the CSP interview queried: what was your path to professional storytelling? In the months after college, Regan-Blake's storytelling path had yet to manifest itself, except in her propensity for travel. Here she tells about those post-

¹⁵⁴ Imaginative play finds new outlets as we leave childhood behind, bound for adulthood. Role-playing games provide one such outlet. Storytelling studies scholar Csenge V. Zalka writes about role-playing games as a kind of interactive storytelling with today's youth culture: "These games appeal to young adults as their target group, offering not only entertainment but also a sense of community both within and outside the game world. The game world itself changes from game to game...Players can immerse themselves in any imaginary environment of their choice" (6). Like a world in which a Loyola co-ed befriends a wolf and catalogs his adventures to the delight of her peers.

college travels and how the desire to return to Europe allowed her to accept a nine-month-long job that put her directly on her career path:

When I finished college, I had applied to...graduate school to...get my law degree...I don't even remember if acceptances or rejections came back, because I decided that I wanted to travel...to take some time away from school. I talked a friend of mine from college into going over to Europe with me. We took our backpacks, and I had a telephone number of someone that we might be able to get a job from...I ended up staying almost a year and a half, traveled all over Western Europe, got over as far as Turkey and Greece, went to every country in Western Europe except the Scandinavian countries...I loved going to new places.

We were traveling...on a shoestring and even less – sometimes parts of a shoestring. We hitched around some of the time. We saved a little money in the winter, and [then] my friend got married and came back to the states. I stayed over there with new friends that I had met. One of the goals for some of the people traveling in Europe at that time was to do what they called "going overland" to Australia. You would go all the way through the Middle East...until you got to Hong Kong. And then take a plane from Hong Kong, over into Australia.

That was one of the things that I really wanted to do,¹⁵⁵ but I didn't have quite enough money to do that. By then – even though I had worked a little bit –

¹⁵⁵ In the 2012 interview with Regan-Blake, she told the story of her Europe trip this way:

I bought a one-way ticket to Europe and talked a friend, whose name was also Connie, into going with me. I ended up living and traveling in Europe for...a year and a quarter, something like that...Had wanted to go overland...to

my supplies had really dwindled. So I decided to come back to the states and work for a year, saving up money, and then make that [overland] trip (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, page 10-11).

Like her father, Regan-Blake turned down further education – in her case, law school – for a chance to live in the real world. She took what has come to be called a "gap year" before graduate school or beginning one's career to pursue the adventure of low-cost, independent travel in Europe. With money saved from waitressing in college, she backpacked for nearly 18 months, sometimes resorting to hitchhiking – with a female friend but also alone – from the United Kingdom to the Balkans, encountering a multiplicity of language areas as well as numerous cultural and ethnic groups. This was one gutsy gal, refusing to buy into the dominant discourse about where a woman's place might be (at home) and unwilling to be hamstrung by the seemingly unalterable fact that women are vulnerable to numerous dangers in a man's world. Setting out with only the promise of "a telephone number of someone that we might be able to get a job from," and traveling on "a shoestring" budget would become the template for her future life as an itinerant storyteller, traveling where the potential of work or one's own whim beckoned, and living improvisationally from job contact to job contact.

She continues:

Australia...where you go all through the Middle East and end up in Singapore and get a kayak (CRB/2012 Interview #2, page 2).

However she might have originally planned to go to Australia, she got as far as New Zealand by plane for the Glistening Waters Storytelling Festival in 1998. She returned there in 2012 in a trip that included Australia. Her decades long yearning to make the trip overland would emerge as fodder for a story she began to tell recently; this tale is told in Chapter Six.

I came back to the states [at the end of 1970], lived with my sister [Bonnie] in Atlanta. She's been a wonderful support for me at lots of different points [in] my life. I...got a job waitressing. That was what I knew how to do. I had done that in college in the summer times, and that's actually how I had made enough money to be able to go to Europe...[Now] I was...working in Atlanta, at the top of one of those *revolving* restaurants, the first one: Polaris, it was called. It was so interesting 'cause you'd come out of the kitchen...and you had to remember where your people were. [*chuckle*]. If you took a left turn when you should have gone right, you would go a long ways around. I loved working there...but was really ready to go back to Europe (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 11-12).

But she did not return to Europe. Instead she stumbled onto a new path populated by picture book animals – bears on motorcycles and dirty dogs fleeing the bathtub.

When Regan-Blake began her work as a teller of folk tales, and an oral interpreter of picture books, there was not yet an identified network of storytelling professionals, publicly making their way toward this art form and toward each other. Given her tightly knit extended family, it is not surprising to note that the siren call to tale telling was first delivered by a relative. After six months of working as a waitress to save money – just shy of her intended return to Europe – Regan-Blake went to visit her cousin Barbara Freeman, now living in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Of that trip, she says: "That's when my life changed dramatically" (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, page 13). Retelling the story again in 2012, Regan-Blake supplies details that capture the cousins' easy intimacy, Freeman's faith in her as a quick study, Regan-

Blake's naiveté about preschool education and storytelling, and the delight she took in the prospect of living and working closely with her cousin:

That following summer of '71, Barbara had become the Children's and Young Adult Librarian at the Chattanooga Public Library. We were always good friends growing up. We had stayed in touch...as we were both in college. She's a little older than I am... Barbara was living [with her husband Dunnie Wright] in a tiny little trailer on...the poor side of Signal Mountain outside of Chattanooga. I made my way to her place.

I remember her opening that door, and we were so happy to see each other. [The trailer] looked like a little boat on the inside. That old-fashioned kind of trailer that had all that wood inside...almost more like a caravan...As soon as I walked in, as soon [as] we caught up with family and what was going on with each other – she said, "Kathryn Arnold and I...wrote this grant. And we got approved. We got money. And we're going to do this program to take storytelling out into daycare centers." And I said, "What are daycare centers?" They were just starting. Then I said, "What is storytelling?" [*chuckle*]

And she literally sat me down and told me [*Corduroy* by Don Freeman and] *Bear on the Motorcycle*¹⁵⁶...I said, "That's pretty cool." And she said, "I think you can do this"...Something about it really appealed to me...about

¹⁵⁶ In the CSP interview, Regan-Blake attributes *The Bear on the Motorcycle* (New York: Scribner, 1963) to Don Freeman, author of the beloved *Corduroy* books. In fact, the author was Reiner Zimnik. She said during our March 31, 2014 conversation that when she read this footnote, she felt some dismay that she had cited the wrong author all these years in her own creation story, imagining all the librarians who must have rolling their eyes when they heard her give this incorrect attribution.

storytelling and about being there – I loved Barbara – and to be able to be there and really hang out with her (CRB/2012 #2 Interview 2, page 4-7).

Later, in a tribute to her cousin, Regan-Blake added: "Barbara was a great storyteller – she was my first storytelling teacher."¹⁵⁷

In the CSP interview, Regan-Blake fleshed out the library program's provenance: It was a brand new program...funded with federal funds [from the] Library Services and Construction Act...It was written specifically to work with...preschoolers, young children, that were in daycare centers, and that did not have access to books and maybe didn't have any reading materials in their homes. This whole program was designed to give library service to these children: 3, 4, and 5-year-olds...

It was funded for nine months, which for me...was a real stroke of luck. Because if it had been funded for years, I probably wouldn't have taken it. But because it was only nine months, I thought, "Hey, I could do this," apply for it and have a for-real job, then go on back over to Europe, and...head on over to Australia, and have something for my resume. Plus it sounded really interesting (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, page 13).

Urging her cousin to apply for the job, and then tutoring her for the storytelling work ahead, Freeman handed Regan-Blake a key to a magic door. Regan-Blake continues:

When I think back on that time, it resonated with me in a way that I knew it was what I was supposed to be doing. So I didn't hesitate much...I went in and applied

¹⁵⁷ From the unpublished text of Regan-Blake's "Fire on the Mountain" tribute to Barbara Freeman. Used by permission.

for the job. And the head librarian, Kathryn Arnold, gave me the job on the spot. She and I became great friends.

This was really her baby, this whole project. I had immediate access [to her], any time I wanted it. I had never been in the work world besides waitressing, so I didn't know some of...the ropes. I didn't know that you didn't necessarily just go knock on the door and say, "Look at my dress. I'm going to wear this dress" [that I made with daisies on it] (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 13-14).

Regan-Blake's naiveté was not confined to her work environment. When she took the nine-month-long job at the Chattanooga Public Library, she moved into the tiny trailer with Freeman and her husband. Of this decision, she says it "was not a good thing. But again, I did not have much awareness. Just like I didn't know Ms. Arnold had a few things to do besides attend to this program" (CRB/2012 Interview #2, pages 11-12). Nonetheless, her relationship with Freeman, Arnold and the community she served did not just endure; it thrived. She says:

[The program] actually brought...a wonderful energy to the library because everyone got involved...Ms. Arnold gave me full reins, in lots of ways, to mold the program. There was another [older] woman...that was a librarian that was the coordinator of the program – Ms. Ola Boatner. [She] really liked for me to plan things and to do things. I...had this wide-open palette and every paint color in the world to [use]...It was a wonderful experience (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, page 14).

When Regan-Blake began her on-the-job training, Freeman, Arnold, Boatner and another library storyteller provided the audience for her first performance – *Harry the Dirty Dog*, a picture book by Gene Zion.¹⁵⁸ Here's how she describes the experience:

I remember this frozen little smile on my face. I was definitely nervous. The fourth person [in my audience] was Janice, who was hired to tell stories at the library...that was kind of her main thing. So Chattanooga was really way ahead of the curve in that.

The story went well. They liked it. I think I could honestly say that's probably the worst story I've ever told...worst performance. [*laughing*] 'cause I loved the story. I...[continued] telling [it]. But that [was] the hardest, maybe the hardest story I ever told in the setting (2012 CRB Interview 3 Transcript, pages 1-2).

Adding two storytellers to its staff – separate from its Children's department librarians – were pioneering hires on the part of an enlightened library board and staff in Chattanooga.

And writing grants to fund a program targeting preschoolers in low-income neighborhoods was another pioneering move on the part of the library. Head Start, the first publicly funded preschool program in the U.S., was launched in its first iteration as a summer "catch-up" program for young children from disadvantaged homes in 1965. Thus, when the Chattanooga library established the preschool storytelling program in 1970, widespread, publicly supported, preschool education was a very new addition to American education. Within this context, the work of Kathryn Arnold, Barbara Freeman,

¹⁵⁸ Gene Zion, *Harry the Dirty Dog* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

Ola Boatner and Connie Regan-Blake in creating can be read as a cutting edge outreach effort.

Here Regan-Blake describes other aspects of the program at the library:

We got a big yellow van [to] travel around to the daycare centers. We knew that we wanted the children to have quality books. I spent maybe the first two weeks solid, just looking at books. I went to the children's room [at the library], and then...there was a big [book] distributor up in Nashville, and I went and just sat for days and looked through all the children's books.

I was able to pick out the books that I thought would be good for these 3, 4, and 5-year-old children to have. I was not a trained librarian, but I had a real sense [about good children's literature]. I'd spent my time in the library, so I knew a lot about books actually, and I brought that to that program.

Ms. Boatner did not want the children calling me by my first name [but]...I didn't really want [to be] a "Miss Somebody" so I came up with the idea of "Ms. – M-S – Daisy." I [made] this navy blue long dress that I wore every day; it had daisies all over it. And then we painted [the] yellow van with daisies. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 14-15).

When we revisited the story of her job history in 2012, Regan-Blake wove the thread of race into the Chattanooga library narrative for the first time:

[The program coordinator, Ms. Boatner, was] a Black woman who was the director of the south branch [of the library]...in the Black neighborhood to be the director of this program, 'cause [at] all the schools we were going to, the majority of the children were Black. That's interesting to me to think about that. I never

thought twice about it, but this was the early 70s, so it was a little different world.
(CRB/2012 Interview #2, pages 12-13).

Indeed, Regan-Blake's encounter with a population of economically disadvantaged children of color in Chattanooga neighborhoods took place less than ten years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington. She describes that moment in time as "a little different world" than the theoretically post-racial one in which she recounted the story to me in 1998 and again in 2012.

Meeting each other across the borders of difference – in this case, race, generation, and culture – Ola Boatner and Regan-Blake were coming from different worlds themselves. When an older African American program director asserts her expectation that children attending classes with a library worker must address that person formally, it is an assertion layered with lived experience of power disparities, racial discrimination, and generational mores specific to African American culture. Some of these layers may have been invisible to a twenty-four-year-old feminist, who had grown up in a world of White privilege, and was seeking a cozy relationship with the kids. But together the two women wove a Daisy chain that bridged their differences, so they could both work to the best of their abilities for the betterment of the children.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ During our conversation in 2012, Regan-Blake remarked: "So I had this little pseudonym... In some ways [there] wasn't that much difference between Regan and Daisy for the kids – but for me it made a big difference" (CRB/2012 Interview #2, page 13). Then in our dissertation dialogue on March 31, 2014, after she had read an earlier version of this chapter, Regan-Blake said: "It's not that I wanted the children to think I was another child, I wanted them to think I was *the storyteller*." She went on to explain that she didn't want the formality of her name to stand between her and the children. Taking the name of a flower allowed her to talk to the kids on a first-name basis. And she got to intentionally use the feminist honorific "Ms." which is linguistically (and subversively) similar to "Miz," the way that "Mrs." is often pronounced in the Southeast.

Regan-Blake's role-playing in high school and college came into play again as she took on the role of "Ms. Daisy," a feminist storyteller in the library preschool program. The pseudonym on her nametag also bloomed on her dress and proliferated on the sides of the program van, spelling out the program's name in letters decorated with daisies. The van itself became a traveling garden of literacy, culture and care, a beloved spectacle of outreach-on-wheels, recognized throughout the neighborhoods served by the library program. And a traveling floral display would become a personal signature in Regan-Blake's life as a touring artist. For – as a passionate flower gardener – she regularly takes fresh blossoms from her yard on the road with her when she travels.

Born of a family of persuasive talkers, and practiced in luring others to adventure or over to her side of an argument, Regan-Blake had found a cause she could support and a niche that she was born to fill:

We called the program M.O.R.E., and that stood for "Making Our Reading Enjoyable."¹⁶⁰ We had lots of phrases that came out of that too: "Chattanooga Public Library is doing M.O.R.E." "Chattanooga Public Library is making our reading enjoyable."

That van became really well known around the streets of Chattanooga... Starting off [we] went to six or seven different daycare centers... We would go in, and if it was a large daycare center, I would bring only the 3-year-olds together and tell them stories and let them check out books. And then we would go to the 4-year-olds and let them check out books, and I would tell them stories. And then

¹⁶⁰ In our March 31, 2014 phone conversation, Regan-Blake told me that she named the M.O.R.E. program herself.

to the 5-year-old group. Then we would bring everyone together, and...[show them] these wonderful 16 mm films. I remember there were a couple of Claymation films and some... Weston Woods¹⁶¹ films on children's picture books...

When I was in each of the classrooms, telling...we would have classical music playing in the background. And these were really the best of children's literature. I took a lot of people's opinions about that and certainly Ms. Boatner knew a lot about it, and so we got all the Caldecott Award-winning books.¹⁶² People thought we were crazy that we were letting a 3-year-old go home with a hardback book (CSP/CRB Transcript 1A, pages 12-16).

She continues:

[Our thinking was that they would] want to go to these books where the stories came from...Part of every year's adventure with this program was to bring the children into the public library, so they could see where it was that I was coming out from – they all thought I lived there. They could see the library and get comfortable with being in that library, be able to check out books at the library...

¹⁶¹ Morton Schindel founded Weston Woods Studio in Weston, Connecticut in 1953, specializing in animating children's books as filmstrips and later as films. In 1964 his first animated picture book film was Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day*. For more see: <http://www.afana.org/schindel.htm> accessed online 27 February 2014.

¹⁶² The Caldecott Medal was established by the American Library Association. According to the medal's homepage on the association's website, "The Caldecott Medal was named in honor of nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott. It is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children." For more see: <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal>. Accessed online 5 February 2014.

During Halloween, I had people dress up as witches or goblins and go out with me. At Easter, we had a huge bunny suit. The accountant, who was an older woman that everyone else was afraid of – I didn't know that – and so I asked her to be a bunny one year and she was. And we had great fun with it.

The program itself, after those nine months, the funding ran out, and I left to travel. I had saved some money, and I decided to travel in the United States...[and see some of my friends from Europe] that were now living in California. I was going to take a train all the way across and stop at different friends' places along the way. I've always kept up with friends and two...from college lived in Houston, Texas.

I knew within a month of being on that job at Chattanooga that storytelling was going to be the rest of my life. So while I was in Houston, I went to the Houston Public Library – this would have been 1972 – and asked if they were interested in funding a position [for] a full-time storyteller. I told them what all I did. They were very interested in what I was doing, but, thank heavens, they said, "We really don't have that funding right now," 'cause that would have certainly taken me in a different direction (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 1-2).

When the M.O.R.E. program pilot ended, Regan-Blake began a trek by train that took her the same distances she had covered in Europe. But this time she was traveling through the variegated landscapes and cultures of America. Having discovered her passion, she used her newfound professional confidence to pitch a job as a to the Houston Library System. If Houston had found the funding to hire her, the storytelling revival community would have lost its future founder. Without Regan-Blake's intentional efforts to stitch the

diverse patches of the storytelling performance community together, the crazy quilt of storytellers might well have taken another decade to find their ways to Jonesborough, Tennessee and to one another.

The Second Iteration of the M.O.R.E. Program

This time when Regan-Blake took up the nomadic life, something had changed. Now she knew her life's work would be storytelling, but she wasn't sure how that would manifest itself as a career path. She remembers:

I continued traveling and went out west. Ended up in Los Angeles. Went up to San Francisco. I had another friend that lived in Denver. Came back across. And was just running out of money and heading back to Atlanta. This was after about a three- or a four-month period of travel. When I got to Atlanta, the day before, a letter had arrived...It was from Ms. Arnold at the [Chattanooga] Public Library. The letter said, "Will you come back and be coordinator of this program? We've gotten funding again." So I instantly said, "Yes," and went back up and was coordinator, and was there for another three and a half years, at the Chattanooga Public Library (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 2).

In 2012 I asked Regan-Blake if, when she returned to resume her work in Chattanooga, she also returned to the little trailer shared with Freeman and her husband. Speaking with a perspective she didn't have at age twenty-five, she said: "I did. Unfortunately. I can't remember how long I stayed that time, but I did move out on my own, finally. I think that's right, Milbre, that I did move back in. Ugh. Barbara and I just did everything together, you know. Oh, God!" (CRB/2012 Interview #3, page 12).

Whatever her living arrangements, she dove back into the work with a passion:

I did a lot of storytelling, and got to see my 5-year-olds come to be second and third graders, and my little 3-year-olds – I really became very close with a lot of the children. I went every week to that same daycare center. So you can imagine, [the relationships I built] over two or three years. We had nametags that we would make – it was a character out of the book –we did a nametag for each child, every single time. Ended up that we were doing 300 nametags a week, [featuring] a character from the book. But that way, we felt [the children] could take a part of that book home with them and help them remember that story. We also always made a nametag to put on a bulletin board in the daycare center. Months afterwards, you could go up and point to a little shepherd and say, "Now, which story is that from?" The children would say, "Oh, that's Charlie that needed a cloak!" That's Tomie DePaola's story, *Charlie Needs a Cloak*.¹⁶³ It was a real visual way of keeping those stories with them. We heard tales of children's refrigerators back home that were covered in all of these nametags.

We did a lot of things to continually bring children and stories, and children and books together, especially these children because they might not have ever been taken to a public library in their lives. We felt we were doing really important work, and also it was such fun work. The children loved to see us coming and there [were] never any discipline problems...it was never hard. The storytelling part was always easy...

When I went back, it was a staff of three. We would have one person stay at the library, and then I would go out with a helper [who] would...check out

¹⁶³ DePaola, Tomie, *Charlie Needs a Cloak* (New York: Aladdin, 1982).

books, and they would talk with the teachers...[and] check back in the books that had come back in...We'd offer the teachers any kind of books, any new resources we found that they might be able to use at the daycare center – maybe a book on play-party games¹⁶⁴ or a songbook...That helper was managing all of that. She also [handled] the projector for the film.

My main thing was with the children. I loved the storytelling part and that was one of the conditions for me if I went back as coordinator, that I could still be doing the storytelling...Several of the people I worked with, though, then started telling stories too...A lot of times they would tell one, and then I would tell one. So we trained quite a few storytellers during those early days.

Another aspect of [the job], that for me turned out to be [a]...training ground in a way, is that because this was a new program and Ms. Arnold really wanted the world, but especially Chattanooga, to know about it. I did a lot of programs where I would go out to the Association for University Women. Or I would go to the different PTAs. And I would tell them about [the M.O.R.E.] program and tell them stories. So early on, I started telling stories to adults. Even though most of the stories at that time that I was telling were children's stories, I got very comfortable in front of audiences of adults.

¹⁶⁴ "London Bridge is Falling Down" is an example of a play-party game with participants and bystanders singing a song while playing the game. This form of homegrown entertainment, often accompanied by dramatic play or handclapping, evolved from children's games during an era when the playing of musical instruments was considered unseemly. According to the digital library of the Oklahoma Historical Society, "In the middle South and in the southern highlands, oral tradition preserved play-parties, and as pioneers migrated westward, they carried these traditions with them." See: <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/P/PL001.html>. Accessed online 5 February 2014.

I also was very involved in N.O.W., [the] National Organization for Women. That's just when it was coming about. And *Ms.* magazine had just come out...I still have a first edition of that magazine. I got on a speaker's bureau for N.O.W. So I would go to the Sertoma Sunrise Club¹⁶⁵ at 6 am, their breakfast meeting, and talk about women having the same rights and responsibilities as men did, and men having the same rights and responsibilities as women did. I made those [talks] into storytelling, because storytelling has always been such a door opener, and such a way *in* to people. You can have people all around the edges looking at the circle and thinking, "Oh, I'm so different from everybody else," or "I'm a little like that person, but I'm different from that person." But if you put a story in the middle, it's like everyone comes to it, and they're all ready to listen – at their own places – but they're all able to listen...to the same story...[It] was wonderful in that work with N.O.W., to be able to use storytelling (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 1-6).

In a follow-up interview in 2012, Regan-Blake elaborated on her position as a second-wave feminist, a member of a women's consciousness-raising rap group, and a subscriber to *Ms.* magazine:

We had a chapter [of N.O.W.] there in Chattanooga. We would meet once a month and people would break up, and have what they called consciousness-raising groups, rap groups. And the women I met there – I'm still meeting with, five of them... During that time, I also got...a subscription [to *Ms.* magazine].

¹⁶⁵ The Sertoma Club is a nonprofit service club with a mission to "get involved" with local communities. Founded in Kansas City by a businessman, a doctor and a newspaper publisher in 1912, it was originally called Co-Operative International. For more see: <http://www.sertoma.org/page.aspx?pid=338> Accessed online 4 March 2014.

And...in those magazines, they were having "Stories for Free Children."¹⁶⁶ Now, my heart was with the women's liberation movement, but I thought the stories were terrible. They were contrived.

That helped me clarify that I don't want to tell [the kinds of] stories [that] get the point first and then work backwards, trying to create a story that fits that. I knew that these other stories [from the folk tradition], a lot of other stories were showing women in strong roles – not a lot but there were some...I didn't want to tell those [*Ms.* magazine] stories just because they had two women that were both mommies and going out to work [because] the stories were not strong enough (CRB/2012 Interview #3, page 8).

Regan-Blake acknowledges her feminism more directly than most of the women interviewed for the Cotsen Storytelling Project, prizing her copy of the first issue of *Ms.* magazine and relishing her ongoing attachment to members of her N.O.W. rap group across the span of decades. But as a storyteller, she is first and foremost a champion of compelling narrative, unfettered by the contrivances of a feminist agenda. Admittedly, when she critiques "Stories for Free Children," it is through the lenses of White and heteronormative privilege as well as the lens of chosen childlessness. Given her lifelong infatuation with story, however, had Regan-Blake been a lesbian library worker, or a mother working to raise a child of mixed race in the 1970s, she still might have recognized that a political agenda could sink a good story.

¹⁶⁶ A number of the stories featured under the "Stories for Free Children" banner in *Ms.* Magazine were collected in a volume edited by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Stories for Free Children* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).

Honoring the integrity of a well-made narrative was a cardinal rule for her. As it was, she didn't need "Stories for Free Children" on the job: she was already on the lookout for multicultural picture books like Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day*.¹⁶⁷ And she knew where to find tales of strong women in other quarters: from the oral stories of old timers she would soon be meeting and in the 398.2 section of the library. She and Barbara Freeman would eventually bring those strong women's stories – from literature, lore and lived experience – to the stage in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

The Meandering Road to Jonesborough

Even before she and her cousin began touring as tandem tellers, Regan-Blake's interest in storytelling took her on a meandering route that led in the direction of Jonesborough. She says:

It's interesting to me...that really my whole adult life...the only for-real job I've done is storytelling. But while I was at the library, I heard about a folk music festival called the Folk Festival of the Smokies.¹⁶⁸ And it was happening up in a

¹⁶⁷ Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day* (New York: Viking Press, 1962). Born Ezra Jacob Katz, Keats, won the 1963 Caldecott Medal for his book *The Snowy Day* (New York: Weekly Reader Children's Book Club, 1962). Setting his books in urban settings with characters of color, he championed multiculturalism in children's literature. When the Jewish Museum in New York mounted a retrospective of his work, Laurel Graebner wrote in the *New York Times* (December 8, 2011):

In 1962 Ezra Jack Keats started a quiet revolution that in its way had as much influence as some of the decade's louder protests. An author and illustrator, Keats published *The Snowy Day*, about a small boy's delight in his first snowstorm. Nothing radical there. But the story differed profoundly from virtually all the mainstream American picture books preceding it: Peter, the little boy, was black.

For more see http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/09/arts/design/the-snowy-day-art-of-ezra-jack-keats-at-jewish-museum.html?_r=0 Accessed 20 February 2014.

¹⁶⁸ The Festival of the Smokies takes place in the Great Smoky Mountains, part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which, in turn, are part of the Appalachian mountain chain. The Smokies create the border between eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina.

little community in Cosby, Tennessee. In 1972 was the first time that I went to that festival. It was a whole new world for me – people picking a banjo and singing ballads. There were some blues singers there and lots of craft people. And one of the people that was performing was Thelma Boltin,¹⁶⁹ and she was [an] amazing woman from down in Florida...[who] kept alive a lot of storytelling traditions down there...She inspired people wherever she went. We didn't have her for very long into this revival, but she was a key person I think in the beginning. I remember hearing her telling a story on stage. She just told one story.

That day, walking around and seeing the crafts people...[I was] thinking, "If I could only live my life this way." I even thought, "Maybe I could learn how to make candles and travel around to all these [festivals]." 'Cause I was hearing that there were folk music festivals all over the United States and Canada...a whole network of them...I believe that that was really the beginning moment of wanting to devote my life to the folk arts.

The next year, I heard about a storytelling gathering that was going to happen in Jonesborough, Tennessee. That was the first – what was to become the National Storytelling Festival. And I heard Jimmy Neil Smith's name. Someone gave me his address, 'cause they knew that I was telling stories, and I might be interested in this 'cause it was right there in Tennessee. So I wrote Jimmy Neil a

¹⁶⁹ Born in 1904, "Cousin" Thelma Ann Boltin was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1976. A high school speech and drama teacher, she became the director of the Florida Folk Festival in 1954, two years after she helped to found it, and served in that position till 1965. She received a national award from the American Association for State and Local History "for contributions to preservation and popularization of Florida folkways, folklore and folk music." For more see: <http://www.foff.org/index.php/angel-band-mainmenu-89/38-cousnig-thelma-boltin> accessed online 9 February 2014.

letter (I wish I still had that letter or he had it): "Dear Jimmy Neil, I'm a storyteller. Chattanooga Public Library. And I wanted to know more about what was going to be happening." He wrote me back and said they were having Jerry Clower come on a Saturday night, and the next day they would have a little storytelling...in the downtown part of Jonesborough, Tennessee, and invited me to come. Said, "It would just be wonderful to have you up here." He was delighted to hear that there was a storyteller close by, that was doing that for their living (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 16-19).

When Regan-Blake decided to travel to the festival to Jonesborough, she didn't go alone. From the first moment of their (as yet unnamed) storytelling revival activities, the two cousins set out together towards Jonesborough:

I got my cousin, Barbara Freeman, and we got in her little yellow Datsun pickup truck and drove up. As was to become our custom, we stopped several times along the way. We stopped and we found out there was a gospel sing, and we pulled over. We were taking all side roads to get there. And we stayed there for a couple hours and, I think, hit a few flea markets.

By the time we finally got to Jonesborough, Jerry Clower was almost finished. We went up into – it was in a big auditorium, a high school auditorium – [Daniel] Boone High School. We went up into the balcony area. I can remember sitting – because all the seats were taken – sitting very close to those iron railings and dangling my legs over the side of that balcony and looking down and watching him. He was pretty much of a speck. I think there were almost a thousand people that were there... I had heard of Jerry Clower; he used to tell

stories [on the radio] about Marcel and that screen door...slamming: "Marcel! Don't slam that!" He was a big man, with a big voice and big kinds of images...mostly humor...It was fun...the ten or fifteen minutes [at] the end of the show that I caught (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 15).

Knowing that the Festival headliner Jerry Clower – a Euro-American, Southern, male humorist made famous on the radio – was performing in a thousand-seat auditorium that evening, Regan-Blake and Freeman meandered towards Jonesborough from Chattanooga, a distance of about two hundred miles. They filled their time with female pursuits – stopping to listen to gospel singers and to shop at flea markets along the way. Arriving (purposefully) late and finding no seats available, they sat on the floor with legs dangling over the balcony. This image calls to mind one of two girl cousins sitting at the end of a dock, dangling their feet over the St. Johns River, conspiring to "do Romeo" without the need for male actors. Regan-Blake concludes, gamely enough, that Clower's performance "was fun...the ten or fifteen minutes [at] the end of the show that I caught," employing warmth and politeness to convey a message that can be read as dismissive in an historical context.¹⁷⁰

Radner and Lanser would recognize this statement as an instance of juxtaposition, one of the feminist coding strategies described in their research on women's subversive messages. They write: "An item [in this case of speech] that seems unremarkable or unambiguous in one environment may develop quite tendentious levels of meaning in

¹⁷⁰ Having been born and bred in Georgia, I can confirm that passive-aggressiveness, clothed in politeness, is a favorite implement from the Southern woman's toolbox. It is used with incredible deftness to periodically tighten the screws on the patriarchy within which she dwells.

another" (416).¹⁷¹ Regan-Blake, speaking in 1998, remembers "looking down" on the headliner – "a big man with a big voice and big kinds of images for mostly humor" – whose fame does not keep him from being reduced to "pretty much of a speck" by the size of the venue. Given the unfolding history of the National Storytelling Festival and its culture of male privilege – embodied from the start in 1973 – it is hard not to read this passage as one of intuitive resistance to what would become one of Jimmy Neil Smith's favorite templates for a successful festival: a polished, funny, Euro-American, Southern man onstage, entertaining an audience too vast to experience the intimate co-creation of the everyday storytelling event.

Regan-Blake continues the CSP narrative:

Afterwards, I went to find Jimmy Neil. We didn't know where we were going to stay that night, or what we were going to do. I hunted up Jimmy Neil and he was delighted to see me. We greeted each other as if we were old friends. And he said, "Where are you staying?" because Jonesborough, then as now,¹⁷² has no motels or hotels, and we probably couldn't have really afforded that anyway. We said, "We brought our sleeping bags."

And he called out into the crowd in this mythic way and said, "Carolyn."

Just then, this woman, Carolyn Moore, was floating by with her long cape flying

¹⁷¹ Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature" in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 100, No. 398, Folklore and Feminism (Oct.-Dec. 1987): pp 412-425.

¹⁷² At the time of this writing, there are now two hotels in Jonesborough, the historic Eureka Inn, restored and reopened in 1999, and AmericInn Lodge and Suites, a chain hotel built in 2006.

behind her. Jimmy Neil said, "These girls need a place to stay." And she said, "Follow me." (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 15-16).

Regan-Blake remembers:

We went out of this huge auditorium. As a thousand people were getting into their cars and leaving, [and] we thought, "How are we going to stay behind [Carolyn in this crowd]?" And we got into our little truck. But we managed to do that.

She...led us to her daughter's home. [It] was the house on the hill [on Main Street] that was one of the first schools for Blacks in the South after the Civil War. That was also the location of the very first ghost storytelling for the National Storytelling Festival. That's where we spent our first night in Jonesborough (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 16).

Born in 1947, Jimmy Neil Smith was the same age as Regan-Blake when they met after Jerry Clower's concert that night in 1973. (Born in 1944, Barbara Freeman was, in fact, his senior.) The fact that Smith and Regan-Blake were the same age may have contributed to the sense of kinship that quickly developed between them, despite her soon-to-be-lauded status as Scheherazade in denim and his being a Southern gentleman given to wearing string ties. But when Smith asks where the two young women were planning to stay the night, and learns that they expected to sleep in their sleeping bags in the back of a pickup truck, he cannot "read" this as a proper solution. Instead he directs them into the protection of an older woman, Carolyn Moore.¹⁷³

The use of the diminutive "girl" to characterize adult women was not unusual for American men in the early seventies; in some circles this demeaning usage remains in

¹⁷³ Born in 1932, Moore would have been in her early forties in 1973.

play today. Smith's upbringing in the Southern patriarchal tradition – a tradition of intentional chivalry and unexamined, unintentional (or sometimes unapologetic) sexism – translated into a subordination of women on stage and on staff throughout his decades-long career as the Executive Director of the national storytelling organization. But regardless of the dismissive language and the unaddressed sexism, Smith's intent was to provide a safe place for what he read as two vulnerable young women to sleep. Freeman and Regan-Blake enjoyed many such sheltering moments in their life on the road and were grateful for them.

Their first night in Jonesborough, the two slept in a pre-Civil War-era home overlooking an historical cemetery. At this writing, multiple hauntings can be read in the scene. First, the house is haunted by its history as the site where African Americans living in Jonesborough were first educated following the Civil War. Second, its yard adjoins an old cemetery that provided a backdrop for early ghost storytelling concerts at the Festival, until growing numbers of Festival attendees threatened to trample the dead. Third, the ghost storytelling was banished from the graveyard in the early eighties, first to a tent and later to Mill Spring Park in the middle of town. Finally, the house provided the room where two young women were reduced to girls and sent to bed by the soon-to-be-lauded father figure of the American storytelling revival. This out-of-sight and out-of-mind mentality would come to articulate the ghosting of women in the public history of the revival.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Happily, the current owners of the historic house have followed in the Moore family's hospitality tradition. At this writing, they host an after-party for the storytellers on Sunday night when the National Storytelling Festival is done.

Meanwhile, in the CSP interview, Regan-Blake describes the life-changing events of the Festival's second day:

The next day, we went down to the center square...On the hay wagon [stage], Jimmy Neil had asked several different people to come and tell stories. It was mostly politicians and Ray Hicks...And Ray and Rosa had stayed...at Carolyn's house. In the early days, they used to stay over one night. That was my first time to hear Ray and to see him on that flatbed [wagon].

It was one of the first times he had ever been behind a microphone. He's six foot seven – so tall – he kind of loomed, as Gamble Rogers would say, like a praying mantis up there. He looked like a stick figure. He was tall and thin. And the microphone, they had put too high, and so his neck was stretched up even more. You could tell that he was nervous...[I had] mixed feelings: "What are [we] doing, taking this person out of the mountains and putting him behind a microphone?" But he was – the stories were – so wonderful that I soon forgot about that, and I was grateful that he was there with us to tell these stories.

Then Jimmy Neil asked if anyone else in the audience wanted to get up and tell a story. I instantly raised my hand, ran up there, and got to tell at the very first storytelling festival...I told "Brave Little Hunter," which is a participation story that I had been doing for the 3, 4, and 5-year-olds, and actually in the Bill Martin version is [called] *The Brave Little Indian*¹⁷⁵...It seemed to stereotype [Native Americans] a little bit, so I changed a few of the images there, made it "Brave Little Hunter."

¹⁷⁵ Bill Martin, *The Brave Little Indian* (Kansas City: Tell-Well Press, 1951).

The whole audience, it was some children, mostly adults – about 35 people – so it was a very different feeling than what had happened the night before with a thousand people. But everyone joined right in with me, did the participation gestures – looking for the owl and looking for the cat – and such. It was really fun. It was very exciting (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 16-17).

The tale Regan-Blake told in the swapping session was her adaptation of a 1951 picture book, *The Brave Little Indian* by Bill Martin. (Both are versions of "Going on a Bear Hunt," a finger play story familiar to many from family folklore.) On the recording of the Festival, her telling of "The Brave Little Hunter" still retains some of the marks of Martin's stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans; for instance, when the hunter's brothers hear him retell his adventure with a bear, they cry "Ugh!" as the punch line to the tale.

On the recording, the emcee, Jesse Safley, repeats the expression to make an editorial comment about the story, or the telling, or both, saying: "All I can say to that is – Ugh!" That was only one of his unconscionable remarks to performing tellers that day, and is surely an example of a man in a position of power, putting down a woman for telling a tale that has delighted generations of children and their parents. The condescension of Safley's remark to Regan-Blake goes unmentioned in her narrative. But in the context of this study Safley's critique of her children's story is directly answered by Regan-Blake's considerably more gracious dismissal of Clower's masculinist humor twenty-five years later.

She continues her remembrances of the first Festival:

Afterwards, Ray [and Rosa] and Barbara and I...went over and sat down on a bench and started talking. Barbara asked Ray about the story, "Wicked John and the Devil,"¹⁷⁶ 'cause that was a story that she had been telling. And I heard Ray Hicks tell it. He told it to Barbara, right there, on her tape recorder. She taped it, and we listened to it, and it was the first time I'd ever heard that story. It's very interesting to me to think back on that, because now 25 years later, I'm telling that story with the chamber music trio, which we might talk about later.¹⁷⁷ So that was my very first time to hear it, there in Jonesborough out in the open area with Ray telling it to us.

Afterwards, we all went back to Carolyn Moore's house, so we got to hear more stories. I told more stories there, so did Barbara. And really a deep friendship – some of the people that were to become the most important in my life developed that day. Jimmy Neil felt that the Jerry Clower thing was wonderful and brought in a lot of people, but *he was drawn to what happened on Sunday afternoon*. That, to him, was where the magic was, those 35 people sitting in the audience and getting up one after another, and telling a story on that hay wagon. That...became the seed for his vision of what was to happen with the National Storytelling Festival. That was in '73 (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 18).

Regan-Blake's Invitation to the Second National Storytelling Festival

¹⁷⁶ As mentioned previously, a version of "Wicked John and the Devil" is included in Richard Chase, Ed., *Grandfather Tales – American-English Folk Tales* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 29-37.

¹⁷⁷ Regan-Blake's experience with the Kandinsky Trio is covered in Chapter Six.

Regan-Blake and her cousin went back to their day jobs in Chattanooga, but she had fallen in love with the folk festival experience, and wanted more. She recalls:

The following year, I had continued to be involved with this folk festival in the Smokies. They were changing sites where they were going to hold the festival. And they had sent out a mailing to everyone that had been on their mailing list, saying... "Come up and help us...the week before the festival; we're going to be working on the land." I decided to take vacation to do that. During that year, I had kept in touch with Carolyn Moore. We had really clicked on that first meeting, and so we had been writing letters back and forth.¹⁷⁸

I planned a trip to go up to this festival [in the Smokies] and work on the land; I was there, camping, [for]...about four days. We were building steps up into where the stage area was going to be, building the stage itself, and putting in outhouses – it was hard work. There was a whole group of us that were there. That first evening, people were getting to know each other beyond our skills of hammering and sawing.

I told the folks there that I was a storyteller. Instantly it was, "Oh, tell us a story." I told a couple stories, and they were thrilled. This was the week before the festival. They said, "Would you tell stories for the festival?" I said, "Yes! I'd love to...My cousin, Barbara, tells stories too. How about if I invite her up?" And they said, "Great!" (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 18-19).

¹⁷⁸ These were letters in long-hand, and sent in addressed envelopes with postage stamps via the United States Postal Service, a task that takes far more effort and intention than the users of email may be able to appreciate today.

At a folk festival in the Smokies, Regan-Blake, a card-carrying member of N.O.W., left behind her persona of "Ms. Daisy" to get her hands dirty as a yeoman carpenter and on-site waste management worker for the event. As it turned out, her joining the volunteer work force provided camaraderie and networking opportunities that bore fruit beyond the pleasure of working for a good cause. Before all was said and done, Regan-Blake had received an invitation (in which she included her cousin) to tell on stage at the folk festival. But before the folk festival started, though, Regan-Blake had a side trip to make:

I worked for four days, and then I left there, [as]...planned, to go visit Carolyn Moore in Jonesborough, 'cause that was only another 15 miles up the road. I hadn't seen her in that whole year. I got in the car, drove in to her driveway. And instantly, just as dramatic as the year before, she came flying out of her door, still with a cape on, and she said, "[*gasps*] Connie, you're the one! Get in the car!" She had one of those old Jeeps that was open... So we hopped into the Jeep, [and] we went down [to town]. I didn't know where she was going but I trusted her implicitly; I knew whatever it was, it was what I was meant to do.

We went to the Parsons' Table, a restaurant there in Jonesborough. We got out of the car, again, without her really telling me what was going on or what she was planning on. She opened the door and announced, "Jimmy Neil, here she is," pushed me in the door, and shut it behind me. It turned out that this was a month before the second storytelling festival, and Jimmy Neil had been looking for someone to tell stories to children. Carolyn, as I had driven up, had said, "Oh, yes, Connie tells stories," and had taken me right down.

That late afternoon, Jimmy Neil and I ended up spending fourteen hours together and breaking only to eat and catch up and then come right back to talking. A very fast and long friendship was developed right then. I taught him how to clog dance that night. I told him what was happening [in] this folk music world of festivals that I was starting to go to. It was that same night that he went to his files and pulled out ["Two White Horses"], a [true] story¹⁷⁹ that a woman, Elizabeth Seeman, had written down and sent to a magazine called *The Tennessean*.¹⁸⁰ The editor of that magazine, [Ardi St. Clair] – she ended up on the first board of directors for NAPPS – ...felt [Seeman's story] wasn't really suitable for her magazine. But she asked Elizabeth, said, "I know someone in Jonesborough that's interested in storytelling. Can I send it to him?" And [Seeman] said, "Certainly."

Jimmy Neil pulled that story out and said, "You might be interested in this." I read the first part of the story, and I had that really strong feeling that my life was changing again. Because I realized in reading that story that this was a story that was really...for teenagers and adults. That this was something different than the stories I had been telling...That was another one of those huge – not only doors – it's almost like a huge archway that just appeared for me. Because I feel

¹⁷⁹ The real-life incident recounted in Elizabeth Seeman's short story was said to have occurred on Coffee Ridge near the town of Erwin in Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest.

¹⁸⁰ According to Jimmy Neil Smith, both in his October 1998 CSP interview and in a recent email to this writer, the magazine that Ardi St. Clair Lawrence edited was actually the *Tennessee Conservationist*. Sobol concurs with Smith in *The Storytellers' Journey*.

that that story is really what ended up taking me to main stages of festivals – again, the folk music festivals – across Canada and the United States. Because it was such a gripping story.¹⁸¹ Jimmy Neil and I spent long hours that first meeting and enjoyed each other so much. He asked me to come back and be featured at the second storytelling festival. I said, "Absolutely, yes," that I would love to (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 19-21).

During his CSP interview in October of 1998, Smith describes their second meeting with no little affection for "the girl" who volunteered to tell a tale the first time he met her:

Connie Regan, who told at the first festival in that section called "Telling Tales with the Masters" – she just hopped up on stage and told a tale as a guest – she came back to visit. And it was August or September. Now, the festival is in October [*laugh*], you know, and I was still trying to figure out who was going to tell stories. She comes to the back door of the Parson's Table, and opens it and there she stood. I recognized her immediately. And I said, "There's my children's storyteller!" (CSP/JNS Transcript, page 13).

Smith's narrative affirms the improvisational nature of the festival's planning in the early days. It also speaks to how he, at least initially, "read" Regan-Blake's potential value to the event: as "my children's storyteller." Yet in the same meeting, he gave her the text of Elizabeth Seeman's story "Two White Horses," the tale that changed the trajectory of Regan-Blake's repertoire away from young children and toward older audiences. Smith's

¹⁸¹ "Two White Horses" became Regan-Blake's signature story. It can be heard along with "Rag Doll," "Mr. Fox," "Mary Culhane" and "The Veil" on her 1999 CD *Chilling Ghost Stories for Teenagers and Adults* (formerly titled *Spirits Walk*).

instincts with regard to Regan-Blake's potential ran deeper than his acculturation as a Southern good ol' boy sometimes allowed him to articulate.

There can be no doubting the impact that Elizabeth Seeman's story had on Regan-Blake's repertoire, for it became the first of a series of haunting folktales and literary stories she told in contrast to the often humorous offerings of her performing partner, Barbara Freeman. For the first twenty years or more of her storytelling career, "Two White Horses" was her signature story, taking her to stages all over the world.

Regan-Blake picks up the CSP narrative:

I left there, visited some with Carolyn and then I went back and told stories [with Barbara Freeman] at this folk music festival. And people loved it...

I think that's one of the things about storytelling – especially in those early days – we had so many people telling us they had never heard stories told. At the same time, it seemed so familiar.

People resonated with it instantly. I think that it's in our DNA. It's inside us, our genes, to have that be a familiar experience: to listen and tell stories.¹⁸²

People really felt that [familiarity] as they started hearing new stories...in a stage atmosphere... It certainly has performance elements. [Storytellers nowadays are] using microphones and things. Yet people feel very personal with it. They feel

¹⁸² Storytelling scholars – and researchers in several disciplines – agree with the concept that human beings are wired for story. In *The Storytelling Animal –How Stories Makes Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012) Jonathan Gottschall writes: "The fact that story is a human universal is strong evidence of [a] biological purpose" (30). In the introduction to *Story Proof – The Science behind the Startling Power of Story* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007) Kendall Haven notes: "In our enlightened, literate, scientific, rational, advanced world, it is still story structure that lies at the core of human mental functioning" (vii).

like they're connected. When it really works, you can have 10,000 people, and each one still feels like that story is being told to them, that they are the listener taking in that story. Yet they're experiencing it within community, which I think is [*chuckling*] the best of all the worlds...

I so loved the story, "Two White Horses" [that] I wrote Elizabeth [Seeman] and asked her if I could tell it. And she wrote me right back and said, "Absolutely." Within a month then, I was back in Jonesborough. That year [1974], Kathryn Windham¹⁸³ was featured, and Marshall Ward.¹⁸⁴ Marshall Ward is another one that we lost kind of early on in the movement, and so a lot of people don't know his name. But really it's the Hickses, the Presnells, the Wards, and the Harmons. Those are the four main families up in the mountains in western North Carolina, around Banner Elk and Beech Mountain, the families that really kept the stories. So to get to meet Marshall Ward was a real thrill for me...

During the afternoon [of the second festival in Jonesborough] the Kennedys, who are still strong supporters of storytelling – they've been very

¹⁸³ Born in 1918, Kathryn Tucker Windham was a much-beloved storyteller, author, photographer, journalist, and one-woman-booster-club for Selma, Alabama. She was instrumental in founding that city's Alabama Tale Tellin' Festival, and a commentator for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" program. At the time of her death in 2011, she had been featured at the National Storytelling Festival 26 times, the most of any teller. To read her obituary and hear her tell a tale, visit: <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/13/137155004/alabama-storyteller-kathryn-tucker-windham-dies> Accessed 2 March 2014.

¹⁸⁴ According Richard Chase in his preface to *The Jack Tales* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), "my own first knowledge of The Jack Tales came in the spring of 1935 through Marshall Ward, a young fellow from western North Carolina" (vii). Ward's invitation to visit his Uncle Monroe – R.M. Ward – led Chase to Watauga County, North Carolina and the legendary story hoard of the Ward-Hicks-Harmon-Presnell families. Born in 1906, Ward appeared only once at the National Storytelling Festival – in 1974. He died in 1981.

influential in the whole preservation of Jonesborough – we had storytelling on their front porch. They remember fondly the 25 to 30 people that would come. Kathryn Windham was there in the afternoon, telling some stories. The Smith family, right across the street, I told in their backyard. And then in the evening, we went to a local school and had maybe 125 people. It was magical. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 21-22).

By the Festival's second year, the flatbed wagon stage and the hay bale seating were gone. Performances moved onto the front porches and into backyards of local supporters, not unlike the intimate venues Regan-Blake had seen at folk festivals.¹⁸⁵ For a brief time these small settings served the performers and audiences well, but as the festival grew, another solution would have to be found.

Later in the CSP interview process, Regan-Blake shared this memory of the second Festival:

It used to be everything was free on Sunday afternoon [at the Festival] 'cause we had [the performances] outdoors and there wasn't really any way to charge. Plus we wanted to invite the community [of Jonesborough] in to encourage them to get a taste of storytelling... We didn't even have a flatbed [wagon] at that time; we just had a little six-inch stage, a wooden platform that was set out. Doc [McConnell] introduced me, and I went up and told "Two White Horses." I was so moved... by that story... and it's still one of my favorites, a good, powerful, mountain story.

¹⁸⁵ The intimate settings, preferred in some folk festival venues, reflected the kitchen table and community settings enjoyed by the traditional performer whose expressive artistry was tuned to the register of small, familiar audiences.

After I finished, Doc came back to the microphone and he said, "I don't think Connie even knows this, but the woman that wrote the words to that story down, she's out in the audience: Elizabeth Seeman." That was the first time that I got to meet Elizabeth. She was already in her late 70s. She was a very powerful woman. She lived at the end of the paved road...[on a] dirt road, backed up to the national forest. Lived there with her husband, Earnest, for 40-something years. No electricity, no running water. They were both writers and creators, with a huge, rushing stream ten feet from their front door. That was a real thrill for me to get to meet her and to know that she had heard my story. The first thing she said was, "I didn't know you'd be so young!" [*chuckle*]...Her image of a storyteller was more 60 or 70, and at that time I was in my 20s. It was so thrilling to meet her though and to see where those words had come from¹⁸⁶ (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 8-9).

Though he emceed in 1974, Doc McConnell's name does not appear on the program for that year. "Funnyman 'Doc' Randall" appears on the program instead; the two "Docs" had worked together on the first appearance of an Old Time Medicine Show at that year's Festival. In an email Jimmy Neil Smith explains:

Doc McConnell was attending a folk festival somewhere in the Smoky Mountains, and he and others began talking about the old-time medicine shows that once travelled around the country. Doc (who was called Doc from his youth) got to thinking: Why doesn't he begin an old-time medicine show? He knew an old man

¹⁸⁶ During our March 31 phone call, Regan-Blake told me that when she was in her eighties, Seeman began to go by "Eliza" instead of "Elizabeth." Since that time, that's what Regan-Blake calls her as well.

named Doc Randall in Hawkins County (where Doc McConnell lived) who had an old wagon that could serve as a medicine show wagon. So, Doc McConnell asked Doc Randall to work with him on his medicine show. When Doc McConnell started the show, he was the medicine show barker (the funny man), and Doc Randall was in his troupe (playing the gut bucket [or washtub bass]). Oddly, the act was called Doc Randall's Old-time Medicine Show. It may have already been painted on the wagon by Doc Randall, but I'm not totally sure.¹⁸⁷

This example of the 1974 Festival organizers' casual approach to the Featured tellers' program billing speaks to the newness of their efforts in pulling the event together and the volunteer hours that supported the Festival's administration. But this template of folksy informality became institutionalized over the years, so that, for example, the programs misspelled some tellers' names multiple times without correction. In other instances, the individuals in performing groups went unnamed. These ongoing inaccuracies in identifying tellers would eventually be read not as the sponsoring organization's lack of experience in preparing a program, but as its lack of appreciation for the tellers' importance to the event. Meanwhile, the carelessness with which the programs were prepared presented more than one riddle for this researcher to solve. Happily these events took place within living memory, and Regan-Blake, Smith and other former NAPPS board members were available for consultation to fill in the blanks.

Spreading the Word about the Festival and NAPPS

With Regan-Blake and others as his conversation partners, Smith's image of what the festival could become, and his vision for a membership organization that would help

¹⁸⁷ Personal email from Jimmy Neil Smith on November 15, 2013. Used by permission.

to fund the expansion of the festival and the reach of the art form, began to come into fuller focus. Regan-Blake relates:

Jimmy Neil and I had started writing back and forth.¹⁸⁸ We were talking about storytelling. I was going to more and more folk music festivals. He was very interested in me being involved in [the storytelling] festival, and helping with ways to make it the best kind of event that we could. It was during that year, too, that Jimmy Neil really had the vision for there being a national organization... NAPPS, National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling.

Probably...I'd say at least 800,000 times, in storytelling performances and workshops...everywhere I went, I would say that full name, and then I would say, "If you can remember that and send in...five dollars, you too could be a member of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling!" We loved the name...NAPPS, that whole idea of taking a little nap and being able to have a story, just as you're drifting off to sleep. But Jimmy Neil had the vision to have an actual organization... It started in just two drawers and a file cabinet – that was really it – in his office. He started sending out a newsletter.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Again, these were letters written in longhand or typewritten and sent by what is called "snail-mail" today. The United States Postal Service played a significant role in the professional life of itinerant storytellers like Regan-Blake. That's covered in Chapter Three in a section on the egalitarian work habits she and Barbara Freeman developed in the early days of their touring.

¹⁸⁹ The newsletter, sent through the mail, became *The Yarnspinner* (published from 1977-1993), precursor to the *National Storytelling Journal* (published from 1984 to 1988.) When the *Journal* came to be perceived as too academic, it was repurposed as a popular publication, *Storytelling Magazine* (1989 to present), in a bid to gain newsstand sales. The magazine incorporated another popular periodical *Storytelling World* in 2000.

1974 is when I went back for the second festival to be [a] featured teller. I was also invited to the third. One of the reasons I performed so much in the early days – I think I performed every year for maybe five or six years...was because we didn't know about other storytellers. We didn't know of anyone that was out there really traveling and doing storytelling. Constantly we were on the lookout for people and spreading the word. Whenever there was any kind of media, [we were] telling people that we were looking for storytellers for this event (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 22-23).

Right after the second festival, Smith wrote to Regan-Blake, dating his typewritten letter "Halloween 74," and saying:

I haven't forgotten you. I haven't had the time to write any of you folks. And I'm doing it now. First off. I've heard NOTHING but GOOD comments on your storytelling activities at the fest. The comment: "She was just excellent" Or "marvelous." Or whatever. And I'm not JUST saying that to benice [sic]. I mean every word of it.

I'm always mentally planning next year's event. And I want your help. How about giving [some] thought (and you probably already have) to how we [could] expand and develop the children's aspect of the fest. NAPPS will be more and more a part of the fest. And here's how the association could be involved: consultation, advisory, and the like.

I'm working on NAPPS. I'll be getting something to you as soon as I can.

Send me ideas whenever they pop into your head. Keep thinking and telling

From 1992-1997, the national storytelling organization also published a newsletter entitled *Inside Story*.

stories and take care. Await further word (From photocopy of a letter provided by Regan-Blake).

If, as Caren Schnur Niele suggests, storytellers as performing artists are marginalized in the broader world of theatrical arts, children's storytellers – regardless of the gender of the teller (often, but not exclusively, female) – are even more so. This is true even within the revival community itself as will be discussed in a later chapter. Even so, in the letter above, Smith pondered on how the National Storytelling Festival could widen its market share by appealing more to families with children. Much later, the Festival programming tried to attract school groups with its Friday offerings. But those efforts have not been particularly successful; as it evolved over the years, the Festival's target audience has remained an adult one.

Meanwhile, Regan-Blake would share her thoughts, as Smith suggested in his letter, and more. She remembers:

By the time the third [festival] came around, Barbara and I – we both loved our library jobs, but I had still loved to travel, and now my new passion was storytelling...I felt that...I needed to get out into the world and tell these stories and collect the stories and encourage other people to tell stories. So I talked Barbara into quitting her job, and I quit my job.

July 1 [1975] we left the library and started traveling full-time. That following October, I had been asked to be featured at the [third annual] festival. I told Jimmy Neil I'd really like for Barbara to be featured with me because we were starting to tell stories together. That's when we started our [travels] around the United States, living in that truck for three years full-time. When I look back

on that, I can't imagine doing that now. But at the time, it was no hardship. It was a great adventure and we had so much fun. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 23-24).

Regan-Blake's Thoughts on the Use of the Word Revival

As the foremother of the festival-based American storytelling renaissance, Regan-Blake is keenly aware that performance storytelling remains on the margins of the culture's consciousness. Because of that marginalization, the majority of Americans are unaware that there has been a forty-year storytelling revival. They are more likely to believe that storytelling as an art form has disappeared. In her CSP interview Regan-Blake addresses this misconception:

You hear sometimes [that] "storytelling has died." I remember in our early days when...Barbara and I, – [she] was my partner for 20 years in the storytelling adventure – ...were doing a lot of national interviews. Everyone would always say, "Oh, storytelling is dead, and here you are reviving it." [But] I feel that storytelling has been with us through the whole continuum of time... From the beginning of speech...maybe even before that, our stories were with us.

And it was just...[during] a little blip in time that we turned away from storytelling, and other media...took our attention and took our focus outside of ourselves and to the movies and television and radio. But now I think we're turning back. I don't think we ever have to worry about storytelling dying. That's why this is such important work, because in future generations, storytelling is going to continue to be an integral part of people's lives. And to look at this particular refocusing of attention on storytelling I think is very important (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 13).

Shared Invitations and Shared Bonds with Barbara Freeman

Smith issued his invitation to Regan-Blake to tell at the third festival in 1975, and accepted her suggestion to have her cousin accompany her to the stage (though Freeman was unnamed in the program which read: "Connie Regan and friends"). Beyond the concerns about identifying the tellers who performed at the event raised in a previous paragraph, this late addition to the roster demonstrates again how flexible the early festival arrangements were.

It also suggests Smith's high level of trust regarding Regan-Blake's programming instincts from early on in their collaboration. When she said she wanted to share the stage with her performing partner, Smith had only seen Freeman in public performance once – for the space of one picture book telling – two years before. Including her cousin in the lineup – even without billing – was the first step toward Regan-Blake's blossoming into the role of the festival's unnamed artistic director. Suggesting that Smith include her cousin also demonstrates Regan-Blake's embodiment of the feminist "ethics of care" in bringing Freeman to the Festival's stage along with her.

The multiple links between Regan-Blake and Freeman, forged not only in the bloodline, but also by years of shared antics during family vacations, gave the two a powerful, multi-layered feminine bond. Freeman talked Regan-Blake into applying for the storytelling position at the library where she worked, and then housed her in close quarters for the nine months of the pilot program. When the program revved up again for its multi-year run, Freeman once again hosted Regan-Blake until she could find her own housing.

Hosting her cousin in a tiny trailer that already housed a spousal relationship may have created extenuating circumstances, or it may have acted as a buffer for any existing tensions in Freeman's personal life, for her marriage ended in 1973. When she left Chattanooga to tour with Regan-Blake in 1975, she was no longer Mrs. Barbara Wright; she was once more Barbara Freeman. The two women had learned in childhood that they were compatible living side by side, and that would come in handy when they went on the road together for three years.

Increasingly ready for a new adventure, Regan-Blake talked Freeman into leaving public library and going on the road. Now that neither was fettered by spousal ties, they pointed themselves toward something they weren't sure would actually work: making their living as storytellers. Regan-Blake's lightheartedness in recalling her early career belies the risks she and Freeman took setting out with plans to live in the back of a pickup truck for a period that stretched to a thousand days. Traveling together made the prospect of that life style less risky and more pleasurable for both.

Conclusion

Family stories, kinship and connections were the major tropes in this portion of Regan-Blake's narrative. Her tending of relationships – across family lines with parents and her cousin, across racial boundaries with a co-worker and across class lines with the preschoolers she served in the M.O.R.E. program and across decades with her N.O.W. rap group members – became a model for cultivating connections of all sorts at folk festivals and with Ray and Rosa Hicks, Carolyn Moore and Jimmy Neil Smith. As the next chapter makes clear, she carried that dedication to nurturing relationships out on the road when she and Freeman embarked together in the summer of 1975, and it helped

them deepen their own ties and forge links with sponsors, publicists, presenters and fellow performers who shortly became friends and champions.

Regan-Blake's willingness to strike out into the unknown carried her across Europe and across America before carrying her into a now-forty-five year career as a touring storyteller. At the same time her willingness to invest her considerable aesthetic instincts and her organizational skills into a collaborative production like the National Storytelling Festival made her an extremely valuable conversation partner for the Festival's founder. From 1974 forward Regan-Blake became Smith's envoy to the folk festival and performing art worlds outside Jonesborough and by the third Festival she was his artistic director for the annual event. For the next decade Regan-Blake's investment in the Festival and her friendship Jimmy Neil Smith returned to her tenfold in the connections she would forge in the name of NAPPS. And as the coming narratives will show, by 1981 Smith's investment in Regan-Blake and her cousin would return to him ten-thousand-fold.

CHAPTER THREE: Piecing Together a Work Life

Introduction

The mark that Connie Regan-Blake made on the world of revival storytelling performance from 1975-1995 had more than two handprints, for she began her touring life with her first cousin and performance partner, Barbara Freeman. To their knowledge, there were no other touring, tag-team tellers on whose well-worn map Regan-Blake and Freeman could trace their unfolding journey. This chapter examines how, as "the Folktellers," they became explorers and cartographers themselves.

With no clear plan of how to create the life of a traveling storyteller, the two were open to improvisation and trial and error in both their evolving performance mode and the logistics of touring. With their shared savings, their commitment to storytelling, and their faith in their potential to succeed as performing artists, they created a performance aesthetic, a touring life and work habits that allowed their partnership to flourish for twenty years. Additionally, the duo became ambassadors for the fledgling National Storytelling Festival and (in 1975) its newly hatched organizational arm, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS).

Two Pioneers in a Unique Creative Partnership

The women's long-term success was built on their deep connection as longtime creative cohorts whose temperaments and performance skills complemented each other well. In Freeman's comedic genius, Regan-Blake found the perfect foil for her own dramatic intensity and the combination proved irresistible to audience members of all ages. In this study Freeman's voice is heard chiefly in conversation with her cousin or in

Regan-Blake's tribute remarks, so I will draw upon another firsthand observer to offer another perspective on her charisma and credentials. Here's how reporter Barbara Home Stewart described Freeman in a 1978 feature story in *School Library Journal*:

My first encounter with Barbara Freeman was in 1973 when I visited the Chattanooga Public Library in Tennessee...I knew at once that I was in the presence of a new kind of solar energy...a true mover and shaker...The ingenuity of Barbara's programs and the audacity of her approach to children's literature most likely was influenced by her background as a horse-back riding instructor, lifeguard, bus girl in Yellowstone National park, and her years of teaching seventh grade...before earning her M.L.S. degree (17).¹⁹⁰

Like many of the people Regan-Blake and Freeman met along the way, Stewart started out in a professional relationship with them, reporting on their exploits, but ended up a personal champion of the duo, even influencing the Folktellers' fee structure. Two years after their first meeting, she hosted a house concert for the two women in the living room of her Philadelphia home, inviting fifteen school and public librarians to meet them. In her article she writes: "In the months and years to come, the folktellers [sic] realized many profitable engagements from this initial introduction to Philadelphia's friendly librarians" (18).¹⁹¹ This is but one example of the loyalty the pair inspired among their admirers and producer/presenters; this kind of scenario was repeated over and over in the coming twenty years.

¹⁹⁰ Barbara Home Stewart, "The Folktellers: Sheherazades (sic) in Denim," *School Library Journal*, November 1978: 17-21.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

Our Heroines Set Out without Knowing Where They Are Going

The summer before the third National Storytelling Festival in 1975, Regan-Blake and Freeman began their travels together, piecing together a work life, and a life's work. By the time they returned to Jonesborough in the fall, they had already begun to develop a tandem storytelling performance style and to attract the support of folk festival and coffee house presenters. They had received the blessing of a children's book author whom they admired as well. And they had secured bookings that would take them through the winter months; one gig led to another in a pattern that would repeat itself for two decades.

For the Folktellers' creation narrative, I draw on the first of the "CSP/CRB" interviews – a joint session conducted with Regan-Blake and Barbara Freeman – on August 18, 1998 at Regan-Blake's home in Asheville, North Carolina. As the tape begins to roll, Freeman sits on the couch in Regan-Blake's living room alone, a coffee table at her knee. She's dressed in a flowing, patterned skirt, a shell and a blazer – that is, performance garb. At 54, she wears her hair in a curly bob with a single blaze of gray in the curls above her left brow. Regan-Blake enters in a long lavender skirt and a blouse of royal purple, a brooch at her throat – also dressed for a performance. As 51, she wears her dark,¹⁹² shoulder-length hair straight, pulled back at the temples with two combs. She is carrying a low bowl filled with flowers from her garden. She sets it on the coffee table before them, and then sits beside her cousin, at Freeman's left. Facing the camera, they

¹⁹² Because her hair went gray prematurely, Regan-Blake dyed it for years. At some point when I lived in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (from 1999-2003), she came to town and called me, inviting me to come see her newly cut short hair-do in its natural hue – dove gray. At this writing, as pictures in the appendix will attest, she remains a beautiful woman in her maturity, keeping more fit and feeling stronger at 67 than she did for decades.

are side by side as they would be in performance: Freeman at stage right, and Regan-Blake at stage left. Before her cousin's entrance, Freeman had remarked that sometimes they were ushered onstage and found themselves on the wrong side of each other, and then had to switch sides in front of the audience to get ready to perform. The day of this shoot, they were on each other's "right side."

The women's responses to our questions capture the readiness for adventure with which they set out in Freeman's yellow Datsun pickup truck (christened D'Put¹⁹³) with their pooled life savings of \$2000. The tape shows how often the two gesture with their hands (very often) and make the same faces we would see in performance to cue the comedy or the drama in a given narrative. The transcripts document the conversational give-and-take that came so naturally to these two first cousins. On the road, starting in July of 1975, the familial give-and-take between them blossomed more fully into a tandem storytelling performance act and a joint entrepreneurial effort. They remember:

BARBARA: [When we left the library] we didn't have a job in the world. We had some tickets to a folk festival in New York – Fox Hollow¹⁹⁴ near Troy, New York. When we got to the festival, we were audience. But...there was a flood in our campground. And they said, "Come and camp with the performers." So we did.

¹⁹³ According to the duo: "D'Put" was shortened from "Datsun Pickup Truck."

¹⁹⁴ The Fox Hollow Festival of Traditional Music and Arts was held on the estate of folksingers Bob and Evelyn Beers in Petersburg, New York. It occurred annually in the summer from 1966 until 1980, and usually took place in August. For more see *A History of Folk Festivals in the United States: Feasts of Musical Celebration* by Ronald D. Cohen (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 75.

We set up a little campfire at Fox Hollow, and a lot of the people from the festival came and listened to us tell stories. From that, we got a sort of makeshift invitation to come to [another] festival [in Hartford, CT] and maybe they would put us on stage, if they had time...(CSP/CRB Transcript 1, page 4).

In his *New Age* cover story on the duo, Rex Weyler describes the same events: "Arriving [for the Fox Hollow Festival] in Petersburg they pulled into the campground and picked a good spot down by the river...How, they wondered, would they ever find the festival organizers? The backstage area was fenced off, and everybody and their dog was trying to get back there" (32).¹⁹⁵ As Weyler tells it, the river rose that night, and unable to awaken Freeman fully, Regan-Blake drove to higher ground where she was directed to park their camper in the performers' area. When Freeman awoke, Regan-Blake told her:

"You wanted backstage, didn't you?" That evening they sat around the campfire with some of the performers and joined in the storytelling. "Hey," said a woman in the crowd, 'you two should go to Hartford! Caroline and Sandy Paton¹⁹⁶ are going to have a storytelling workshop there'...[When they arrived in Hartford,] Sandy Paton managed to squeeze them into the program...[and] the crowd loved them" (32).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Rex Weyler, "On the Road with the Folktellers" in *New Age* magazine (July 1980), 32.

¹⁹⁶ In the late fifties and early sixties, Caroline and Sandy Paton co-founded the Folk-Legacy record label on which Gordon Bok, Rosalie Sorrels, Frank Proffitt recorded albums. Their catalog of recordings eventually topped 120 items, and their efforts were honored from coast to coast, including awards from the California Traditional Music Society and the Eisteddfod Festival of traditional arts in Massachusetts.

¹⁹⁷ Rex Weyler, "On the Road," 32.

In one of our dissertation dialogues in March of this year, Regan-Blake corrected Weyler's account: it was Sandy and Caroline Paton themselves who heard the two cousins tell stories at Fox Hollow, and encouraged them to come to the festival in Hartford. She told me: "Paton *did* put us on stage and before we got to the bathroom afterward, someone stopped us and asked us to come to their school. It was our first paid job as a duo."¹⁹⁸

The cousins take up the CSP narrative:

BARBARA: And so it happened...that we *did* get a little spotlight [on stage in Hartford] and got several jobs from that experience...

CONNIE: That festival that we went to the next weekend in Hartford – again, it was a music festival. Because the only storytelling [festival]...at that time was the National Storytelling Festival, and it was only in its like third year.

CONNIE: We were unloading some things from [the] back of the truck [and] heading into where we were going to tell some stories. Barbara had her limber jacks – dancing, wooden, mountain dolls. And we had some books and some other things. Some children saw us and asked what we were doing, and we said, "We're storytellers... We're going to tell some stories [inside]." And they asked us to tell some stories right there in the parking lot. We started off – I told "Three Billy Goat's Gruff"¹⁹⁹...And Barbara told one. Then one of the children asked for

¹⁹⁸ Phone conversation with Regan-Blake on March 31, 2014.

¹⁹⁹ "Three Billy Goats Gruff" is a folktale collected in Norway by Peter Christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe. To read a version, see: <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0122e.html#gruff> Accessed online 12 February 2014.

Where the Wild Things Are – that picture book.²⁰⁰ Barbara and I both knew that story from when we were at the library and told it as a picture book, holding the book and turning the pages. Well, we just started in on it. Barbara started off and I came in. That was our very first tandem story.

BARBARA: So we said: "That night, Max wore his wolf suit –"

CONNIE: "And made mischief of one kind –"

BARBARA: "And another."

CONNIE: "And his mother called him –"

BARBARA: "'Wild thing.'"

CONNIE: "And Max said—"

BARBARA: And we were off and running. Going by the parking lot was a man...

CONNIE: Bob Zentz.²⁰¹

BARBARA: ...a famous songwriter. He runs a coffeehouse near Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. He heard [*Where the Wild Things Are* and] said, "That's my son's favorite story. I'll give you all a hundred dollars if you'll come to my festival²⁰² in six or seven weeks and tell that story." He also...got the

²⁰⁰ Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012). First published in 1963. Shortly after their first spontaneous (and free) performance of his story, Regan-Blake and Freeman contacted Sendak and got his permission to perform the work.

²⁰¹ A folk music impresario and prolific musician, Bob Zentz has also been praised as a songwriter by Johnny Cash and Pete Seeger. Zentz established and ran Ramblin' Conrad's Guitar Shop and Folklore Center in Norfolk, Virginia. (<http://www.bobzentz.com/bio.htm>). Accessed 14 February 2014.

²⁰² In our March 31, 2014 phone call, Regan-Blake named the event Zentz invited them to: the Old Dominion Folk Festival, which he ran from 1971-1981. By the time

president of the college or the dean of one of the schools of education to see us, and *he* asked us to do a six-week course in continuing education. So right away, we had our winter mapped out. We had enough money; we knew we could live for the next few months. And we were pretty much immersed in storytelling – what we really wanted to do (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 4-7).

Remembering a Road Not Taken

Traveling together offered the two women a chance to develop a tandem repertoire. But since, to the best of their knowledge, the career path they were seeking didn't exist, Regan-Blake and Freeman had to imagine where the journey might lead them. Before long, several accidents of fate – a flooded campsite, an encounter with children, a chance meeting in a parking lot – took them beyond the venues they had envisioned and into a world of enthusiastic audiences and generous champions. But here's how they originally envisioned their journey:

CONNIE: When we left the library, we did not think that we could make a living. I mean, who would have thought you could make a living telling stories? That was in '75, in the summer. As we were driving up from Chattanooga, all the way up to this Fox Hollow Festival that Barbara mentioned in New York, as we were going through New Jersey...we were talking about "How could we do this storytelling? What could we do?" 1976 was coming up – the Bicentennial. So we were talking about, "We could learn some Paul Revere stories." [*laugh*]

BARBARA: [*both laugh*] We stopped at a library...

CONNIE: ...in New Jersey... We looked up colonial stories...

Regan-Blake and Freeman got to Norfolk and took money for telling *Where the Wild Things Are*, they had the permission of the author.

BARBARA: "Once upon a midnight clear..." [*Both laugh*]

CONNIE: We thought, "We could go to malls, to shopping centers and tell stories." But what then happened – just within a few days – was this whole thing we were just saying about the folk festival and then going over to Connecticut. I mean, getting two in-the-future jobs was pretty exciting! Then it just unfolded (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 6-7).

In hindsight, the two recount with some hilarity how they had envisioned telling Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere"²⁰³ at shopping malls. Freeman attempts to recite the opening line of the poem: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere..." But instead of quoting Longfellow, she says: "Once upon a midnight clear." As near as I can tell, this is an inadvertent mash-up of Edgar Allen Poe's narrative poem "The Raven"²⁰⁴ ("Once upon a midnight dreary...") and the opening line of Edmund Sears' Christmas carol ("It Came upon the Midnight Clear").²⁰⁵

The subsequent laughter that the two women share may be in recognition of Freeman's putting "The Raven" and a nineteenth century Christmas carol into Longfellow's mouth. Since both Sears and Longfellow were Unitarians – and Edgar Allen

²⁰³ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1861. For more see: <http://www.paulreverehouse.org/bio/bio.html>. And for the complete text of Longfellow's poem see: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15640>. For commentary on its purpose see: http://www.hwlongfellow.org/works_paul_reveres Ride.shtml and <http://www.paul-revere-heritage.com/midnight-ride-myths.html>. Accessed online 12 March 2014.

²⁰⁴ Edgar Allen Poe first published "The Raven" in 1845.

²⁰⁵ Edmund Sears wrote "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" in 1845.

Poe dated one (Transcendentalist Sarah Helen Whitman), the three dead writers may not have minded much wherever they are in the hereafter. But a subliminal element embedded in Freeman's "mash-up" adds another layer of meaning to the women's shared laughter. By the time of this interview, Freeman had re-embraced her Catholicism with a fervor that contributed to the duo's decision to dissolve their partnership in the mid-nineties. The Christmas carol reference may have triggered a release of tension over this tender topic.

It is intriguing to note that when the two women tried to imagine a path that would allow them to make a living telling stories, the route they envisioned was that of Paul Revere's ride. For all his casting his audience as children, Longfellow did not pen his poem to entertain preschoolers. Writing in 1860 on the eve of the Civil War, the poet sought to make a hero out of a silversmith who was also the father of sixteen children.²⁰⁶ Despite some historical inaccuracies, Longfellow succeeded in memorializing Revere as a patriot for generations to come. When the Folktellers imagined themselves reciting his densely packed verses to distracted shoppers in a setting dedicated to commerce, they removed themselves in every aspect – text, audience, and venue – from what they knew and loved: traditional folk tales and award-winning picture books shared freely with audiences in locations that privileged listening.

This cramped, unintuitive vision of what life as a storyteller seems to be an instance in their early career in which the dominant discourse penetrated the duo's

²⁰⁶ Paul Revere's first wife, Sarah Orne, died shortly after the birth of their eighth child. That same year he married Rachel Walker, who gave him eight more children. Perhaps not surprisingly, Revere outlived his second wife as well. For more on his biography, see: <http://www.paulreverehouse.org/bio/bio.html> accessed online 12 March 2014.

consciousness. That discourse brings with it the pressure that a capitalistic, consumer-driven culture imparts on its acculturated-toward-service and relationship-focused female members. Happily, in retrospect, these two women, who dedicated their lives to an expressive art form associated with and often directed toward children, can see how unfitting a masculinist, commerce-fixated model of success was to their needs and skills and inclination. And they could laugh at the ludicrousness of a path they did not take even as Paul Revere gallops by in their memories.

Establishing a Brand

One of the producers of the folk festival in Hartford, Bill Domler,²⁰⁷ ran a printing company by day and a coffeehouse by night. He not only spread the word about the two women's work, but also set up a photo shoot, providing their first PR picture, and printed flyers and business cards for them. Here's how they tell it:

CONNIE: We had so many people that helped us so much. It was just like storytelling was kind of waiting and ready to happen. Bill Domler was at that folk festival in Hartford; he was one of the people that was putting it on. And he ran a coffeehouse called the Sounding Board. It's still in operation – mostly folk music – all folk music at that time. He really took a shine to what we were doing. He

²⁰⁷ Bill Domler and his father founded the Connecticut Family Folk Festival in 1974. He co-edited (with Jan Domler, Chris Morgan, Don Sineti and Karen Kobela) a collection called *Traditional Folk Songs as Sung by the Greater Hartford Folk Music Society* (Hartford: Greater Hartford Folk Music Society, 1980). According to Folk Legacy records founder Sandy Paton, Domler was "a prime mover in the folk world in Connecticut" (<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=32730>). He died in 2001 at the age of 53. A folk disc jockey on the University of Hartford's WWUH FM (91.3) for more than two decades, Domler was eulogized in the Courant newspaper's rock critic Roger Catlin as "A Folk Legacy" (http://articles.courant.com/2001-04-04/features/0104040953_1_folk-music-print-shop-gordon-bok). Both articles accessed online 14 February 2014.

thought it was wonderful that we were telling stories. So he sat down and wrote about fifteen other people that ran coffeehouses and said, "If these two come through, you've got to hire them." His day job was running a print shop. And he got someone to come in and take a photograph.

BARBARA: He took us over to the church next door, set us between two pews [*chuckle*]...with kind of an interesting wainscoting in the background. And we had our first promo picture. He developed it as soon as he could, while we were still there visiting. He had a house concert for us and invited all of us friends and anybody influential in the area that he could think of.

He encouraged the duo to decide on a professional name for their business cards. They wanted a name that informed their potential sponsors that, increasingly, they were targeting older children, teens and adults as listeners. Freeman says:

We were talking about what to call ourselves, 'cause we were calling ourselves Barbara Freeman and Connie Regan-Blake at one performance, and at the next performance, we were Connie Regan (at the time) and Barbara Freeman... We said we didn't want to be called storytellers because then everybody would think, "It's a preschool story hour for five and six-year-olds" (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 11-12).

The ongoing, widespread devaluation of jobs associated with young children is well known to storytellers who cut their teeth on preschool programs. Regan-Blake and Freeman had not only paid their dues in this arena, but also they had discovered the power of storytelling to entrance older listeners.

Escaping the Story Hour Means Opening a Can of Worms

The fact is that despite lip service given to young children's needs by American policy makers, the institutionalized devaluation and low pay scale of those who actually work with kids (mostly women) suggest that there are economic incentives for wage earners *not to be associated* with the care of young children. In contemplating a professional name for their work as a touring duo, this realization may have fed Regan-Blake and Freeman's desire to be mistaken for "preschool story hour" purveyors.

As the storytelling revival unfolded this sentiment would resonate with other tellers as well. Sometimes that sentiment was read as both anti-children and anti-librarian. In an essay published in 2000, Wendy Welch articulates what she identifies as an anti-librarian backlash in the early days of the revival:

Ironically, as storytelling boomed [between 1973 and 1982], it also attempted to change its image. Storytellers who had been on the scene since the 1970s were now recognized as both pioneers and stars, and their performances before largely adult crowds in Jonesboro²⁰⁸ sparked new ambitions in practitioners of the art

²⁰⁸ Historically the name of the town has been spelled both "Jonesboro" and "Jonesborough." In an email to me on February 14, 2014, Jimmy Neil Smith explains: The original spelling was JONESBOROUGH. But in the early days of newspaper printing in America, the "ugh" was dropped to save time and money (when lead was used to create the letters for printing). So, for years the town's name was spelled JONESBORO. Then, during the town's restoration period in the 1970s, while the official name was JONESBORO, we often used "HISTORIC JONESBOROUGH" when we spoke of things related to the re-birth of the town as a "tourist attraction." Then in the early 1980s when I was mayor, the members of the Board of Aldermen and I voted to OFFICIALLY and LEGALLY change the spelling to JONESBOROUGH. The joke was "We put the 'ugh' back in Jonesboro." Gradually, it has stuck (personal email).

In her 1985 article for the *New York Times*, Wilma Dykeman cites 1983 as the year of the official name change. Welch's spelling in her text may be indicative of the era during which she spent time in the town.

form; the war cry became "it isn't just for kids anymore."²⁰⁹ As the pendulum swung, librarians became something of a target for the type of storytelling associated with stale, dry talentless performances in institutions..." (16).²¹⁰

Welch continues:

Many tellers disagree with this pendulum swing away from storytelling's library past. They remind tellers that it is not the roll call of those who performed at Jonesboro between 1972 and 1982 who are the pioneers, but the librarians who nursed the flickering flame of oral narrative from 1906 to 1972. Ironically, in many cases, those who told at Jonesboro in its inception were librarians (16).²¹¹

In fact, the initial wave of female storytellers featured in the first ten years of the National Storytelling Festival included ten library workers and librarians (Freeman, Regan-Blake, Jackie Torrence, Carole Lieta and Nancy Schimmel as Sister's Choice, Ellin Greene, Cynthia Orr, Julia Ruth Richardson, Elizabeth Ellis and Gayle Ross as Twelve Moon Tellers), nine traditional tellers and balladeers (Te Ata, Hattie Hicks Presnell, Janie Hunter, Cora Bardwell, Sarah Cleveland, Dellie Norton and Evelyn Ramsey, Maggi

²⁰⁹ As it happens, I published "Storytelling: It's Not Just Kids' Stuff" based on my experience as a producer (and interviews with several other producers) of adult storytelling concert series. The 1997 pamphlet was intended for theatrical and academic presenters who were unfamiliar with verbal artists outside the "solo performer" mold. Since Welch has demonstrated a familiarity with my publications (see below), her "war cry" may be an oblique reference to the unintentionally kid-dissing sentiment that could be read in the pamphlet's title. "Storytelling: It's Not Just Kids' Stuff" can be found at: <http://www.kindcrone.com/publications/storytelling/> Accessed online 13 February 2014.

²¹⁰ Wendy Welch, "Perceptions of Inequality: Women in the Art and Business of Storytelling," in *Women in Storytelling*, edited by Afra Kavanagh (Sydney, Nova Scotia: University of College of Cape Breton Press, Inc. 2000), 13-31.

²¹¹ *ibid.*

Peirce, Rosebud Yellow Robe), six theatrically trained tellers (Angelyn DeBord as part of the Roadside Theater, Gwenda LedBetter, Laura Simms, Heather Forest, Linda Goss, Mara Cappy), three educators (Harriet Allen Insignares, Hannah McConnell Gillenwater, Mary Carter Smith), two authors (Kathryn Windham, Diane Wolkstein), and a single folklorist (Linda Morley). On the storytelling circuit across thirty-five years, I have never heard any of these women trash the performance tradition in which she was rooted.

I wrote a 1996 *Storytelling World* magazine article, "A Storytelling Artist at Work"²¹² which Welch quotes to make her point about the seeming belittlement of librarians among members of the revival community. Attempting to address "Some Not-So-Popular Realities" about the storytelling profession based on my then-twelve years' experience as a nationally known teller, I had written: "Spaulding [sic] Gray"²¹³ and

²¹² Milbre Burch, "A Storytelling Artist At Work," *Storytelling World* magazine, Issue 10 (Summer/Fall, 1996), 17-21.

²¹³ Actor and writer Gray worked with Richard Schechner in the seventies before cofounding the Wooster Group with Elizabeth LeCompte. In the eighties he turned his focus to autobiographical monologues. He was featured at the National Storytelling Festival once – in 1985. His use of "the f-word" there generated numerous complaints from the audience and he was never invited back. Despite the furor in Jonesborough, three years later Jimmy Neil Smith included Gray's story "Terrors of Pleasure: The House" in the anthology he edited, entitled *Homespun: Tales from America's Favorite Storytellers* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988). Though unidentified, Gray's face appears on the cover of the book beneath the title and above the editor's name. His image is flanked on the left by images of Diane Wolkstein and Brother Blue (Dr. Hugh Morgan Hill), and on the right by images of Jackie Torrence and Ray Hicks. All are similarly unnamed.

For those who have worked to widen the palate of listeners at the National Storytelling Festival, and to make the storytelling revival community a more inclusive one, Gray's experience in Jonesborough remains a painful memory of a link left unforged, especially in the wake of Gray's suicide in January of 2004. The tellers' and audience's lingering, shared hunger for (at least slightly) edgy material at the festival, and the producers' desire to increase revenues by adding separate ticket events, led to the establishment of the Midnight Cabaret in 1993. That favored slot is a ninety-minute set of

Garrison Keillor²¹⁴ don't describe themselves as storytellers, although they occasionally allow themselves to be described as such. Should this be telling us something? Yes."

(18).²¹⁵ To make her point about librarian bashing, Welch cites the next two paragraphs of my *Storytelling World* article:

This news just in: The word storytelling has a bad rap in America, except when invoked with poetic license to describe the craft of a filmmaker or novelist.

Otherwise it seems to call to mind the image of a musty librarian reading from a book to a group of two-year-olds.²¹⁶

programming that begins at 10:30 pm on Friday and Saturday nights at festival with the understanding that the material is intended for adult listeners.

²¹⁴ A writer and Grammy-winning radio personality, Keillor began his professional radio career in 1969, hosting a morning show for what is now Minnesota Public Radio that became the template for *A Prairie Home Companion* (christened as such in 1971). Though his name was brought up by various Festival planning committees, according to Smith (in an email to this writer on 14 February 2014), Keillor was never officially approached, and has never appeared at the National Storytelling Festival or any event hosted by the national storytelling organization. In our phone conversation in March, Regan-Blake remembered that they had approach Keillor and been turned down. This bears more research.

²¹⁵ Embraced as two of America's best-known storytellers – after Walt Disney – neither Gray nor Keillor saw much to be gained by identifying with a storytelling revival tethered to the National Storytelling Festival and Jonesborough, TN. In a private conversation at the end of a news conference in Honolulu, Hawaii on November 16, 1985, I asked Keillor if he considered himself a storyteller, and he demurred, suggesting that he connoted storytelling with an amateur "dog and pony show." Seeing him improvise his monologue in a live performance that night, I understood that he was both a writer and an oral composer of great skill. By that time his *Prairie Home Companion* radio show had been going strong for fourteen years. He didn't need an artistic home place in upper East Tennessee; he had one already in Lake Wobegon.

²¹⁶ *Storytelling World* (which Welch quotes above) published an edited version of what I had originally written in "A Storytelling Artist at Work." The full text read: "Otherwise, it seems to call to mind for the general public the stultifying image of a musty and mustachioed lady librarian reading from a book to a large group of two-year-olds and their delirious-with-cabin-fever parents." I can only hope that it is clearer from

Storytelling is popularly associated with babysitting. This PR problem can get you coming and going. If your work as a storyteller is aimed at adults, no one will believe you. And if you are dedicated to your work as a children's performer, some people may wonder why you can't make it in the real world (Burch 18).²¹⁷

Caren Schnur Neile and I are not imagining the marginalization of storytellers as a professional group (even those targeting adult audiences), or the devaluation of those who tell stories to children. Melvin Maddocks, writing in *Time* magazine in 1981, ridicules storytellers targeting audiences of children in favor of those who can entertain adults: "Ten years ago, a storyteller was somebody who sat cross-legged on a classroom floor with a copy of *The Brothers Grimm*,²¹⁸ locked in a losing battle with the attention span of first-graders. Under the ceiling fans [of the Opera House in Rockport, ME], 404 adults perch on folding wooden chairs for 12 ½ hours, charmed by every possible kind of story from every possible kind of storyteller" (6).²¹⁹ If Mr. Maddocks had ever put aside a volume of tales "collected" by the Brothers Grimm, and told a story face-to-face with

the unexpurgated sentence that I was playfully riffing on the worst-case scenario of a library story hour as imagined by "the general public" – 49% of whom may never have attended a story hour in their lives. If not, I apologize many years after the fact, not only to librarians, toddlers, and their harried parents, but also to hirsute women – like myself – who may be offended by this passage. The unedited text of my article can be found at <http://www.kindcrone.com/publications/storytelling-artist-work/> Accessed 8 April 2014.

²¹⁷ Milbre Burch, "A Storytelling Artist at Work."

²¹⁸ This is a reference to what's come to be known as *Grimm's Fairy Tales* edited by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. These two enterprising brothers published their first volume of *Children's and Household Fairy Tales* in 1812, inspiring the worldwide collection of folk tales in service to national pride.

²¹⁹ Melvin Maddocks, "In Maine: Storytellers Cast Their Ancient Spell" in *Time Magazine* (August 3, 1981), 6-11. At my request, Linda O'Callahan sent me a scan of this article, which features her husband, Jay, and Michael Parent.

first-graders, he, like many a teacher who expresses surprise at the end of a storytelling assembly program, would have been impressed by the length of their attention spans.

Rereading my own article as published by *Storytelling World* and quoted by Welch, I stand guilty as charged in seeming to dismiss both librarians and two-year-olds, two demographic groups to whom I am indebted for my many years as a performing storyteller. My larger point appears to have been missed because I did not spell it out more clearly: in a patriarchal society, when storytelling equals babysitting and babysitting equals women's work, it is bound to remain a marginalized profession.²²⁰ I believe that *this* "Not-So-Popular Reality" is what drove Regan-Blake and Freeman to search for a name that would liberate their performance personas from the preschool story hour set.

Making a Name for Themselves, So to Speak

When they left Chattanooga, Regan-Blake and Freeman weren't looking to leave preschool audiences behind, they just wanted to make it easier for sponsors to understand that storytelling appealed to a wide palate of listeners. Once their touring began, the duo

²²⁰ The final paragraph in that section of my 1996 article reads: We can address this problem [being associated with babysitting] directly or indirectly. The direct tactic involves talking about it in our work, our communities, and the media – consciously and consistently demonstrating the power of spoken narrative. The indirect approach involves finding ways to describe our work to people so as to get them in the door to hear us before they realize that they're experiencing storytelling. I personally prefer a strategy that includes both (19).

My professional strategy, starting in 1991, was to begin to fully stage my one-woman storytelling shows under the auspices of "Theatre of the Spoken Word," so as not to frighten away presenters by using the word "storytelling." Almost a quarter of a century later I'm still working daily to help legitimize storytelling as a performance art form, appropriate for people of all ages, adults as well as children. Meanwhile the importance and dignity of working with and for children remains largely un-championed by American policy makers except in pedagogically ungrounded, educationally disastrous ways during a previous Administration run by a former C student. Happily, however, storytelling has long been seen as a valuable educational tool.

would perform at library story hours and preschool venues regularly. What *was* left behind in Chattanooga were two personas they had shed: Ms. Daisy and Mrs. Barbara Wright. This time, if Regan-Blake and Freeman must take a name other than their own, they wanted one that delivered them from the culture's limited expectations of what a storyteller did and what her audiences looked like. They remember:

CONNIE: Bill Domler said, "I'll do up a flyer and you need some business cards...Why don't you come up with a name?"

BARBARA: ...[Bill Domler's friend, Margery Nichols] said, "What about 'Folktellers'?"...It sounded so good, you know...? 'Cause...we were learning stories from the folk by going up and listening to stories from the old timers, like Ray Hicks on Beech Mountain and people anywhere we could find...doing fiddle and harmony singing. We would...listen to their stories...

CONNIE: We thought Folktellers...would give that sense of really being for all ages too.

BARBARA: And telling folk stories.

CONNIE: So Barbara did this little drawing and we gave it to Bill.

BARBARA: Covered wagons, no horses. [*laugh*]

CONNIE: I remember it well...I still have my copy somewhere...Then we left there to do another coffeehouse that was just down the road...Bill had called someone [who] said, "Come on down...You can have whatever comes in at the gate." That [evening] was also a momentous occasion for us...We were sitting in their kitchen [and] the people that ran the coffeehouse...had heard about [our telling of] *Where the Wild Things Are*. They said, "Are you going to tell that

tonight?" We said, "Actually we want to make sure that Maurice Sendak²²¹ – he's the one that wrote it –... that he's OK with that." [Our host] said, "He lives down the street!"...So Barbara went over and called [him]...

BARBARA: I really expected a secretary or an answering machine or maybe an agent; I certainly didn't expect to talk to Maurice Sendak...When I called him on the phone, this voice answered and said, "Hello, Maurice Sendak."...I didn't know what to say. I was just stymied.

CONNIE: 'Cause we were so in awe of him from...coming out of the library world.

BARBARA: ...I told him we were two traveling storytellers, hoping to make our living like this. We were [librarians] and we loved his story. We told him the little story about the parking lot and that it went over so big with the children that we would like to use it with the adults that night because so many of them had kids and...read *Where the Wild Things Are* to them, and so on. He said...that he's always intended his stories to be loved by adults as well as children, and that we could do that.

CONNIE: He gave us his blessing and encouragement to tell [it]. That was another building stone in all of this happening. By the time we got back to Bill

²²¹ A first generation Polish American author and illustrator, Sendak was the winner of Newberry and Caldecott Awards, the Hans Christian Andersen Award for illustration, an Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for children's literature, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, a National Book Award and the National Medal of Arts. In his obituary in the *New York Times*, he was called "the most important children's book artist in the twentieth century." See: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/09/books/maurice-sendak-childrens-author-dies-at-83.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). Accessed 14 February 2014.

Domler's two days later, he had our flyer ready for us. We were set to go. [*Both laugh*] (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 12-17).

Regardless of Freeman's stated desire to escape the Story Hour, my ill-conceived comment about "musty" librarians or Welch's charge that an adolescent storytelling revival disparaged "stale, dry talentless performances in institutions," the Folktellers would soon be featured by library associations and educational conferences from coast to coast. And their charge in those settings would be to teach library staff and educators how to enliven their performance of stories. Of course, taking performance storytelling back into library and educational settings was taking it "home" to the places it had been nurtured before the "revival" or, as Regan-Blake put it, before the refocusing of the popular culture's attention on its own (unsung) oral tradition.

Developing a Tandem Practice and a Process for Lifting Stories off the Page

In her 1978 article for *School Library Journal*, Barbara Home Stewart describes the two in performance at an early National Storytelling Festival:

Amid greetings from all sides, [their car] bumps to a stop at the edge of a large clearing in a field at Jonesboro, Tennessee, and the two attractive smiling young women in denim coveralls and brogans hop out...The folktellers [sic] begin their virtuoso storytelling performance...One senses a rare comradeship between them...Barbara changes voices for different characterizations and...Connie uses the full range of her voice, with its lyric highs and somber lows...The audience [listens] spellbound...After the show, the crowd surrounds the folktellers [sic] asking questions, volunteering stories the women "might like to use in their act,"

and offering room and board, companionship, and jobs for them on their next visit to the area" (18-19).²²²

The chemistry between the two performers, and between the performers and their audience was palpable everywhere they went. What they did on stage was spellbinding, but what was it exactly? On the one hand, they were raised in an oral tradition of family stories, animal tales, Jack tales, jokes, pranks, and imaginative play. Some of their repertoire they learned by hearing it from family members, other storytellers and audience members with a tale to share. On the other hand, they were oral interpreters of print materials, choosing the best of children's literature to share with children and adults. In both cases, orality played an important part in their process. A picture book is meant to be read aloud, and – as with an oral tradition tale once it is captured in the amber of a print or digital collection – the words inside it ache to be liberated from the page and returned to the tongue. Welcoming words back to the tongue was one skill in which the Folktellers excelled. The oral interpretation of literature depends more on the ear than on the eye, and spoken word performance depends on silence as well as vocal expression. Through their work together Regan-Blake and Freeman learned to do justice to both the words and the silences between them.

In the tandem interview, I asked the duo: "What did you learn about stories or storytelling as part of being a tandem team that you would not have learned if you had been performing solo?" Here's what they said:

BARBARA: I think we understood the story better. For example, there were some stories that we had read at the library that we didn't quite understand. When we

²²² *ibid.*

divided up the parts, said the words together, put emphases on certain parts, whispered others, the story came alive in a different way. Our audience would come up after some of those stories, and say, "I never understood exactly what was happening in *Where the Wild Things [Are]*...but I do now."

CONNIE: ...Neither of us would have individually quit our library jobs and just gone out and started telling stories – or collecting stories or whatever else – on our own. That was a huge factor for us: that we were together. Those...tandem stories, really grew out of that, out of being good friends and first cousins, and the ease with going back and forth...Us both being on stage – for people that had never heard storytelling before – it gave them three different styles [of telling to observe]: Barbara telling her individual stories, me telling my individual stories, and then there was a different energy when the two of us were telling together (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 45-48).

In the interview, I pointed out that there was a fourth element in their performances in addition to the three styles Regan-Blake enumerated: because the two of them were visible on stage throughout their performances, each modeled listening to the other for the audience. Regan-Blake said that this aspect of their performance had evolved unconsciously. Here Freeman recounts what they'd learned about stage etiquette from watching folk musicians model *inattention* to one another:

The spokesperson for the band would go up to the microphone and tell a little joke while everybody else was re-tuning for the next song. You can retune and watch somebody [or] listen to what they're saying, but a lot of [musicians] would just be in conversation [with one another] as if they weren't on a main stage,

which threw off the one that was trying to hold...[the audience's attention] with this little thread of a story...[and he'd] forget the punch line...So when they saw us pay attention to each other when the other one was speaking, really enjoying listening to each other, it did [provide a] model for the...bands as well as the other storytellers and people in the audience (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 46-49).

Collecting, Courtesy and Copyright

There were a number of elements involved in the duo's emerging oeuvre. Not only did they immerse themselves in collecting stories from "old-timers," but also, as former library workers, they were vigilant in getting permission to use copyrighted material in their repertoire. And they had to learn to be careful of one another's needs on stage. In developing a joint performance aesthetic, the different personalities of the two women came into play, and the dynamics of their differing performance instincts had to be brought into balance through trial and error. Freeman discloses:

One thing that Connie and I worked through that I think is very valuable: when she would tell a gripping story – if something would happen, like the microphone would fall off the [stand] – Connie obviously wanted to keep that mood and just reach down and pick it up, and carry on. [But] something would pop in my mind [in response to the interruption] and I would say it, and it would be very funny. And the audience would just roar in the middle of her stories. I never did it unless something happened on stage, but my spontaneity would come out. Sometimes as she was ending a story, as soon as she would end it, I would say something that might [change] the mood. You know, the mood of silence says a lot out loud. A lot of times, I didn't let that space happen, because I would go right into

something that referred to her story, and make [the audience] laugh. Or before she would start the introductions, sometimes I would think of something and [say or] do it. So we had to work through that. Connie was bothered by it, but at the same time, it worked for the audience. But it really didn't work for the audience because she could have made it work better by [preserving] the mood. And I didn't see that too well. But through talking it out, once again, and giving examples and reversing the roles and doing all the stuff that we tried to do, anytime there was a wound, we tried to find the right salve to bandage it. And not just bandage it, but put the right medicine on it, so that there would be a healing every time. And it was. It always was. These things came through tears and came through discussion and came through laughter and came through joy (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 68-70).

Some of the duo's early repertoire was grounded in the oral interpretation of picture books. As professional storytellers, the two women's performances were not anchored in the same safe harbor of "fair use" of copyrighted material as teachers and librarians dock in when they share tales in the classroom or at story hours. The Folktellers sought and gained permission to adapt and perform copyrighted material, not only for legal reasons, but also out of courtesy to the authors. Through these efforts, they made some lasting friendships with writers and author/illustrators – Ezra Jack Keats,²²³ Margot and Harve Zemach, Jane Yolen, and Richard Kennedy among them.

²²³ During our March 31, 2014 dissertation debrief phone call, Regan-Blake told me that Ezra Jack Keats had wanted to illustrate the text by Elizabeth Seeman that became her signature story, "Two White Horses." But because she was afraid that young children would then pick up the book thinking "Two White Horses" was intended for them, when it's aimed at a much older audience, she did not encourage him to do it.

The duo also learned stories and shtick orally from audience members (both adults and children), other tellers including Marshall Dodge and Ray Hicks. When working with traditional material, they grew a performed story from an oral story seed. When I asked Regan-Blake and Freeman to talk about their process of lifting a literary story from the page or crafting an oral story, here's how they responded:

CONNIE: As far as taking some of those stories off the page...people would sometimes see [us]...and say, "You all must have had to really labor to get that timing exactly right." But when we would take a story that was in a book...like *[A] Penny A Look*²²⁴ or *The Judge*²²⁵ by Harve Zemach ...almost the first time, it would just fall into place...It was almost like we could say: "...That next part, if we want to do it together, let's do it like that"...And then we'd do it like that, and it would be in the exact same tone of voice or in the same pacing [that was needed]. So it came fairly easy to us...

BARBARA: Really, it was almost always on the first reading that we had it: the emphasis and who would do what part, when we would speak together.

(CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 72-73).

At school and library performance venues, the two would always visit the school library or examine the library's holdings, and often the librarian would bring an author to

Today, thinking of how illustrations are found in collections of stories for older children, she can't believe she didn't encourage Keats to contact Seeman and go forward on that project.

²²⁴ Harve Zemach, *A Penny A Look: An Old Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

²²⁵ Harve Zemach, *The Judge: An Untrue Tale* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988).

their attention or pull a book off the shelf for them to consider for future reference. As to choosing material for performance, they said:

CONNIE: We...both [had] a sense for that, especially for the picture books and the written versions...Just in reading 'em, we would kind of hear [what would work]. That's the way I work on stories that are written anyway: I hear it in my ear. I hear it as a told story to begin with... That's the way that we picked the ones that we wanted to tell (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 77-78.)

I asked if there was a difference in their process if they were working with stories from the oral tradition, instead of literary stories. Regan-Blake replied:

"Two Old Women's Bet" is a collected story. "Foolish Bet" is what Richard Chase calls it²²⁶...but the version that we tell is *much* expanded from that. Within that story, [there are] two main characters, and we had room...to flesh out the story, each ourselves, and we would give each other feedback on it...So it grew with us in the telling...as a tandem story. I remember the first time we told...[it], thinking, "I don't know if that's ever going to work." Then it turned out to be one of our favorite...tandem stories.

The two went on to talk about the process of performing two literary stories by Richard Kennedy:

²²⁶ "The Two Old Women's Bet" in *Grandfather Tales – American-English Folk Tales*, selected and edited by Richard Chase (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 139-142.

BARBARA: I used to tell "Come Again in the Spring;"²²⁷ that was one of my stories to tell. But we thought about trying it out [as a tandem tale] since it had a two-person part: Old Hark, feeding the birds, is visited by Death, who tries to take him away...And "Oliver Hyde's Dishcloth Concert"²²⁸ – Connie always told that by herself. But in our play, *Mountain Sweet Talk*,²²⁹ I played the part of Oliver sitting in the corner with the dishcloth over his head, shutting himself away from his community.

CONNIE: In the play, you never said anything...

BARBARA: Except... "I can't fiddle" and... "Now, you folks, get yourself some punch." [Oliver] just had a few little lines in it, but his presence there made it a powerful tandem [piece]. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 78-82).

The duo's combining of their personal performance styles, their shared discernment and discovery in each of their tandem works and the braiding together of their voices made for a memorable tandem presence on stage.

Handling the Stress of Traveling in Tandem

The lives of touring artists are full of logistical problems to solve. When traveling as a duo, emotional tensions arise as well. Regan-Blake and Freeman turned to family models and family teachings to explain how they crafted a conflict resolution style that helped them detoxify stressful situations on the road:

²²⁷ Richard Kennedy, "Come Again in the Spring," in *Richard Kennedy: Collected Stories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 9-19.

²²⁸ Richard Kennedy, "Oliver Hyde's Dishcloth Concert," in *Richard Kennedy: Collected Stories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 201-211.

²²⁹ The creation of *Mountain Sweet Talk* will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

CONNIE: ...I really credit you with this, Barbara. A lot of people, when they're in partnership, they compromise and each one ends up not quite getting what they want...Barbara's philosophy was more "see how you can work it out where you both get what you want...where everybody wins." Rather than just "Oh, we either have to do this or we have to do that," we would look at [each] situation and turn it all the way around...and say, "If we do it this way, both of us can get to stay here one day extra, and then we'll both be there ready for the performance."

BARBARA: Some of that came from Uncle John, Connie's dad. Sometimes with food at the table, he would say, "Honey, you cut the pie, but then let your sister choose the slice." When you do that, you start looking 50/50 at things. And it makes a big difference. Or if you want a little less, you look 40/60, but you give the other person the 60% – thinking that maybe they would want it. [It] makes fairness more visible that way. Another thing was to say, "Let's each write on a separate piece of paper what it is we want. Then we can swap off, like auctioning off something within the family [because] everybody wants the piano; everybody also wants the big entertainment center or something." [*chuckle*] You put what is your top choice and then what's your second and what's your third [and] we would do a lot of little mini-auctions...The second person got to choose two things because the first one got top-of-the-line if you both wanted it. But the second one got two nifty things [*chuckle*], which made up for it. We always tried to be fair, always tried to be honest with one another. My policy was to let things roll off, [like] water off your back. What I didn't realize was that sometimes I was forming this nice little Lake Michigan behind me, and then...several months [*chuckling*]

down the road, I would take Connie and try to drown her in all that. Connie's ideal was to take each little drop, each little tear, and wipe it away at the moment. We had two different banks [or economies] going there, and I realized that Connie's was the best. Even though it seemed picky to me to do each little tear and seemed to take a lot of time, it saved a drowning later on. *[laugh]* So, we would always work out things that way on the road...

CONNIE: It was the care that we took with that too...the time and energy that allowed us to be partners for 20 years...'Cause in the folk music world at the time, [it] was just unheard of for people to be together for that long. Or if they were together that long, to still be friends...

BARBARA: [We were] together literally 24 hours a day, and it was just amazing to get along that well...The bottom line was [a] sense of humor...'Cause we could always just roar over a situation...Not at the moment, sometimes, but soon.

CONNIE: Sometimes we laughed so much, we would have to pull off the side of the road and just sit and...laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh.

BARBARA: We would be sick, almost sick...

CONNIE: ...[Where]...you are sick to your stomach, you're laughing so hard...

We almost couldn't catch our breath, sometimes, we laughed so much. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 33-38).

Speaking of a shared sense of humor, Regan-Blake told this tale of life on the road in a performed tribute to her cousin:

One time we were heading into Washington DC for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. And we glanced down at the odometer and realized our dear truck – our

D'Put – was almost at 100,000 miles! – It was 99,998 miles to be exact! We knew we wanted to document this momentous milestone, get a photo at least, but we were in the midst of five o'clock traffic – heading into the nation's capital – multi-laned highways – cars and trucks whizzing around! Then Barbara saw a tiny sign that said "campground." She zipped off the exit and into the campground. The only trouble was it was a very small campground - with a very short road around the perimeter.

We spent the next 45 minutes, going two miles an hour, circling this campground! Inching our way to 100,000 miles! When the magic number finally turned, it was pitch dark and we had to shine a flashlight on the odometer to get the photo! I think the campers were ready to call the police on these two odd, women stalkers that were driving a yellow truck - going around and around in circles in their campground!²³⁰

An Egalitarian Approach to Doing Business

Since they knew no other duos of traveling storytellers from whom to get advice, Regan-Blake and Freeman improvised work habits that would contribute to the long-life of their tandem team. They created an egalitarian work model, inspired, in part, by the dysfunctional group dynamics they sometimes observed among band members on the folk festival circuit. The Folktellers carefully established alternating "work days" to share the administrative burdens of booking themselves and planning their travels, ensuring that both would hone the skills needed for life on the road. Here's how they describe the evolution of those skills:

²³⁰ From unpublished text of Regan-Blake's "Fire on the Mountain" tribute to Barbara Freeman. Used by permission.

BARBARA: We would get out of the truck and both of us would almost knock heads, trying to lock up the truck. Or we'd both think the other one had done it, and we'd go into the restaurant to eat and...we couldn't see the truck. Then one of us would say, "Did you lock the truck?" "No, I locked it last time. Remember?" [*chuckle*]...

CONNIE: That back of the pickup truck was the first thing we realized that was causing a little irritation of either it wasn't getting done, or [we wondered] who had done it? So that was our first lead-in to having what we called "business days." In the early days, we would do a whole week. If it was your business week, we kept adding different things that you would do. We even added a few perks: if we were staying at a place...where they had one really nice room and another room that was maybe in the attic...

BARBARA: A closet [*laughing*]...a drop-down bed.

CONNIE: ...if it was your business day, then you got the perk of being able to pick the room first....

BARBARA: And you were encouraged to pick the best room, not to be humble and let the other one go first...

CONNIE: It really turned out to be a great system for us in lots of ways...[During your business week] you would make the phone calls or you would be responsible for any maps if you were having to get to a place. That was another huge thing for me because I was good at maps and that was not necessarily one of Barbara's fortes...

BARBARA: You mean east is always right of the map...[*laugh*]

CONNIE: We'd been traveling for almost a year and we had seen a lot of the folk music bands that performed at all these festivals. We would get to know them because we were traveling that same circuit. A lot of times, the one that was more organized ended up having to do it all the time. Everybody else would go and...jam or they wouldn't have to think about what time they [had] that photo shoot the next day...It was only that one person [who did the work]. And usually [that person] would get burned out and they'd break up. Then they'd form another band... That was really an inspiration for me that we needed both to learn and develop these skills.

BARBARA: I want to use that word, disband [*laughing*].

CONNIE: [*laugh*]

BARBARA: [*laughing*] They would disband.²³¹

CONNIE: I knew it was important for Barbara to learn how to read a map. At first, [she] was actually more comfortable on the phone, and I knew it was important for me to get that same comfort level when we were having to call people about jobs...

BARBARA: For the biggies...we would opt for who [had] [*chuckling*] the God-given talent to do that particular activity when it was real important, no matter the business days.

CONNIE: ...We both tried to learn all the skills we needed to keep this going as a business and as a friendship and a partnership. The other person would always be

²³¹ Though this appears to be a moment in which Freeman is being playful with language – noting that a band can "disband" – there's an emotional subtext here as well, for this 1998 interview took place in the wake of the Folktellers' 1995 disbanding.

there to help, but it was more that if it was your business day, you were in the lead. You needed to think about if we had to be over in Long Island by 5:00, then what time do we need to leave New York City to get there?

BARBARA: Not only that, but you had to think about the rush hour traffic. You had to think ahead... That was harder for me because my brain doesn't operate in advance. I can do reverse [*laughing*] and side to side... But I had to learn it...

CONNIE: As we traveled along and met different people, we had married couples that would say, "You really ought to write a book [*laughing*] about this whole system of working things out." We did talk to a lot of people about it and offered it up as a model.

BARBARA: We started little business days in families all over the nation [*laughing*] and all around the world...because people loved it... People loved to hear about our business days (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 27-33).

Finessing Financial Matters for the Duo

Beyond the care the Folktellers took to share the workload, to handle the tensions that rose between them, and to look back at those tensions and laugh about them, there was another element that helped to preserve their twenty-year working partnership: a similar value system. They were used to living on "a piece of a shoe string," so much so that eventually they had to be counseled by a friend to charge more for their services. Without taking intentional vows of poverty, they were two storytelling "sisters" who valued family and relationship and living simply as they made their way in the world. Their principles embodied what Caren Schnur Neile calls "the tendency of storytellers to

eschew mainstream consumer culture" (1). Here's how they describe their attitude about money:

CONNIE: [At first] we were thrilled to get \$25 to come to a school. It seemed that our taste, the things that we wanted, were in line with how much money we had. In the beginning...our big thrill after a performance – and by then we were making \$100 for two performances at a school – the big thrill was to go into a stationery store. We'd each get a couple of cards...

BARBARA: Or a bookmark that was real fancy and hand-drawn or water-colored [*laugh*].

CONNIE: We would take it and put it as a little framed print in the back of the truck... We had our little areas for putting up artwork. Our taste seemed to follow our income...so that money was never a problem... We weren't making very much. As we used to say, the IRS would send us a care package...the first few years. But we didn't feel that we were lacking in anything. We didn't [say], "Oh, we've got to do this other job or we've got to get two more jobs because if we don't, we won't have enough money." It was like we always had enough. It was always plenty.

BARBARA: And family always came first. If somebody in the family was sick or [there was] a funeral, we would try to make arrangements with whomever, whatever school we had, or whatever job we had, to get to our families. When we were scheduled to go over to Europe for our first trip...to Sidmouth, [England] to

the 24th annual folk festival,²³² my mom was real sick. I wanted to go out of the country so bad, but at the same time, something was telling me – I know now it was the sweet Lord – just telling me not to go. And she died three days later... Had I gone...I would not have made it back. We have been blessed...that things have happened so beautifully in our lives along the way...

CONNIE: We really respected each other's gut feeling or intuition about things, too, in those early days...I remember one time in particular that I was really out of sorts...We'd been invited to go to California, and it was the first time. We were excited about that, going across the country, and we were going to get to fly. After about three or four years of this, we did start flying more to jobs. But I remember being so upset... Both of us were really patient with that... It turned out that I wasn't ready to know any more people. [*chuckle*] We had met so many people in those first three years. The idea of going to a whole new state and doing a big conference out there...it was too [much]. I was on overload.

BARBARA: We had so many golden friends, and we knew that we would get more when we went to California. I was looking forward to that, "the more the merrier" kind of thing. But Connie verbalized it so beautifully: "Why don't we take this time to write some of [our] old dear friends or go visit them and maybe perform at their birthday parties or something. Just cement some of what we already have..." She just needed to be more grounded with that. So we didn't go that year... Then the next year, we went. It was wonderful. I ended up benefiting

²³² The coastal town of Sidmouth in Southwest England has held a celebrated folk festival every August since 1955. For more see: <http://www.sidmouthfolkweek.co.uk> Accessed online 27 February 2014.

from that, even though I wouldn't have done it, had I been alone. I would have always chosen the party and been the last one to turn out the lights, as if it were my house [*laugh*]...

CONNIE: We really trusted each other. I think that's what it was. And it didn't have to be a thought-out, logical reason for that trust...That helped us so much in the beginning...Because we trusted [each other]...we would be *here*, and then something else would happen, and we'd get to *here*, and that was the perfect place to be. Lots of things happened to us, and a lot of those doors opened because we were at the door when it opened. We were at the right place (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 39-43).

The Ups and the Downs of Life on the Road

Regan-Blake and Freeman stepped out in faith to pursue an intentionally nomadic life, buoyed in the beginning by some savings from their library days, but mostly carried forward by a willingness to go where fate led them. Regan-Blake told this story about how they used the CB radio in the Datsun pickup truck to track road conditions and weather ahead, and even once to make a booking for a performance:

When Barbara and I were first traveling around in D'Put in the mid 70's – we had a CB radio in the car. Kind of a clunky unit with a little old-timey-looking microphone connected to it. And no wireless! There was a short curly-cue cord coming out of it. You had to talk right into it. You could listen to truck driver's talk back and forth, get traffic conditions, and pass the time.

Everybody had a “handle”. Barbara was ‘Storyteller’ – and I was --
“You got your Carolina Gypsy here: 10/4 good buddy.” Once we were driving

through West Virginia – and we started talking to “Jester-Lester.” Turns out he was a principal at an elementary school. We told him a tandem story – Barbara and I going back and forth with that little microphone – driving in the middle of the night on these steep, curvy roads in the West Virginia Mountains. We told him *Where the Wild Things Are...* “The night Max wore his Wolf suit, and made mischief of one kind, and another”... Well Jester-Lester – he loved it! And hired us to come to his school to perform the next week!²³³

Not only did the duo rely on the kindness of the CB community, but also they depended on family members as “support staff” when necessary. In fact, the metaphors of family and home are used again and again to describe the relationships to people and places that the duo fashioned on the road. Here the two talk about their charmed lives as traveling tellers:

CONNIE: In those early days, it was the folk festivals and coffeehouses, and then schools and libraries that hired us. That was the mainstay of our work...for three years, traveling in that little Datsun pickup truck. When I think back on that, [*chuckle*] that's pretty amazing. People will say, “You all sure paid your dues. You didn't even have a home and here you were, out traveling.” But...the greatest percentage of it was wonderful. We were having such a good time (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, page 19).

The greatest percentage of their experience was wonderful, but here's what the duo told journalist Barbara Home Stewart about the downside of life on the road: “For us it comes down to just a few negatives. Letters have to be written – even when you are bone tired

²³³ From unpublished text of Regan-Blake's “Fire on the Mountain” tribute to Barbara Freeman. Used by permission.

and your only desk is the steering wheel of D'Put. Weight gain is also a problem, from fast food to home-cooked feasts. And once our camper was broken into and nearly all of our belongings were stolen – including irreplaceable tapes of storytellers" (21).²³⁴ In *New Age* magazine, Weyler also reported the story of the burglary:

With all there worldly goods...packed in their camper...[the Folktellers] were free – or so they felt till they got to Atlanta. Returning to their camper [one time]...they discovered that D'Put had been broken into, their belongings pilfered. Their hearts sank as they stared into a ransacked, empty D'Put. Gone was their money, tape recorder, tapes precious and irreplaceable, personal journals, quilts...their banjo [and Freeman's favorite pair of overalls]... They sat on the back of... D'Put and cried" (33).

Beyond the trauma of this burglary, nowhere in the Folktellers' narrative does the threat of danger, physical violence or sexual harassment appear.²³⁵

Most of the people the two women met welcomed their talents and shared their excitement about storytelling, but some of their audiences were not as receptive as others. In his *New Age* profile of the Folktellers early years, Weyler reports on some of the hegemonic pushback that the two encountered even *before* they went on the road fulltime. As members of the steering committee of the Chattanooga chapter of the National Organization of Women, the cousins remember:

²³⁴ Barbara Home Stewart, "The Folktellers: Sheherazades [sic] in Denim" in *School Library Journal*. (November 1978), 17-21. http://www.storywindow.com/articles/78_slj.htm Accessed online 6 April 2014. While at the Library of Congress, I made a photocopy of this article.

²³⁵ In fact at the time of the CSP interviews, we asked no questions whatsoever about the dangers of life on the road (for women or men). Nor did we interrogate the mating habits of touring storytellers.

"We toured clubs and organizations," says Barbara "talking about women's rights. You can imagine," she laughs, "the level of awareness about women's issues in those days at the Chattanooga Kiwanis Club or the [Sertoma] Sunrise Breakfast Club! Whew! You know," she mimicked, hunching her shoulders and snarling, "'ask one of the girls at the desk to help you.'" "We learned that terminology is important," explains Connie, "that words do make a difference. This carried over later in our selection of stories" (31).²³⁶

Beyond the dismissal of the members of a men's organization in Chattanooga, there times on the road when the two women's presence was "misread." In the CSP narrative Regan-Blake and Freeman remember one such instance in the midst of their otherwise charmed lives:

CONNIE: It was like every place that we went there were teachers or libraries or people that ran folk festivals in the audience. They would come up to us afterwards and want us to come to their school the next day, or want us to come to their festival the next summer. That's how it started.

BARBARA: [Then] we'd pull over, like at a filling station, and [bring down] the tailgate on our camper and [raise] up the back and get out our tuna fish and make a little ice tea or something. Once...in Connecticut, this guy pulled up into...the filling station, walked over, threw down a dollar on our tailgate and said, "I'll have a cup of coffee, black." [*laugh*] And we said, "Well, we don't have any coffee... But we've got some tea...and it's nothing for a tea bag." He said, "You don't have any coffee in your coffee wagon?" [*laugh*] Then it was, "Actually, we're not a

²³⁶ Weyler, "On the Road with the Folktellers."

coffee wagon. [laugh] We're just two storytellers." [laugh] So we gave him some tea and he said, "You're not from here. You're too nice to be from here." [laugh] We had little events like [laughing] that happened all the time. It was kind of cute. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, page 7-10).²³⁷

When a male traveler tried to order a cup of coffee from them, he was admitting that the only way he could read two women preparing lunch on the open tailgate of a pickup truck was as food service workers, grateful for his patronage. As they tell the story, the duo appears to take his performative entitlement ("he...threw down a dollar on our tailgate and said, 'I'll have a cup of coffee, black'") and his lack of imagination in stride. On camera when Freeman tells how she responded to the man, offering him some tea, she speaks almost coquettishly. But when she gets to the part where she points out to him that they're not running a coffee truck, they're storytellers, her facial expression and tone of voice become more assertive. When Freeman then says, "...we had events like that that happened all the time. It was kind of cute," she intimates (without saying) that it was also "not so cute" to be illegible in a culture to which storytellers – and women – have much to contribute beyond serving coffee to thirsty strangers. Twenty years after the fact, she seems to acknowledge that the two were, in fact, misread multiple times. Her light-hearted editorializing, and the duo's twenty-year-long career together indicate that,

²³⁷ During our conversation about this chapter on March 31, 2014, Regan-Blake told me about a time that she and Freeman were introduced at a folk festival by a (male) emcee who said (essentially): "They're from the South, but don't worry, they're smart as a whip!" In this case, being "read" as Southern Belles did not advance the duo's cause; it ran smack into a dominant discourse that said not only were women ditzy, but also Southern people were stupid, as evidence by their drawls. (The "Southerners are stupid because they talk so slow" bias is not only aimed at women. My husband encountered it when he moved from his hometown in Mississippi to enroll in his Master's program at Columbia University in New York City.)

ultimately, such misreadings diminished neither the women's sense of adventure nor their sense of accomplishment as touring storytellers.

Still a culture's comfort level with, or insistence on, women's invisibility has an impact even on its pluckiest distaff members. Throughout her narrative in this chapter, Freeman uses the diminutive with some frequency: "We had little events like that;" "We did get a little spotlight [on stage in Hartford];" "We told [Sendak] the little story;" "Each little community...became our family," and "We started little business days in families all over the nation." In each case, the "little" thing she mentions is, in fact, no little thing. Use of the diminutive "little" in these multiple instances embodies the repeated societal message that as a woman and an artist one has diminished value. These instances accrue on the spirit, dampening it the same way that water off the back can accumulate and become a "nice little Lake Michigan," deep enough for drowning someone in.

Each "little" thing Freeman mentions above is a thing of great significance in the duo's lived experience. The "little spotlight" at the Connecticut Family Folk Festival was the duo's first appearance on a main stage at a folk festival, and led, in turn, to an array of gigs. "The little story" of telling *Where the Wild Things Are* in a parking lot and catching the attention of Bob Zentz is a defining moment in the Folktellers' creation story, and Freeman's relating it to Maurice Sendak secured his blessing on their endeavor. "Each little community...became our family," references a state of grace within which the cousins moved across the landscape of the Eastern Seaboard and always felt at home. The "little business days" concept was a hard-won entrepreneurial model that allowed the two women to maintain a balance of power while growing beyond their natural skill level to become two self-sustaining freelance artists.

Regan-Blake invokes the same linguistic strategy, describing the "little drawing" that Barbara did that became their professional calling card, "the little irritation" about who locked the truck that inspired their alternating business days model, and the "little areas for putting up artwork" in the back of the truck that insured their aesthetic pleasure all along the roads they traveled. Radner and Lanser would recognize the Folktellers' repeated use of "little" as coded instances of trivialization, involving "the employment of a form [in this case trivializing the importance of their accomplishments through the use of the diminutive]...that the dominant culture considers unimportant, innocuous, or irrelevant. When a particular form is conventionally nonthreatening [that is, too "little" to bother with], the message it carries, even if it might be threatening in another context, is likely to be discounted or overlooked" (19).

As Radner and Lanser suggest, the Folktellers' minimizing of important instances, experiences, achievements, revelations, and moments of self care appears to be a gendered rhetorical stance, intended to "make little of" or camouflage the personal power, the hard-won wisdom, and the true worth of these two individuals. Even women who've been raised with the "cunts'pah" to claim center stage are taught to apologize for the space their efforts take up in the public sphere. Whatever the language they used to express their experience, these two women had a huge impact on the emerging storytelling revival community.

And despite the incredulity of a disappointed coffee truck customer, these two itinerant tellers attracted several real-life fairy godparents who helped to smooth their journey in significant ways. The women they met often provided entrée to the library and educational worlds, and housing that was a step up from sleeping in the back of a pickup

truck. But in the 1970s, men tended to be the ones who produced folk festivals, ran coffee houses, directed university programs, or headed up folklore departments. Several went the extra mile for these two young women.

Throughout their journeying, the two saw their lives as charmed ones. And with good reason. Being exactly who they were – two attractive, engaging young female storytellers – not only opened doors to the venues and homes of their supporters, but also netted them keys for return visits:

BARBARA: [We] probably camped overnight maybe three or four times in three years. That's how open people were with their homes and their families...Just took us right in, and still write to us...

CONNIE: People let us house sit. Connie Dyckman...was a storyteller and librarian up in [Montrose], New York. We had just met her at a storytelling event we had been invited to. Anne Izard was giving a presentation and they asked us to come and tell stories there. We met Connie Dyckman and a fast friendship developed.²³⁸ The next week, she and her family were going out of town for a two-week vacation. So she said, "Why don't you all just come and house sit?" That happened to us everywhere we went. People would open up their homes and invite us to stay...Having that pickup truck with a camper gave us an option because we could stay in it. So it wasn't like we were going out and expecting to make enough money to stay in motels or anything like that. We had this backup of

²³⁸ In fact, Dyckman crocheted a Crictor the Boa Constrictor snake puppet for the Folktellers to use in performance to tell the story *Crictor* by Tomi Ungerer (New York: HarperCollins, 1983).

being able to live in that camper if we needed to, and that gave us a real sense of freedom.

BARBARA: At the same time, we had to write so many letters and...we had no office. Back then, there was not Office Max or [Office Depot] that you can go to and literally sit at a desk or a Xerox machine. *[laugh]* Did they have Xerox *[laughing]* machines back then...Yes, they did 'cause I Xeroxed "Paul Revere"...We had to put one of our bigger picture books on the steering wheel and write these letters. And get out of the car sometimes in a torrential rainstorm, and walk over to the phone booth and put in our quarter, and call the school [we were going to visit]. Back then you didn't have phone cards either. We...*[asked]* my cousin, Connie's sister Bonnie, if she would let us accumulate our phone bills *[and mail]* through her. Then she would package up all of our mail *[from sponsors, saying]*, "We would like to get you for this festival or come to this school or young adult's conference or reading conference." We'd call Bonnie and say, "We're *[going to]* be in Phoenix, Arizona next week." We would go to the post office to General Delivery,²³⁹ and they would hand us this big package of mail. We would sit there in the car and open our letters and write our letters.

CONNIE: It made us feel at home everywhere we went. We'd go into that...Vermont post office or to the Philadelphia *[post office and ask]*..."Could I

²³⁹ For the reader unacquainted with the intricacies of the U.S. Postal Service, the concept of "General Delivery" may be an unfamiliar one. According to the U.S.P.S website, you can "get your mail if you're on the road, new to town, or between permanent addresses. Mail addressed to you at General Delivery will be held at the area's main Post Office for up to 30 days. All you have to do is pick it up." See: <https://www.usps.com/manage/forward-mail.htm>, accessed online February 27, 2014.

have my mail, please?" And they'd give us this [big package of mail]. We didn't use the phone very much because we were traveling...so we really used the mail as our main form of being booked and of keeping in touch with people. It was a real gift my sister gave us, of being able to use her address so people had a place...to write to, and then we would get that mail and decide where we were going next.

BARBARA: We would go back to places every year, the same places [like] Chelsea House²⁴⁰ coffeehouse in Brattleboro, Vermont, so we got to know the people at the post office. We fell so in love with Vermont. We would decide every winter where we wanted to stay for the two months of December and January because it was so cold and so snowy almost everywhere. We would try to book a few jobs...out in California or something of that nature...where the weather was not a factor. But [otherwise] we pretty much would [hunker] down and try to learn new stories or just have some rest from the road. One year, we chose to spend the...[summer] in a beautiful old farmhouse in Brattleboro, Vermont...Then we were right next door to the post office...Each little community or town became our family too, as well as the individual schools and special friends that would hire us.

²⁴⁰ Founded by Carol Levin and Bill Gehman, the Chelsea Café House, as it was originally known, opened in a barn at the Old Locke Farm in Windham County, West Brattleboro, Vermont and hosted a variety of concerts, contra dances, song swaps – and, apparently, storytelling events. From 1974-1981, it attracted audiences from Southern Vermont, Southwestern New Hampshire and Western Massachusetts. For more see: <http://www.reocities.com/uridfm/c/chhouse.htm> Accessed 20 February 2014.

CONNIE: ... We were [on] the East Coast those first three years. We hadn't made it out west yet. But we had four or five different people's homes that were like our homes, where we could go and take everything out of the truck and get organized and do all of our paperwork and things. Those were really a godsend...[*chuckle*]: We had one in D.C., one in New York City, one in Philadelphia²⁴¹...Carolyn Moore in Jonesborough, Tennessee was one of our stopping places.

BARBARA: And Norfolk, Virginia.

CONNIE: And [at the home of Montessori school teacher] Caroline [Sell] in Norfolk. So that's where our main...

BARBARA: We had keys...

CONNIE: ...second homes [were].

BARBARA: ...keys to all these homes (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 19-25).

Not only were they guests in the homes of their sponsors, but some of the picture book authors they admired welcomed them to the dinner table and into their studios.

Freeman remembers:

Authors would see us at conferences and invite us to come to their home for dinner. Like Margo Zemach,²⁴² and Ezra Jack Keats, the wonderful picture book

²⁴¹ The Folktellers' house-sitting hosts were: folk musician and Russian interpreter Carolyn Smith in the District of Columbia; Linda Harrison, a member of their N.O.W. rap group, who had moved north, in New York City, and folklorist Amy Shuman in Philadelphia.

²⁴² Margo Zemach illustrated over forty children's books; many were adapted from Yiddish and other Eastern European folk tales. In addition, she collaborated with her husband, Harvey Fichstrom, writing as Harve Zemach; one of their collaborations, *Duffy and the Devil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), won the 1974 Caldecott medal. The Folktellers included the Zemach's *Penny a Look* (New York:

writer [with] *Snowy Day*²⁴³ and *Whistle for Willy*.²⁴⁴ And he would invite the owner of Scholastic books, for example, and other influential people to see us. These people were so kind, and they wanted to help us along in any way they could. Because they believed in what we were doing. They knew we were dedicated pioneers. They wanted to help facilitate that any way they could. It was a real blessing. We got to see their private studios, the latest books they were working on. They would always do us a little drawing or sign our books in a tremendously special way. (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 25-26.)

The Media Takes Notice But Doesn't Always Get the Story Right

During this time, other storytellers were working in their home communities, or their home states, but that work remained largely invisible in the national news. The Folktellers were a visible force, zigzagging up and down the Eastern Seaboard in full view. The verbal art form they championed had flourished in private conversations around the campfire or at the kitchen table, in library children's rooms, at local pubs, over backyard fences and on front porches, and now they were bringing it into the public sphere. And the media took notice.

Regan-Blake remembers: "In those early days, we had a lot of media attention – storytelling as a performing art was still in its infancy – we were 'pioneers' – and the media was interested. We were 'cover girls' on *New Age Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, ended up being featured in *Southern Living*, *National Geographic* and we even

Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) and *The Judge: An Untrue Tale* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988) in their repertoire.

²⁴³ Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day* (New York: Viking Press, 1962).

²⁴⁴ Ezra Jack Keats, *Whistle for Willy* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

made it into an issue of *Sport & Fishing*" (Unpublished text of Regan-Blake's "Fire on the Mountain" tribute to Barbara Freeman). Even though the two women had known each other all their lives, media interviews sometimes revealed a little known fact – or fantasy – that they had not shared. Regan-Blake relates:

Once we were being interviewed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. And the reporter asked how we had prepared to be storytellers, if either of us had been in plays. I said, no – I had never been on stage before telling stories. And Barbara said, "Oh I was in a play." And I turned to her and said, "You were! I don't remember that. What play was it?" She said, "Brigadoon!" "Brigadoon – Really! – What part did you play?" She said, "Let's see – I know I wasn't the lead. Hmmm. I didn't sing or dance..." And then she said, "I was the usher!" She had ushered for this play for three weeks – and she knew the play so well, she felt like she had been in it! And that is the way Barbara is. She has such a zest for life. Whatever she does, she enters it so fully [that] she becomes a part of it (Unpublished text of Regan-Blake's "Fire on the Mountain" tribute to Barbara Freeman).

Regardless of the occasional narrative flight of fancy, the duo's success can be documented. According to "On the Road with the Folktellers," Rex Weyler's 1980 cover article about the storytellers for *New Age* magazine,²⁴⁵ "by 1978 they were doing 150 programs a year, including workshops, festivals, high-school performances, library story hours, concerts and benefits" (33). When he notes that their repertoire included jokes and "tales of how the sea got its salt, how dogs came to hate cats, how big man Jack killed seven in a whack" (62), Weyler confirms that John Regan's stories had settled not only

²⁴⁵ Rex Weyler, "On the Road with the Folktellers," *New Age* magazine (July 1980), 26-33 and 62-63.

into the memory but also onto the tongues of his daughter and her cousin. Another generation of listeners would be spellbound by stories passed down in the Folktellers' family, and the media gave the two a spotlight. Regan-Blake remembers:

Barbara and I happened to be the first ones to be traveling around and making our living at it. That was unusual and people couldn't believe it. So everywhere we went, we got publicity... It was one of those things: when you are in the flow of life, and you're doing what you're meant to be doing, everything is easy. It doesn't mean it's not sometimes work, but there's such an ease with things... And that certainly happened in those beginning days.

People literally were standing in line to write articles about [storytelling]. We got a lot of national coverage. I didn't even know it at the time, but we were interviewed on *All Things Considered*. I didn't know National Public Radio then; this was back in 1975 or '76... Later someone [who] had heard [the broadcast] invited me to a festival in Colorado, and [I asked] him, "How did you ever hear about us in Colorado?" And he said, "It was on *All Things Considered*"... There were lots of different people [covering the Folktellers and the National Storytelling Festival in the media]: Someone from Walter Cronkite's [*CBS Evening News*] show, and he was the king of evening news at the time. [Charles Osgood], the man that took over the [*CBS News Sunday Morning*] show from Charles Kuralt... he came down to the National Festival and... did lots of interviewing and filming. It was very exciting to have that kind of attention being placed on storytelling.

I...credit storytelling itself with this...I didn't get so caught up in being a star...because...I was so clear that it was the stories [that were the gift] and that I was the gift bearer. I was delighted to be that, and to be a spokesperson, but...it was the gift that was really getting the attention. And part of the attention was people realizing they could also give that gift. It wasn't something that only I knew about, or that only I could do. I was just bringing it to show other people: "Here's a gift you can give, remember?" And people would say, "Yes, I remember." (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 33-35).

Clearly smitten with the duo, Weyler muses: "These two women definitely weave a special magic in their performances – Barbara always quick with a joke. Connie able to still the rowdiest crowd with an eerie mountain tale – but it isn't simple entertainment that they offer. The mystery [of their art] haunts me" (28). Speaking of haunting, the reporter includes Regan-Blake's signature story, "Two White Horses" by Elizabeth Seeman alongside the Folktellers' profile.²⁴⁶

While puzzling out the provenance of the Folktellers' magic, Weyler supplies a few of the missing pieces from their pre-performance career biographies: "These two quite remarkable women were once adventurous young girls. Both traveled out west as teenagers to work and to see what they could see. Connie worked as a waitress at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, and Barbara worked as at tour guide at Yellowstone National Park" (31). He goes on to retell the Folktellers' creation story, though he conflates their years in Chattanooga with their current addresses in Asheville.

The Scope of the Folktellers' Touring

²⁴⁶ Elizabeth Seeman, "Two White Horses," *New Age* magazine (July 1980), 28-30.

In those early years, wherever the Folktellers toured, the freshness of their approach to storytelling performance caught the eyes and ears and hearts of their sponsors. The sponsors, in turn, would do whatever they could to help spread the word about the duo to other potential audiences around the world:

CONNIE: In the early days, those first three years, [we toured] up and down the east coast...all the New England states and the middle states, Pennsylvania and then on down into the south, Virginia, and over as far...

BARBARA: Florida a lot.

CONNIE: ...as Ohio. Yeah, down to Florida.

BARBARA: South Carolina. Tennessee.

CONNIE: Ohio was as far out – Ohio and Kentucky – and Tennessee were as far west as we were getting at that time when we were driving. In 1978 is when we moved to Asheville [North Carolina] – we had picked this as one of our favorite spots and decided to live here – that's when we started flying places. One of the first places we flew was [St. Louis,] Missouri. We went to the Catholic Library Association, their national convention. They asked us to come and tell stories. That's where we met Mort Schindel [founder of Weston Woods Studio]²⁴⁷ who eventually put out our first recording....

²⁴⁷ Along with its animated films of children's books, Weston Woods produced storytelling recordings under the imprint "Storytelling Circle" featuring the work of several first and second wave revival storytellers, including this writer; storyteller and librarian Carol Birch was Weston Woods' artistic director for the Storytelling Circle recordings. Schindel sold Weston Woods to Scholastic, Inc. in 1996. For more see: <http://www.afana.org/schindel.htm> accessed online 27 February 2014.

BARBARA: And Caroline Field from Philadelphia...Free Library...She had seen us already in Philadelphia...

CONNIE: She was the one that invited us there [Missouri]...We quickly started adding states to the states that we had performed in. And early on, Barbara Home Stewart – someone that had been a friend of [ours] at the public library in Chattanooga – she taught us several good lessons.

In the very beginning, probably within the first couple of years, we had gone to visit Barbara...in Philadelphia. We were talking about our fees, trying to see about raising the amounts of money we were charging for schools. But we really didn't want to [cut] out anyone because they couldn't afford it. So we were struggling with this: how do you really put a price tag on that half hour that you're telling stories or that one hour that you're doing a workshop...We were at [Barbara's] [*chuckling*] kitchen table [in Philadelphia], making all these notes and trying to get a new flier done with our fees on it. She came over and said, "I want to tell you something...If you don't start charging more money, you're going to get tired of this and you're going to quit. Then all of the future people that might be listening to you are not going to have the chance to hear you tell stories. So you owe it to them to charge more money." That was such a good lesson for us because I think what she said...was absolutely right. If we had had to start really struggling and wondering whether we would have enough gas money to get to the next place or any of that...Plus being so tired or having to do so much storytelling, I think that might have really affected us... [Barbara Home Stewart] was important in our lives for lots of reasons. She's the one that wrote the first

School Library Journal article on us... We were in Pittsburgh with Maggie Kimmel²⁴⁸ at the Carnegie Library there, telling stories, and... we were going to do a workshop in the afternoon. When the person introduced us... to the students, she... reached over and picked up a magazine... and turned it around and it was the cover of *School Library Journal*. And she said, "Here's who's going to be giving your workshop today." We looked at that [magazine], and here's a full [cover picture of us].

BARBARA: And they had never... put a person... on the cover. They'd always featured a book or an architectural drawing of a library. They had never put a person [on the cover] and [the article] was...

CONNIE: ...called "The Folktellers: Sheherazades [sic] in Denim." That's the name of the article. It created a storm in the library and educational world, all over the world. That's when we first started getting invitations to go to other places in the world. We went to...

BARBARA: Brussels, Belgium.

CONNIE: ...And we went up into Canada. We eventually went over to... the Philippines and over to Korea and Japan. And quickly then started adding more states. It got up to about 45 states that we had performed in and twelve countries around the world (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 50-56).

Adventures Overseas: A Folktale Villain Reflects a Real-Life Horror

²⁴⁸ Librarian, children's book author, and advocate for libraries, literature and children, Mary Margaret Kimmel also consulted for the *Mister Roger's Neighborhood* show on PBS. She is Professor Emerita in the School of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh.

In the eighties, when I lived in New England and met the Folktellers for lunch during one of their tours, they shared a personal experience about the unexpected impact of a told tale on a community of listeners. I asked them to share that anecdote again for the archive. Here's what they say:

CONNIE: We...always [tried] to select stories depending on the audience, so we never decided for sure what stories we were going to tell ahead of time. We would have some idea going up on stage. Then we would...change that if we needed to...[responding] to the audience themselves in deciding which stories...we were going to tell... This was actually over in Japan, on an island in the northern part... We were telling stories for the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. It was a junior high and high school. [The teachers] had gathered [the students] all together in a small...movie theater...[that] doubled as a stage and performing area. One of the stories I love telling to junior high was "Mr. Fox"²⁴⁹ because sometimes the junior high and high school students would think that storytelling was for...little kids...Telling them a gripping story, a lot of times, opened up doors for them and for us too. I started this story, and it was the only time in all of the years of telling stories that I ever stopped telling a story... There was this palpable feeling in the theater... It wasn't a rustle... It was just...very intense. I stopped and...said, "Should I go on, telling this story?" I didn't ask a teacher or anyone in particular – I asked the audience. I asked all of them, and it was as if all of them answered, either verbally or nonverbally, yes.

BARBARA: It was very hushed...

²⁴⁹ "Mr. Fox" can be found in Joseph Jacob's collection *English Folk Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1893), 148 -151.

CONNIE: It was. [And] it was clear that I should continue it. So I did, and we told a couple other stories. It was only afterwards that some of the teachers came up and said, "You know, we have a teacher here named Mr. Fox, and..."

BARBARA: A redheaded teacher.

CONNIE: "...he is redheaded," which is [like the villain] in the story: he has a red mustache and...bright red hair and a beard... And just two months before that, [the redheaded teacher] had been accused of molesting some of the children and young adults at that school. "Mr. Fox" is an intense story...[and, in it, the title character] has done harm to a lot of young women too. It turned out that the community had really divided [over] this [incident]. Here they were, all of these Americans, stationed over in Japan, on a small [base]...and they really banded together, almost like a large extended family. [The incident with the teacher] had put a tear right through the middle of that [community] because some people believed that this awful thing had happened, and some people believed that it had not. But they had not talked about it openly. And it was this story [that opened the conversation]. We stayed on that base for two or three days, doing workshops and telling stories to all the children on the base, and some to the adults. And in those two or three days, [the community] began talking about it. And the feedback that we got later was that that was such a healing story to tell, because it gave people an avenue and even...a language to be able to talk about what had happened. It was a very powerful experience (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 57-61).

Crafting the Folktellers' Signature: Balancing Intensity and Humor

The duo talked further about the scary and humorous tales they deliberately told in each show:

CONNIE: I did always tend to tell those more intense, scary stories. And I remember [in] the beginning...Barbara would tell the really funny ones and everybody would be laughing and she's so funny...I'd be laughing and rolling on the stage, and they'd be rolling...in the aisles, listening. Then I'd get up and tell these gripping stories, [*chuckle*]...like "Mary Culhane"²⁵⁰ and "Mr. Fox." I've really questioned that for myself, because I'd think, "...Why should I be telling these gruesome stories and with bold kinds of images? Isn't it better just to laugh?" At the same time, I was drawn to tell [the intense stories] and I knew that listeners were drawn to hearing them. People loved hearing those stories. And...the intense stories that I tell always have a sense of hope at the end. It's very different than the blood and guts that's on television or in the movies, but still they're intense stories. And I really came to understand – very early on – that these stories, the reasons that we're drawn to them, both to tell them and to listen to them is that they help us be more human. They awaken some of...those emotions that we all have, but in a safe environment. So that we can have fear, we can have the chill on...the spine and the hair-raising up on the back [of the neck]. We can experience those feelings and emotions and yet be safe within a story... In telling those stories, I always make sure that I'm telling them to the right age group. Because if you're telling to very young children, you want to be sure, as I say, that you scare them appropriately; that it's...that same kind of "Whoo!"

²⁵⁰ "Mary Culhane" is an Irish folktale found in *The Goblin's Giggle and Other Stories*, edited by Molly Bang (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher, 1973).

...excitement, but it's not something that's too intense for them to handle. After that Barbara and I talked. I remember the exact performance. I remember what the stage looked like, too, when the...

BARBARA: Yeah, me too – everything.

CONNIE: ...awareness came to me about that. Afterwards we [decided] that maybe what we needed to do was not to go from this absolutely uproarious funny [story] right into this other [intense] one. That we might use a tandem story as a bridge, and take people instead of [from] this emotion [to] this emotion, take them a little bit gentler but continue having all of those emotions within the storytelling (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 61-65).

Becoming Ambassadors for the NAPPS Cause

In October 1975, Regan-Blake and Freeman returned from their first road trip to perform as "Connie Regan and Friends" on the front porches and in the backyard venues of the third annual National Storytelling Festival. For the past year Jimmy Neil Smith had been working on his next big idea: getting a nonprofit charter for the national storytelling membership organization he had conceived. And on the wings of the Folktellers, that organization would take flight.

When they left Jonesborough after that weekend, Regan-Blake and Freeman became the unofficial ambassadors for the National Storytelling Festival and for its "first child" – an embryonic organization called the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS). On spreading the word of storytelling, Regan-Blake relates:

We started our [travels] around the United States, living in that truck for three years full-time. When I look back on that, I can't imagine doing that now. But at the time, it was no hardship... What gave us the support to be able to [travel] for that long [was] we felt so at home in the different places that we went. Carolyn Moore's [house in Jonesborough] was one of those places...

Right off, we started getting jobs. Every time we did a performance, there would be a teacher or a librarian or some other [person from]... a music festival or a coffeehouse in the audience. So every performance led to ten others. Every single time for probably twelve years, Barbara and I used to make out... a set list... We never made that set list until we saw the audience, so it would be coming from them... [and] on those set lists, second from the bottom was always "NAPPS." Every single place that I went, I talked about NAPPS... I started doing a lot of performing and workshops at... regional and state and national conferences, both in the library world and in the educational world. Those people embraced storytelling. I told them every year when the festival was going to be, and I would say that, "You just write to NAPPS, Post Office Box 309, Jonesborough Tennessee, 37659"... I said that so much, and so many people [responded] – it was as if all of the seeds that were there for storytelling started to germinate right about that time (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 30).

In his 1998 CSP interview, Jimmy Neil Smith acknowledges the duo's significance in spreading the gospel of Jonesborough, Tennessee:

The success of this storytelling festival and this movement and this association... was due to one thing. We had seven people on the board; six of

them were professional... storytellers who were ambassadors. The other one was me. I couldn't tell stories, so I licked stamps. And it was that combination of having somebody back home, licking stamps, and the six ambassadors, going out throughout the United States, telling stories, especially Connie and Barbara. I mean clearly they were the ambassadors...²⁵¹

Regan-Blake also acknowledges Smith's contribution to their shared effort to develop the NAPPS organization and the Festival in those early days:

Jimmy Neil...gave so much. I remember [at] all those board meetings, he would insist on us coming to eat at the Parson's Table and later on at the Widow Brown's [restaurant].²⁵² And he would never charge NAPPS anything for that. He sent out those newsletters all on his own monies. Before we had any money coming in or even after we had monies coming in, he did so much...

He was informally the director of NAPPS. We didn't really think of it that way. He was the chair of [the] NAPPS [board] and I was the vice-chair for several years. Though his restaurants and other businesses took some of his attention during the year, he was still very involved in the Festival and pulling all those

²⁵¹ From an October 1998 CSP interview with Jimmy Neil Smith.

²⁵² While still teaching journalism at Science High School in nearby Johnson City, Tennessee, Smith opened the Parson's Table restaurant in the parsonage of the former Christian Church (established circa 1874) in Jonesborough. This was in 1973, the same year he founded the National Storytelling Festival. He opened a second restaurant, the Widow Brown's, also in the parsonage building, around 1978. The two restaurants were run separately but shared a kitchen. He eventually added an ice parlor in Johnson City to his restaurant empire. In an email exchange with Smith, he was unclear about the years of the restaurants opening and closing. In our phone conversation in March of 2014, Regan-Blake mentioned that Smith closed all three restaurants in 1984; that was when he became fulltime paid staff as the Executive Director of NAPPS.

logistics of the Festival together. His wife, Jean, was director [of NAPPS] for a couple of years. We got some CETA²⁵³ funds in the early 70s, federal funds, to put some people...to work [in the NAPPS office] (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 73-74).

For a time in the early years of the festival, when Smith or Regan-Blake heard about storytellers in outlying areas – beyond the reach of Smith in upper east Tennessee, or outside the Folktellers' touring area – whose work warranted their attention, the CETA-funded office workers were dispatched to make "audition tapes" and bring them back to Jonesborough for vetting.

As Artistic Director, Regan-Blake Handles the Details of the Festival

From 1975 onward, two gendered "elemental forces" – the Folktellers (Regan-Blake and Freeman) and the Founder (Smith) – were inextricably linked in the making of the American storytelling revival. This is as it should be in any creation myth that acknowledges biology by invoking both feminine and masculine energies in the making of a world.

Regan-Blake would organize her touring schedule and her personal life to accommodate a second job – as unpaid vice-chair of NAPPS and unnamed artistic director of the National Storytelling Festival. She says:

[I was the] detail person. I followed everything, because once I was meeting these different people on the road, and if they were going to be coming [to

²⁵³ CETA stood for Comprehensive Employment Training Act. According to a Jimmy Neil Smith, CETA funds paid for NAPPS staff from "about 1976, but by 1981, our CETA grants had come to an end" (Personal email from Smith on March 11, 2014. Used by permission).

Jonesborough] to tell, I wanted everything to be as easy and smooth for them as possible. That meant attending to what kind of microphones we had and...what kind of emceeing we had, [or] if people went too long [when] they were telling, because that would affect the next teller. All of those kinds of details I felt very connected to. [Later on] Laura Simms is the one that really put the word[s], "artistic director" [to the task], but that's really what I was doing. 'Cause I wanted the storytelling to happen in as much of a relaxed atmosphere as possible. Attending to all of those details, in my mind, let that happen.

For years after I met Phil in 1981 – he's the love of my life, Phil Blake – a lot of times we would take vacations in September. Actually we got married in September [of 1984]. Then after that, we'd always take our vacations [in September]. And he remembers, every vacation, me doing the schedule for NAPPS. [*laugh*] As it got [to be] more and more people, and more and more places that we performed around town, it got very complicated!

I would have all these lists of who I would put together and who I would have follow each other. It was in lots of ways, especially in the early years, like a full-time job. So I actually had two full-time jobs. One was with NAPPS and it was year-round, because other things were happening; the conference started happening [in 1978]. We had the newsletter and that kept rolling. And we were trying to get some funds. We were trying to get other people interested in the festival itself...(CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 74-75).

Crafting the Listening Experience for the Festival Audience

Having come of age as a storyteller on folk music festival stages, Regan-Blake adapted that model to the National Storytelling Festival. She knew where she wanted to emulate the folk revival model and where she preferred to innovate. Every change was intended to ensure that the teller was well served and the listening audience was having the experience she wanted them to have. Those changes, in turn, were adapted by other festivals as they began to spring up across the country. She said:

I felt inspired by...the spirit of storytelling or something that was looking over me as I was making decisions about the festival. [Those decisions] have affected storytelling in some ways worldwide, but certainly in the United States. One was putting time in between the tellers' performances. [At] the folk music festivals – the only model that we had at that time – everything overlapped. So you'd look at a schedule, and this one event was happening at main stage from 1:30 to 2:30. Then at 1:45, at stage...number three, something else was happening...Something else was happening over here that was just finishing off...People's...schedules for a weekend event were circled to catch this person at the ballad singing, and then they would run over to the river and catch these two people 'cause they really wanted to hear them. Then they would run back over to the forest and catch those.

I knew, in some way, from some voice, that that wasn't what we wanted to do with storytelling. That we wanted to be able to clean our palate in between the stories to give a chance for the stories to settle in. We did one-hour slots. As the festival grew to three locations around town, to five locations, to ten locations...everything was going at once so that you had to choose. You had to make a decision of which place you were going to go... There was a half an hour

in between, so that the tellers had a moment to take a breath. The listeners had that chance...to walk away and either think about that story or turn to someone sitting next to them in the tent and tell them a story that they were reminded of in the listening...The National Festival became the model for all the hundreds of festivals that go on all over the United States and almost all of them follow that same lineup.

The other thing that I'm proud of doing in the early days – it had some good aspects and some not so good aspects to it – ...was to not allow any videoing or audiotaping inside the tents. Everyone that was coming wanted to take home these stories. All these librarians and teachers and storytellers, people that wanted to do storytelling and people that already were doing storytelling, they wanted this tape recorder [to capture the stories and take them home].

[When that happens]...as the tellers, your heart beat starts going with the rhythm of that tape recorder rather than the rhythm of the audience. [The space was filled with] things clicking and buzzing and people rewinding [tape]. I'd found in the folk music world...you'd have this huge crowd outdoors, this beautiful tent, [and] all these tape recorders...A performer was up there singing a ballad and said, "Now, sing this one with me," and a lot of people wouldn't sing 'cause they didn't want their own voice on the tape recorder. They wouldn't clap as loud. You'd hear 'em in the middle of somebody singing, if they didn't want [a recording of that song], they'd click it off. It was horrible!

I felt that that was not what we wanted in the storytelling world. So we made this [rule]. It was not a popular law or a ban. I remember hearing from lots

of people, especially as media people started coming, because they wanted access...to those storytellers. This is where, if I had that to do over, I would do it differently, that is, having one place [where things could be recorded]. That's what [happened] after I left the board...to have a particular tent where the media could come. 'Cause what happened during my time at the festival, those first twelve to thirteen years, all the media people...got [footage of was]...the storytellers that were out on the street. They got the people that were dressed up as Mother Goose...the people that were wanting to be inside [the tents], telling at the Festival, but weren't quite at that quality...

[But] I was glad to not have the taping going on inside the tents. And that's continued. Almost all festivals have that same thing and no picture taking...When people have a tape recorder, it's almost as if they don't listen because they think that they can wait till they get home to listen. And by not having that, by having to take home the stories through [your] eyes and ears and into [your] hearts, then you listen in a different way. You listen much more deeply...(CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 49-53).

A Personal Relationship with Festival Audiences

Because Regan-Blake herself had traveled to so many venues across country, and lit the flame of storytelling in the hearts of so many listeners, she recognized a good many of the folks who made their way to Jonesborough in the early days of the Festival:

At the Festivals at that time...I felt like I knew everyone, because I'd been up to Ohio; I'd been to Long Island. I'd been to Massachusetts and down to Florida and at all these library associations. I would say probably...up until the ninth, tenth,

and eleventh Festival, I personally had told stories to ninety per cent of the people that were [there].

The people around Jonesborough really didn't know what [the Festival] was yet. That's the way it is often...People don't realize the riches that are right there [in front of them]. So it was more people flying in from other places and making the journey to get there, rather than getting in a car and driving ten minutes. It took a long time for east Tennessee people to realize the jewel that was in their backyard. Most people were coming from other places, extending that image of the family. Not only was it these storytellers [we met] that we were feeling so close to, it was the story listeners. And that group kept growing and growing. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 47-48).

She continues:

There was this...incredible openness [in the audience]. It was as if people came and took several layers off as they walked into Jonesborough and started hearing the stories. Then by Saturday afternoon, when they had heard maybe ten different storytellers, they were all the way down to their heart, and ready to turn to anyone and offer that heart [to them]. That was...the feeling that was there, even though...we were starting to get large crowds (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 49).

The Folktellers Bring Home the Bacon to NAPPS

Not only did Regan-Blake and Freeman provide (sometimes un-credited) talent to the Festival stage, but also the two brought funds to the organization's meager stores. According to an email from Jimmy Neil Smith: "[After] our CETA grants had come to an end in 1981, we had no funds for staffing. Connie and Barbara had made friends with

Mort Schindel of Weston Woods. They told him of our plight, and he gave NAPPS \$10,000".²⁵⁴ Smith indicated that this was a one-time gift. However, during the next three years, the organization's revenues grew, and NAPPS itself could afford to provide a modest annual salary to its single paid staff member. As it happens, Smith used Schindel's gift to hire his wife, Jean, to be the administrator for the NAPPS organization. In the email mentioned above, Smith also writes:

Jean...quit teaching...took a salary cut, and for \$10,000 annually became the [first] full-time Executive Administrator for NAPPS for three years. By 1984, she was ready to return to teaching, resigned from the NAPPS position, and I asked to become the NAPPS director. By then, revenues were about \$125,000 annually, so there was sufficient funding for a full-time director.²⁵⁵

I emailed him again to ask these follow up questions: "The year you asked to become the NAPPS director, was it the board you asked?" and "given that the organization's revenues were by then \$125, 000, I'm thinking your starting salary was a little more than \$10,000. Do you remember...?" By return email, he answered: "I had earlier stepped down as chairperson of the NAPPS board. I remained a board member, but Connie became

²⁵⁴ Personal email from Jimmy Neil Smith on March 11, 2014. Used by permission. In another email from that exchange, Smith wrote: I invited Mort to the Festival one year, not too long ago, and we had a small ceremony during which we thanked him for his critically important gift at our time of need and gave him a plaque that included a gavel made from the wood of the fallen Daniel Boone Tree that once stood, until 1916, near Jonesborough in the Boones Creek area. The plaque honored him as a Trailblazer for storytelling. I was not at the Festival where Schindel was honored, and had heard nothing about this recognition in the community. After the fact, I was moved to learn of Smith's public gesture toward one of the backstage benefactors of the Festival and the revival community.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

chairperson. I asked Connie and the board if they would consider appointing me the executive director of NAPPS, and they did..."²⁵⁶

Smith went on to answer my question about his salary thus:

I probably made more than \$10,000. In fact, Jean's salary during her second and third years could have been more (growing as the organization was generating more income). I don't know what my salary was. This info (and other info) could be checked by Valda at the Library of Congress. The minutes from the board meetings and old financial reports are there for many of the 40 years.²⁵⁷

Smith's hiring of his wife mirrors the seemingly self-promoting practices of the storytelling organization's first board members who featured themselves onstage in the early years of the Festival. But when a handful of professional tellers became the official board of directors for the nonprofit organization in 1975, they became Sobol's "secret society" of dedicated volunteers working together to produce a then-one-of-a-kind event. Until they could locate and vet other performers, the skills of the same small group that organized, programmed and promoted the Festival were also needed to provide the talent and populate the Festival venues.

In the early years, the practices of this working board made sense, and went unchallenged. But as the fame of the Festival spread, and the number of its venues and the size of its audiences grew, so did the size of the storytelling talent pool. From that larger pool of talent came the next generation of the NAPPS board of directors, and eventually the question of a conflict of interest arose around the practice of the board

²⁵⁶ Personal email from Smith on March 24, 2014. Used by permission.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

hiring its own members to tell at the festival. In an attempt to address the appearance of a conflict of interest, a later board created a new policy deeming its members ineligible for a featured teller slot. For better or worse, this policy shift happened during my tenure on the board in the late eighties.²⁵⁸

Smith's disclosure about Mort Schindel's \$10,000 investment in NAPPS (by then the Festival's producing organization) puts teeth into Regan-Blake's earlier mentions of Schindel, and her statement at one point that "we were trying to get some funds. We were trying to get other people interested in the festival itself." Thanks, chiefly, to the Folktellers' work as ambassadors for the Festival and NAPPS, the revival community in the early seventies came to include tellers, librarians, educators, presenters, record producers, authors, folklorists – and the occasional philanthropist. All of these people had matrilineal kinship ties – through the Folktellers-as-foremothers – to the cause of preserving and perpetuating storytelling. Many in this growing pool of supporters (including the board members) invested financially in the cause. That fact makes the matriarchs' erasure from publicly acknowledged revival history all the more egregious.

Conclusion

Home and family remain significant tropes in the narrative, occurring again and again in the Folktellers' description of the people they met and places they stayed during their exploratory travels into the wilds of the (as yet unnamed) revival. Those repeated tropes communicate how well cared for the Folktellers felt in the company of their sponsors on the road. The homeowners who offered the Folktellers keys and "second

²⁵⁸ Regan-Blake and others spoke about issues relating to the national storytelling organization's "growing pains" in a poly-vocal keynote at the 2012 National Storytelling Conference; their statements will be referenced later in the study.

homes" were all female; the same group of women might not have felt as comfortable offering house keys to a pair of male itinerant tellers. As it happened their hostesses also happened to look like Regan-Blake and Freeman: Euro-American, college-educated, professional women in the fields of education and library science. Theirs was a ready-made sorority.

The recurring tropes of family and home – on and off stage – also communicate the fondness with which the Folktellers remembered their own family relationships while growing up. A fondly remembered growing-up narrative is not shared by some of the other women who found their way to the revival community. Nor was it necessarily the lived experience of tellers whose identity markers separated them from the humorous, heteronormative, hegemonic standard that began to be particularly privileged at the Festival in the second twenty years of the revival. But theirs are another set of stories, to be interrogated in other studies.²⁵⁹

Meanwhile, a growing web of sisterhood among the Folktellers and their female sponsors would soon be matched by a sense of kinship the duo encountered with fellow performers. This coming kinship allowed Regan-Blake and Freeman to feel cradled in the bosom of extended family in their interactions with the emerging revival community as well. Being housed within a growing circle of familial friendships seems to have shielded them well from the indignities many women still encounter when traveling by themselves. Perhaps expressly *because* they traveled in a borderless state of grace the

²⁵⁹ One such study is my article (thinly disguised as a lengthy performance review), "Trail of Blood: Celebration and Capitulation in Eve Ensler's *The Good Body* and Elizabeth Ellis's *One Size Fits Some*," Rev. of *The Good Body* by Eve Ensler and *One Size Fits Some* by Elizabeth Ellis, *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* 6.2 (2010), 145-163.

Folktellers were ready to welcome others to the revival with such open arms. The narrative of that welcoming begins in the next chapter.

Meanwhile Regan-Blake and Freeman's narrative documents the impact that the Folktellers had in shaping the work of other tellers, piquing the interest of potential attendees and identifying possible donors to join the cause of an as-yet-unnamed storytelling revival community. They set an example of aesthetic excellence as tandem tellers and they set the bar as NAPPS ambassadors spreading the word about the Festival and even raising funds to pay the staff. In addition, Regan-Blake became Smith's most valuable player as the (unnamed) artistic director of the annual event. The next chapter about the Folktellers' identifying fellow performers and building the revival community confirms the breadth and width of their impact.

CHAPTER FOUR: Stitching Together a Quilt of Community

Introduction

In *Burning Brightly – New Light on Old Tales Told Today*, Kay Stone identifies four streams from which the river of the contemporary storytelling revival has been fed: the oral tradition (15), library and educational storytelling (17), theatrical storytelling (20), and therapeutic and spiritual storytelling (22). As their touring life unfolded, the Folktellers encountered narrative performance artists representing all four of these streams. In fact, the duo's own evolving work drew water from each.

During their travels, Regan-Blake took care to bring the talented artists whom she and her cousin met on the road into the fold of the National Storytelling Festival. In doing so, she stitched together a living quilt of the storytelling performance community, connecting the first two waves of revival storytellers into a professional cohort. Along the way she also identified storytelling champions: directors on the folk festival, healing arts, and coffee house circuits, folklorists, collectors and producers of archival and commercial recordings, librarians, educators, and children's picture book authors and illustrators. The input of those practitioners, in turn, informed her understanding of the breadth, depth, and importance of storytelling practice whether on stage at festivals or in an elementary school, a library, the halls of academia, or across the kitchen table.

In *The Storytellers' Journey*, Sobol observes that "communities organize events and events organize communities..." (157). He writes:

The revival was powered in the main by energetic individuals in widely scattered areas, who banded together into local and regional, formal and informal networks,

story-swaps, performance collectives, classes, conferences, and guilds... These local and regional communities provided the close support and nurturing necessary to launch local storytelling careers, which eventually bloomed into the national spotlight" (157).

It was with Connie Regan-Blake's help that many of those "energetic individuals" found their way to Jonesborough and "the national spotlight."

Building a Professional Community Where There Was None

In telling her story Regan-Blake makes light of the hard work the Folktellers did, not only to keep their emerging livelihood as a tandem team going, but also to build connections among a diverse group of solo performers that would come to inhabit the revival community as kin. Bringing about that kinship was no mean feat, for as Bill Harley said of the community in his keynote at the 2012 National Storytelling Conference:

People who call themselves storytellers...are, almost by definition, anarchists. Lone wolves. They spend entirely too much time by themselves. They stand on stage alone, they write alone, they often practice alone, and they sit in airplanes and in the car alone. And after everyone else in the theater has left, they go home alone... This approach to life makes it inherently difficult for us to be organized and think, as a group, about what is best for the promotion of storytelling...

Furthermore, we all are mongrels. None of us is pure. We are refugees – refugees from theater, from the world of oral tradition, refugees from libraries and

schools of education. From the world of music and dance and academia and welfare and the corporate world (1).²⁶⁰

Harley continues:

We were mongrels when we started, making it up as we went along, and we are mongrels today...All these different mongrel strains started coming together about thirty five or forty years ago. It was a perfect storm waiting to happen. Or if not a storm, well, an occluded front. All of us coming from different backgrounds, but looking for a place to try it out (2-3).²⁶¹

Out of this hybrid tangle of solo performers and other practitioners, Regan-Blake tirelessly set about to create the extended family she was used to. In crossing their paths, she gave this disparate group of "mongrels" a name that, in some cases, they had not yet given themselves: storyteller. And she made every effort to stay in touch with them so she could bring them back to the already-mythic homeplace of revival storytelling – to Jonesborough, Tennessee.

Spreading the Word, Enriching the Soil

On the road, Regan-Blake became a master gardener, recognizing both wildflowers, and award-winning hybrids, already flourishing in an emerging garden of storytelling practitioners. These she transplanted to the stage of the National Storytelling Festival. In the early years, the festival benefitted from a variegated field of expertise that included the most prominent practitioners in their diverse performance, professional and

²⁶⁰ Bill Harley, "Where Do We Go From Here? The State of Storytelling – My Perspective," Keynote Address, National Storytelling Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 1, 2012, 1.

²⁶¹ *ibid*, 2-3.

academic areas. As she gathered these seeds of talent and expertise, Regan-Blake also nurtured the flowering dreams and ambitions of Jimmy Neil Smith. Spreading the word about storytelling – and especially about NAPPS and the Festival – meant enriching the soil of Jonesborough's economy and its cache as the Mecca of the revival movement. She remembers:

From '75 on, Jimmy Neil was depending on me to find the tellers, because I was out there, doing the traveling; I was talking about the national association.

Jonesborough was a place that [Barbara and I] would come back through probably three or four times a year, for [NAPPS] board meetings and also to stay at Carolyn's house and just to connect with Jimmy Neil. Actually...it was probably closer to eight or ten times [a year]. Jimmy Neil's first question was always, "What do they think of us out there? Are people knowing about us? Do they hear about us?" I always loved telling him because he would get so excited when I'd say, "...I was at this folk music festival and somebody came up to me and said, 'I've heard about a festival down in Jonesborough.'" Jimmy Neil would just cheer that the word was getting around (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 36).

Gathering the Pieces of a Community Quilt

Of course, there were other talented spoken word artists and traditional tellers whose work was becoming visible in various venues in their home communities, and whose paths crossed the Folktellers' trajectory on the road. Here's how Regan-Blake tells it:

It was a very exciting time. I believe in the concept that no one person creates or imagines or invents anything. When Edison came along, there were people all

over the world that were looking into electricity. It just happened that Edison put the final pieces together...and that's who we look to as the person that invented [the electric light]. Our consciousness is connected in lots of ways around the world, and certainly in our stories and in our paths. That was happening to a lot of people – those juices were just starting to flow – and they were seeing the first beginning flowers of being able to do storytelling. It was happening in a lot of places (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 33).

Even before the Folktellers went on the road, Regan-Blake had been taking note of storytelling performers and story collectors whose work she admired. The efforts of Richard Chase and James Taylor Adams in Wise County, Virginia and Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky all came up in conversation:

Appalshop²⁶² [was founded by] folks up...in Kentucky...Those are people homegrown to the mountains. Most of them have past generations that lived and worked in the mines or people that died in the mines or had that black lung disease from being in coalmines... It's a real hard place to make a living. These creative people got together and started doing joint storytelling...as an acted out kind of thing. At the same time, it was very much storytelling.

As Laura Simms tells her students...as the storyteller, you always have to stay home: you have to be present. You can become these other characters [in the story], but you have to...[stay present to your audience]. That's what [Appalshop's Roadside Theater] did. [There] was always someone that was at home [as the

²⁶² Appalshop is a collective of activist artists making theatre, making films, making recordings that celebrate traditional arts and empower members of the community. For more see: <https://appalshop.org/about/>, accessed online March 19, 2014.

narrator]? I remember them telling some of the Jack stories. When Jack gets put into a sack and his brothers...[are] going to throw him into the water, they would take...one of the guys that was there and turn him upside down, and the other three would hold him...So it was acted out in that way, but it was still very much storytelling...I met them when I was still at the public library in Chattanooga, and began [a] correspondence with them too. I think it was probably around '77 or '78 that they were featured at the festival.²⁶³ They were doing great work.

That particular area [and the area] surrounding it is where Richard Chase got a lot of his stories. [He] brought a lot to the storytelling world. He was quite a character. I met him early on too. He was...in his late 60s by the time I met him, maybe early 70s – and very crotchety, a cantankerous old man. He kind of created a wake [*laugh*]. Wherever he went, there were ripples and waves and sometimes he tried to drown people. He was that kind of a person. But I've always been indebted to him for what he did with collecting the Grandfather tales and the Jack tales because [his books by those names]...put those southern Appalachian stories within easy reach of millions of people.

It's important...to note that even though we think of Richard Chase²⁶⁴ as collecting all of those stories, he really used a lot of stories [collected by others]

²⁶³ Tom Bledsoe, Ron Short and Angelyn DeBord came to the National Storytelling Festival as "Roadside Theater" in 1979.

²⁶⁴ Storyteller, author and collector Richard Chase (1904-1988) was born in Huntsville, Alabama, and graduated with a B.S. in botany from Antioch College in 1929. Though not trained professionally as a folklorist, he was intrigued by the connection between Anglo-Celtic lore and the lore of Appalachia, and devoted much of his life to preserving, perpetuating and publishing stories and songs and play party games from oral cultures in Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. He published *The Grandfather Tales*

from Wise County [Virginia in his book]. [Many] were collected by [James] Taylor Adams...That's the man that did massive collecting...in Virginia and Kentucky.²⁶⁵ He and Richard were to do a book together. That was the original intent. Then Richard [Chase] did those stories [in his own book].

[But]...Adams... deserves [credit too]...The joy and the beauty of storytelling is that all these people that have already passed on, through our stories, we can bring them back on stage and bring them back into people's lives and their homes and in their hearts...Adams was a very important person...for getting those stories, and Richard [Chase] is the one that gets all of the credit for that.

I give Richard a lot of credit too, 'cause he certainly did so much; he touched a lot of people's lives...Over the last 25 years after a performance, if I've told a Jack tale or a Grandfather tale or one based on those collections, I'll have someone every once in a while come up and say, "Richard Chase came to my school when I was in fourth grade." This will be someone that's in their sixties. Or someone else might come in and say, "Richard came to the summer camp that I did, and he taught us all those play party games." So Richard was out there, and very much storytelling and very much [sharing] the music, folk dancing, and folk

and *The Jack Tales*. Chase was featured at the National Storytelling Festival once – in 1977. For more see Charles L. Perdue Jr.'s one-page entry about Chase in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jan Harold Brunvand (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 281.

²⁶⁵ Though Regan-Blake remembered him as "Samuel Taylor Adams" in the unedited narrative, the collector's name was James Taylor Adams. His informant in Wise County, Virginia in 1939 was Samuel Simpson Adams. The material J.T. Adams collected from S.S. Adams can be found in *Virginia Folk Legends*, edited by Thomas A. Barden (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991).

music. He was a gift to all of us [through] all of the preservation that he did (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 20-22).

Grounded in the kinds of stories that Adams and Chase collected from traditional tellers in Virginia and Kentucky, the work of the Roadside Theater was one of Appalshop's earliest manifestations. Regan-Blake remembers:

At the beginning, it was only storytelling that [Appalshop] did. Then it grew to film and records. They've produced a lot of records. Once they started going in different directions and getting so much expertise in different directions, that's when they started naming the different divisions, and [the performance arm] became Roadside Theater...The beginning people in Appalshop, were very close with Ray [Hicks]. 'Cause they had done [a] film on him early on.²⁶⁶ Jack Wright and...Tom [Bledsoe]...with someone else...[Jeff Kiser,] Don Baker... There was a core group...of about six or eight people that did a lot of the storytelling.

I'll tell you this too. This was, again, before I left the public library. I went up to a gathering that [the Appalshop folks] were having. It was one of the most remarkable events...I felt like I had been put back 50 years in time... It was at this church...a big church picnic and folks had gathered around. They had a big open room. We went inside, and there [were] two people that were riddling.... They went back and forth; it was like a contest... They were on opposite sides of the room. One would...yell out a riddle..."As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives. Seven wives had seven cats. Seven cats had seven kits.

²⁶⁶ Ray Hicks, *Fixin' To Tell About Jack* (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), DVD. Appalshop also produced a 1989 audio recording of Hicks entitled *Jack Alive!* (June Appal Recordings, 1989). It is available as a digital download.

Kits, cats, wives...how many were going to St. Ives?" [The answer is] only one because "I" was going to St. Ives. "Between heaven and earth, not on a tree. I've told you, now you tell me." Can you get that one? ...I'll come back and tell you the answer to that in a second.

These two people – I get chilled...thinking about it now – they stood across from each other, so it wasn't like a performance. We were all just [there] after dinner...I told some stories and some other people – Appalshop folks – had told stories, and we were just hanging out. And they started this riddling. It was electrifying...I think sometimes people get the image that before television and before Broadway, "Oh, it must have been real boring"...but this was just as good as Cirque de Soleil...It was amazing what happened between these two. "Between heaven and earth, (k)not on a tree. I've told you, now you tell me?" It's a knot, k-n-o-t. A knot on a tree. That was one of the [riddles] that I heard that day... That was Appalshop that brought me into that world. [Through them I also met] Rene Davis...[who] was like 93 years old and still quilting. Barbara and I went up and worked with her for a day, and helped her do some canning and learned some of the quilt stitches...[It's] a blessed life that I've led (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 22-24).

Earlier in the interview, Regan-Blake mentioned some of the other performance storytellers who were developing their own iterations of the art form when the Folktellers came along:

It's always been so fascinating to me...in later years...meeting Laura Simms and Ed Stivender and Jay O'Callahan. For them, too, 1974, '75, '76 – that was a real

pivotal time. That's when Ed Stivender...was in a group called the Plum Cake Players...doing skits and plays and going into libraries.²⁶⁷ I met him...at [the] Connecticut Folk Festival, one of the first performances I did on the national scene. [I] told Ed about the festival [in Jonesborough]. The next October, three months later, he was there [to listen]. It blew him away...He went back and really changed his focus...to storytelling and became...[an] important part of [the] National Festival too.

Jay [O'Callahan] had taken a sabbatical from work and was writing a lot of stories.²⁶⁸ He really felt drawn to be a writer...[and] was...telling stories to his children; he had started telling stories at the school where the children were going...Laura [Simms] was very involved...in theatre.²⁶⁹ She started

²⁶⁷ Described by the *Miami Herald* as "the Robin Williams of storytelling," and by the *Kirkus Review* as "a Catholic Garrison Keillor," Stivender is a much-beloved Philadelphia-based storyteller, educator, and August House author who has "strutted in the Comic division of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade since 1982" (<http://edstivender.com/about/> Accessed 14 February 2014). He was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1980, and was welcomed into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1996. A member of the NAPPS board when I served on it, Stivender founded an informal Fringe Festival in front of the Jonesborough courthouse at the National Storytelling Festival in 1988.

²⁶⁸ One of the best known tellers in the revival, writer and performer Jay O'Callahan has received story commissions from NASA, National Public Radio, the Boston Symphony, the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, Touchstone Theatre and others (<http://ocallahan.com/story-commissions> Accessed 14 February 2014). Living in Marshfield, Massachusetts, he was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1980. An early member of the NAPPS board, he was welcomed to the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1996.

²⁶⁹ One of what I call "the New York goddesses of storytelling," and a founder of the New York Storytelling Center, Laura Simms is an artist-scholar and the author of several books, including *Our Secret Territory – The Essence of Storytelling* (Boulder: Sentient Publications, 2011). She is also a human rights activist whose adopted son, Ishmael Beah, is the best-selling author of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

[experiencing] that pull of the traditional stories, and started turning more towards the stories themselves. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 32-33).

Later in the interview, Regan-Blake returned to her first hearing of O'Callahan on "The Spider's Web," a radio show produced by WGBH in Boston, and distributed nationally through National Public Radio:

I remember the very first time I ever heard Jay O'Callahan. I had been on the road, traveling with Barbara, full-time for three years...And in the winter of '77-'78, for two months, Barbara had gone back to Chattanooga...[and] I went to stay with...friends of mine in a little community up above Knoxville, Tennessee...I brought in everything that had been on the truck...and put it in that room. I had a quilt and I hung it up. It was so wonderful to be able to come in, day after day for five weeks, and see the same thing and be on the same ground...

I had a radio in the room. One evening I came in and it was on NPR...and I heard somebody telling a story. It was like "Whoa! That's the first time I've ever heard [anything] on the radio like that"...It was Jay O'Callahan...That was before I'd ever met him...He was telling a story about...a fantasyland that he had created...for his children...This was one little segment of that...on the radio. I remember standing in that room, looking around...hearing Jay's voice coming through with that story...All of a sudden, I realized, in a different kind of a way, how big this could be. Because it really worked on the radio. It could be

(New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2008). A board member for NAPPs from 1979-1987, Simms was the National Storytelling Festival's second artistic director after Connie Regan-Blake. She was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1979, and was honored in the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1996. For more see: <http://www.laurasimms.com> Accessed 24 March 2014.

international. That we could help [countless] people bring back their stories – remember their stories and also create new ones, as Jay was doing (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 5-7).

Ed Stivender lived in Philadelphia, Jay O'Callahan in Marshfield, Massachusetts and Laura Simms in New York City. But there were others who lived in closer proximity to Jonesborough – like David Holt.²⁷⁰ Regan-Blake remembers, "I met him at the Fiddler's Grove folk music festival,²⁷¹ here in North Carolina. He was doing music collecting, and playing music...I said, 'You gotta come to the festival.' He came the next year [in 1976]" (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 36). At the second storytelling festival in Jonesborough, Regan-Blake had met two folk musicians who were folklore collectors and community organizers near Knoxville, Tennessee:

I believe the first time [Guy and Candie Carawan]²⁷² came [to Jonesborough] was the second storytelling festival. They lived in a little community outside of

²⁷⁰ Multi-instrumentalist David Holt is a four-time Grammy award-winning musician and storyteller, as well as a recent recipient of the North Carolina Heritage Award. He has hosted "Riverwalk: Classic Jazz from the Landing" for Public Radio International, and been a television host for the PBS show "Folkways" focused on North Carolina, and for the Nashville Network's show, "Fire on the Mountain." He first appeared at the National Storytelling in 1976 and was welcomed to the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1996. He toured extensively with Doc Watson, and has played with Grandpa Jones, Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Roy Acuff and Chet Atkins. For more see: <http://www.davidholt.com/about/> accessed online 21 March 2014.

²⁷¹ Founded as the Union Grove Fiddlers Convention in 1924, it morphed into the Ole Time Fiddler's and Bluegrass Festival in 1970. By now, Fiddler's Grove is considered the home of the oldest continuous old time fiddler's contest in North America. In 2000 it was recognized as a Local Legacy, as part of the Library of Congress Bicentennial Celebration. For more see: <http://fiddlersgrove.com> accessed online 21 March 2014.

²⁷² At this writing, Guy and Candie Carawan have been making music, collecting and disseminating songs and other cultural expressions, documenting folk life, establishing traditional music festivals, and organizing workshops to teach empowerment

Knoxville²⁷³ – not the same one that I lived in but another one – and they were doing great work there. They were very involved in the labor movement back in the 40s and the 50s, and also in the Civil Rights movement. A lot of people don't think of the South being a stronghold in certain areas for people that were very concerned about other people's rights...This [community] was one of those places, a safe place for people to come and to be able to plan what they could do to broaden people's rights.

Guy was also into folk music. He did a lot of collecting down in the Georgia Sea Islands. It was through Guy and his wife, Candie, that I met Janie Hunter²⁷⁴ and Bessie Jones.²⁷⁵ Guy had collected a lot of different stories: [singing] "Barney McCabe, Doodley Doo and Sue-Boy, your master's calling

in local communities for fifty years. For more see: http://digitalstudio.ucr.edu/studio_projects/carawan/ accessed online 16 March 2014.

²⁷³ As community organizers and activists, the Carawans were involved with the Highlander Institute in New Market, Tennessee. It is now called the Highlander Research and Education Center. For more see: <http://highlandercenter.org/about-us/> accessed online 16 March 2014.

²⁷⁴ Born on Johns Island, South Carolina in 1918, African American traditional storyteller Janie Hunter was listed as a featured teller at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. She was recognized as a 1984 NEA National Heritage Fellow. She died in 1997. For more see: <http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/janie-hunter>

²⁷⁵ A founding member of the Georgia Sea Island Singers and a frequent source of songs, stories and lore for folklorist Alan Lomax, Bessie Jones was born in Smithville, Georgia in 1902. She never appeared at the National Storytelling Festival, but the second generation of the Georgia Sea Island Singers appeared there in 1989, represented by the husband and wife duo, Doug and Frankie Quimby. Jones was a 1982 NEA National Heritage Fellow. She died in 1984. For more see: <http://arts.gov/honors/heritage/fellows/bessie-jones>

you."²⁷⁶ [That] was one of those stories I told...in the early days. Guy [was featured at] the Festival [in 1977 and 1982]. He didn't really tell stories, but what he would do is play some music...He played banjo and some guitar. Hearing those [old traditional tunes]...[would] take us to that place of hearing the stories and, vice-versa, the stories would lead you back into the music. So he played an important role.

It was Guy and Candie that brought Nancy Schimmel to the storytelling festival the first time. Nancy is Malvina Reynolds' daughter.²⁷⁷ Guy...had performed with Malvina all over the world. She's the wonderful folk singer that wrote that great song, talking about all the houses in San Francisco...[singing] "Little boxes, made of ticky-tacky."²⁷⁸ Also that "Love is Like a Penny"²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ "Barney McCabe" is a cante fable, a folk tale form in which the prose narrative is interspersed with sung refrains conveying crucial information like threats or magical spells (or, in the case of this story, both). It was first published in *Aint' You Got a Right to the Tree of Life* by the Carawans (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994). Guy Carawan collected it from Janie Hunter, and published it (with an attribution to Hunter) in *More Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1992), 93-96. Therein, he also directs the reader to a recording of Hunter's own telling on the Smithsonian/Folkways' audio-anthology, *Been in the Storm So Long: A Collection of Spirituals, Folk Tales and Children's Games from Johns Island, SC* (1990). For more see: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/been-in-the-storm-so-long-spirituals-folk-tales-and-childrens-games-from-johns-island-sc/african-american-music-spoken-gospel/music/album/smithsonian> Accessed 20 March 2014.

²⁷⁷ Born in San Francisco in 1900, Malvina Reynolds was a Jewish socialist and singer-songwriter-activist who held a PhD in English from UC-Berkeley. For more see: <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/reynolds.html>

²⁷⁸ Malvina Reynolds' song, "Little Boxes," is on her album *Ear to the Ground*, (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2000). Pete Seeger is credited with making the song famous.

²⁷⁹ Malvina Reynolds' song, "Love is Something" or "Magic Penny," is on her album *Ear to the Ground* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2000).

song...Guy is the one that encouraged Nancy to come to the festival; then he was a part of the festival probably for at least four or five years in the early days²⁸⁰ (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 6-8).

Regan-Blake also detailed Doc McConnell's contributions to the Festival early on. From nearby Rogersville, Tennessee, McConnell had made his way to the second festival just as the two cousins from Chattanooga had the year before. She says:

Doc McConnell. I didn't really mention too much about Doc. By the second – I guess it was by the third or fourth festival – Doc was coming with his Medicine Show.²⁸¹ His daughter, Hannah,²⁸² joined him on the platform, and also his

²⁸⁰ Though his name only appears on the 1977 and 1982 Festival programs, Guy Carawan attended the festival as a supporter for more years than that. Regan-Blake has a photo from an early festival of Carawan onstage playing hammer dulcimer with his son Evan, then ten years old.

²⁸¹ The making of the revival community was not without its difficult moments. In an email Jimmy Neil Smith shared this story about the birth of Doc McConnell's Medicine Show:

Doc McConnell was attending a folk festival somewhere in the Smoky Mountains, and he and others began talking about the old-time medicine shows that once travelled around the country. Doc (who was called Doc from his youth) got to thinking: Why doesn't he begin an old-time medicine show? He knew an old man named Doc Randall in Hawkins County (where Doc McConnell lived) who had an old wagon that could serve as a medicine show wagon. So, Doc McConnell asked Doc Randall to work with him on his medicine show. When Doc McConnell started the show, he was the medicine show barker (the funny man), and Doc Randall was in his troupe (playing the gut bucket [or washtub bass]). Oddly, the act was called Doc Randall's Old-time Medicine Show. It may have already been painted on the wagon by Doc Randall, but I'm not totally sure. It's gets fuzzy from here...

Producers of *Hee-Haw*, then a CBS network show, called NAPPS and asked if we had any suggestions for storytellers or other acts that would fit the *Hee-Haw* theme. I suggested Doc McConnell and his show and Lee Pennington. Both appeared once on *Hee-Haw* at different times. The hope, however, was to use Doc's show as a regular. About the same time, Doc decided to do his own show under his own name, and he did. The two Docs went their separate ways.

brother, Steamer. Steamer McConnell²⁸³ was...one that we lost early on, a wonderful man – very humble and generous. They would do the Medicine Show a lot of times in between [the concerts on stage]. We always tried to not have that be while storytelling was going on, and also not during that half hour break while we were clearing our minds. So it would have its own slot. [The Old Time Medicine Show], we felt, would take people back to another time, especially older people that were coming to the festival (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 8).

Regan-Blake and Freeman also made their way to the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina, modeled after folk schools in Scandinavia where traditional

Doc McConnell revamped his show, got a new wagon, and re-named the show after himself.

But, after Doc McConnell's Old-time Medicine Show appeared on *Hee-Haw*, Doc Randall sued Doc McConnell and me and the *Hee-Haw* producers. I can't remember his objection, but the case was dropped along the way. It never even went to court. *Hee-Haw* producers didn't want to get further involved in legal issues, and they dropped Doc after his first appearance.

From this point forward, Doc McConnell performed the medicine show as Doc McConnell's Old-time Medicine Show. Doc Randall was no longer involved, and he died some time later (Personal email from Smith on November 25, 2013. Used by permission).

²⁸² Hannah McConnell Gillenwater was a contributor to the 1991 audio album *Tales of Humor and Wit*, recorded live at the National Storytelling Festival. On that recording she told the story of "The \$50,000 Racehorse." She also published the story in *More Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1992). When she wasn't onstage with her father Doc, Gillenwater taught school.

²⁸³ Steamer McConnell appeared at only one National Storytelling Festival – in 1977. Doc attributes his own telling of "The Walkin' Catfish" in *Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1991), 21-27, to Steamer. In the wake of his untimely death, Steamer remained a beloved character in Doc McConnell's stories, particularly one of his signature pieces, "Viennie Sausage Story" or "How Steamer Got Addicted to Viennie Sausages." Hannah McConnell Gillenwater, in turn, has kept that story alive after her father's passing.

people pass on their traditional crafts to interested students. That's they met another remarkable teller. Regan-Blake remembers:

Donald Davis²⁸⁴ – I first heard him telling stories not too far from here at the John C. Campbell Folk School. He was telling all traditional stories. I was mesmerized by his storytelling, in a living room, and invited him to the next Festival [in 1981]. Donald has become one of the real leaders in the whole storytelling movement, and a lot of people look to him as their favorite storyteller. He was already comfortable with...telling... traditional stories... One of the reasons that he's so good at telling personal experience stories is because he had that long background of years and years and years of telling those traditional stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 42).

Regan-Blake continues her roll call of Festival tellers, whom she influenced or discovered while on the road with Barbara Freeman:

Barbara and I did workshops in lots of different kinds of communities – in [the] corporate world, and [one for]...national park rangers, up in Virginia...a relatively small group, about fifteen park rangers. I thought it was with a lot of foresight, that whoever had arranged that workshop felt that storytelling is an

²⁸⁴ Probably the best-known storyteller in America, Donald Davis was born in Waynesville, North Carolina in Southern Appalachia. When he first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1981, he had a day job as a Methodist minister in Charlotte, North Carolina. Later he gave up his pulpit to become a full-time freelance storyteller. Davis chaired the NAPPS board for some of the years during which I served on it. He was invited into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1996 and received an NSN Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010. He has published several books and released numerous audio recordings for August House. "What's Your Story? A Donald Davis Workshop" his 2011 five-disc DVD set was produced by the sponsors of the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival in Orem, Utah. For more see: <http://www.ddavisstoryteller.com> accessed online 21 March 2014.

important part of park rangers' lives [with] all the programs around the campfire in the parks. It turns out Bobby Norfolk²⁸⁵ – [a] wonderful storyteller from St. Louis and Atlanta [who] is now nationally known and has been for a good long while – he was in that workshop...He later said: "You were doing what I wanted to be doing too." We were always thrilled to be able to encourage people in that (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 10).

Regan-Blake speaks with particular tenderness about three storytellers whose craft moved her:

I was...at the Winnipeg Folk Festival²⁸⁶ in Canada. I'd heard about Gamble Rogers²⁸⁷ ...He used to tell about when he was playing in bars, that he'd play and people would just keep right on talking. He was [an] expert flat pick guitarist, really one of the leading ones in the United States; he was so good. But he said that people quieted down in that noisy bar when he started talking, and that's

²⁸⁵ A former park ranger, actor, comedian, three-time Emmy award-winning television host and author, Bobby Norfolk has authored six picture books, and released numerous audio recordings. With his wife storyteller and educator Sherry Norfolk, he co-authored *The Moral of the Story – Folktales for Character Development* (Little Rock: August House, 2006). He joined the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2009.

²⁸⁶ The inaugural Winnipeg Folk Festival was held in 1974 to commemorate the city's 100th anniversary. For more see: <http://www.winnipegfolkfestival.ca/about-us/> accessed online 10 March 2014.

²⁸⁷ A native of Winter Park, Florida and a modern-day troubadour, James Gamble Rogers, IV was one of the first wave tellers, initially featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. While camping at Flagler Beach in St. Augustine in 1991, Rogers drowned in an unsuccessful effort to rescue a swimmer caught in a rip tide. After the NSN Circle of Excellence Award was established in 1996, he was awarded posthumously. The park where he lost his life is now called the Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area at Flagler Beach. To get an earful of Rogers' picking and performing prowess, visit his memorial website at <http://www.gamblerogers.com>.

when he started doing a lot more stories. On the folk music festival circuit, he still was doing mostly music. He did one story in his set. I was just enthralled and went over and talked to him.

He was already big-time...in the music world and was commanding pretty good...pay. He had an agent and all. I [told] him that I would love for him to come to the National Storytelling Festival. And he knew instantly that that was something he wanted to be involved in. I [was] embarrassed to say, "You know, we only pay you \$100." [But] he said, "Well, here's the address of my agent. You tell Charlie Steadham²⁸⁸ that if he feels like that's not enough money, that he's to come to me, 'cause I'm going to come to that festival." The following October [in 1978], Gamble was at the festival (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 37-38).

Gamble Rogers was not the only "big name" brought to Jonesborough by the heart-felt persuasions of Connie Regan-Blake and Barbara Freeman. Here's the tale of another heirloom seed they gleaned and planted at the National Storytelling Festival:

A few years before that – actually on this [folk music circuit] – I had started hearing about Marshall Dodge. He was the closest thing to storytelling that was out there...on the [folk festival] stages. He called himself a humorist, used to dress up in these [yellow rain] slickers... and a hat. He'd go on stage and tell

²⁸⁸ Charlie Steadham co-founded the Blade Agency with Allen McCollum in Gainesville, Florida in 1974. Gamble Rogers' long time agent and business manager Steadham acquired the rights to the storyteller/musician's intellectual property, founding Oklawaha Records to keep the recordings in active circulation following Rogers' death in 1991. To get an earful of his picking and performing prowess visit the website of the not-for-profit Gamble Rogers Memorial Foundation: <http://www.gamblerogers.org> accessed online 10 March 2014.

stories from Down East, from...Maine [about the adventures of] "Bert and I".²⁸⁹

He told these wonderful stories, funny things about lobster fishermen going out and setting the bait, and using the mother-in-law for the bait. Some of them were a little bit sexist, but very funny (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 38).

She goes on to detail their first meeting:

[Barbara and I] had heard about him. He [was] already, to us, an icon. I remember the first meeting; it was in Connecticut. We had driven a long way...and got there just as the performance was starting. That night, we had not stopped at flea markets so we could get there on time. And I was enthralled with listening to him.

It was the first time that I realized some of the impact of storytelling. I had been hearing...comments from audience members of my own storytelling, [saying] that "You just take me to a different place." With Marshall, it was one of the first times that I was taken to a different place. Because Ray Hicks and some

²⁸⁹ A native of New York, Marshall J. Dodge III summered in New England as a child; he transplanted himself "Down East" as an adult. Robert A. Bryan and Dodge made a recording called "Bert and I and Other Stories from Down East" in 1957 at the recording studios on the campus of Yale University where Dodge was a philosophy student and Bryan was in Divinity School. It was custom pressed into vinyl by RCA Victor's RCA Custom, the leading record manufacturer for independent record labels. It was picked up for distribution by a Boston-based company, and three more recordings followed. Dodge founded the Maine Festival on the grounds of Bowdoin College in Brunswick. He was killed by a hit and run driver while bicycling in Waimea, Hawaii in 1982. When the NSN Circle of Excellence Awards were created in 1996, he was awarded one posthumously.

The Rev. Robert Bryan officiated at Dodge's memorial service at Yale Divinity School. He worked as a bush-pilot minister to outposts along the coasts of Quebec, Labrador and Newfoundland, becoming archdeacon of the Quebec North Shore for the Anglican Church of Canada, and founder of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment. For more see: http://www.bert-and-i.com/Bert-and-I.com/Bert_and_I_History.html accessed online 1 April 2014. Bryan released "Bert and I Rebooted" with Maine humorist Tim Sample in 2013. By now the two have been performing partners for thirty years.

of the other people that I knew...were taking me back to the places I was already familiar with. Marshall took me to Maine. I'd never been to Maine and out on the sea, and with lobsters. [Through Marshall's stories] I had felt the impact...of storytelling by listening.

At the intermission, Barbara and I went up to him, kind of shy, knowing he was a superstar in that world. He was standing up on...a high stage. We walked up, looked up and said, "Marshall, I'm Connie and this is Barbara and we're storytellers." He leapt off the stage and grabbed us both up in his arms, literally, and swung us around. He said, "I've been hearing about you and I've been waiting to meet you." It took our breath away.

Marshall became a brother. We went back to his place, where he lived in Maine, and spent several days with him. Went to his bank, went to his local store, and he introduced us to everyone. It was like we were his long-lost cousins. It was this family of storytellers that were looking for each other (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 38-40).

Later Regan-Blake spoke of another storytelling jongleur that she met on the road – the Jesuit priest and self-proclaimed itinerant fool Ken Feit:

He was...a troubadour, had the passion for what he was doing and did it regardless of anything else, regardless of money or being put up in a hotel – all of those things were logistics that [weren't] important to him. One of my favorite Ken Feit²⁹⁰ stories was that he had been asked to go into a prison to tell stories.

²⁹⁰ "Itinerant fool" Ken Feit crisscrossed the country (often by hitchhiking) to present workshops and celebratory performances drawing on his skills in puppetry, music, mime and storytelling, and his training as a Jesuit seminarian. He was a popular

You can imagine all these prisoners coming, [asking] "What is this storytelling?"...And Ken started out by saying, "Now, the reason you're in here is because nobody believed your story." All of a sudden, he had the rapt attention of all of these, so-called hardened criminals...He had a way of finding whatever key was necessary that fit the lock [perfectly] that let people open up their minds and hear his stories and hear who he was. I wish that I could have known him better. He was invited to be featured at the National Festival [in 1981] the year that he was killed in an automobile accident.

We've actually lost three – lots more than three, I guess – but three people, pretty important in my own life, to accidents. Ken Feit in that automobile accident. Marshal Dodge was riding a bicycle in Hawaii and someone hit him and killed him; it was a hit and run... And then Gamble Rogers died...trying to save the life of someone else – jumped into the ocean, off the coast of St. Augustine in Florida. [The water there]...was treacherous; you were not supposed to swim in it. A young boy came running over to his campsite – [Gamble] was there with his wife – saying, "My daddy...was fishing and he's just been swept out." Gamble, without a second's thought, grabbed a flimsy little air mattress and went running out. [He] lost his own life, and the other man drowned too. I think

presenter at the ecumenical Clown, Mime, and Puppetry Ministry Workshops that flourished in the early eighties. After falling asleep at the wheel of a car, Feit died of his injuries in August of 1981; he was to have been featured at the National Storytelling Festival for the first time that October. When the NSN Circle of Excellence Award was established in 1996, he was honored posthumously. Joseph F. Martin published a book about him: *Foolish Wisdom: Stories, Activities, Reflections from Ken Feit, I.F. (Itinerant Fool)* (San Jose: Resource Publications, 1990). For more about his life and work, see E. Reid Gilbert's eulogy at: <http://physicalcomedy.blogspot.com/2012/10/remembering-ken-feit.html> accessed online 16 March 2014.

of [Feit, Dodge and Rogers] as heroes in lots of ways, even in the ways that they died (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 1-2).

Acknowledging the losses, but also the gifts she'd received from other tellers, Regan-Blake says:

Whenever I do performances now, I always like to bring on stage with me some of those people that have been important in my life as a storyteller...I mentioned ...Gamble Rogers [who]...along the way, was so encouraging to me, and such an inspiration with the way he was on stage...the way he kind of gave himself and yet held a bit of himself back. I really like that. I liked his manner and rapport with the audience. He's certainly been an inspiration (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 85).

She continued to enumerate performers who'd taught her something about their shared trade:

Utah Phillips²⁹¹ is another one that was in the folk music world that I heard and loved. I met him at the Fox Hollow Festival the first year, where Barbara and I went as audience and got rained out, and then ended up meeting a lot of the performers. That was really the beginning of people putting us on stage to tell stories. We were invited to be featured at that Fox Hollow Festival the next year,

²⁹¹ Born in Cleveland in 1935, itinerant folksinger, songwriter, storyteller and social activist, Bruce D. "Utah" Phillips was the son of a labor organizer. He was a regular on the folk music circuit from the sixties onward. According to his *New York Times* obituary by Jon Pareles, "his songs were recorded by Emmylou Harris, Tom Waits, Joan Baez, Waylon Jennings and Ani DeFranco, who signed him to her label, Righteous Babe and produced two albums for him in the 1990s." He died in 2008. For more see: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/arts/music/27phillips.html?_r=0 Accessed online 21 March 2014.

and when we went back, Utah Phillips was there. He was a real mentor, especially for his emceeing. His emceeing was so good that people would make sure – even if they were at the crafts [fair] or they'd be taking a little swim – they would always try to get back in time to hear Utah's emceeing. I thought he should be at the Festival so I invited him [to appear in 1979]. All these people were willing to come for almost no money, to this tiny little town, down in Jonesborough, Tennessee (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 40).

Librarians as Listeners, Teachers and Tellers

Apart from the folk and music festivals, Regan-Blake and Freeman relied on contacts with librarians to reach a wider and wider audience on the road, to develop the talent pool for the National Festival, and to recruit audience members to come to Jonesborough. Regan-Blake remembers:

Barbara and I were at a conference in Winston-Salem in 1977...and we had given a couple of workshops. We heard that there was somebody else that was doing a presentation on storytelling, so I ran over to meet her. It was Jackie Torrence...²⁹²

²⁹² In fact, Torrence was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1977, the same year she met Regan-Blake. Steeped in her own Appalachian, Cherokee and African American traditions, she began her storytelling as "the story lady" in a public library High Point, North Carolina. She was awarded the NSN Circle of Excellence Award in 1996, and appeared on CBS' "Sunday Morning" with Charles Kuralt and "Late Night with David Letterman." Her version of "Wicked John and the Devil" is found in *Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1991); in fact, the cover of the paperback edition features a photograph of her in performance. Her telling of "Tailypo" is featured on *A Storytelling Treasury – Tales Told at the 20th Anniversary National Storytelling Festival*, an audio anthology selected and arranged by Carol Birch (Jonesborough: NAPPS, 1993). Torrence published a collection of her stories, *Jackie Tales – The Magic of Creating Stories and the Art of Telling Them* (New York: Avon Books, 1998). Health problems kept her homebound for some years toward the end of her life, but she received visitors, storytellers and listeners with relish. In 2004 storyteller Diane Ferlatte arranged to bring Torrence for a special guest

We instantly connected... The people that I was meeting at that time – when I met them – it was as if I was meeting family. As soon as we met, we met as a family. I said, "Jackie, there's this National Storytelling Festival. You gotta come over there." 'Cause I went and heard her presentation and saw how good she was. I don't know if it was that October – I think it was the following, in '78, then, that Jackie came to the festival to be featured (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 35).

In the emerging storytelling community, good news about talented performers traveled fast. And in those heady, early days the sense of aesthetic kinship between tellers crossed over the borders of gender, race, ethnicity, and performance genre with some regularity.

Later in the interviews, Regan-Blake talked about librarians as champions of storytelling and the Folktellers:

I've talked a lot about the folk music world and how those people came into the storytelling world. The other place [that had nurtured storytelling was found in] libraries and schools. One of the first people that I met early on was Anne

Izard.²⁹³ She was a wonderful writer and a storyteller herself, and told some of the

appearance at the National Storytelling Festival. Torrence died two months later. For more see her obituary by Myrna Oliver in the *Los Angeles Times* 12 December 2004. <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/dec/12/local/me-torrence12> Accessed 21 March 2014.

²⁹³ Anne R. Izard was born in North Carolina in 1916, and attended Duke University before going to Simmons College for her MA. She began her career at the New York Public Library under legendary librarian Anne Carroll Moore. In 1959 she became the first Children's Coordinator at the Westchester Library System; she was there for two decades, teaching her branch staff to review books and tell stories. The head of the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association, she chaired its Newbery-Caldecott awards committee. She was an early member of NAPPS and founded the Westchester Storytelling Guild in the mid-1970s. She was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1984. When she died in 1990, her obituary appeared in the *New York Times*. The Anne Izard Storytellers' Choice Award is given by the Westchester Library System in her memory.

Jack tales and other stories...within that library and school setting. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 54).

Regan-Blake continues:

[Anne Izard] was up in New York [as the Children's Services Consultant at the Westchester Public Library System from 1959-1976]...[and] we went to her home. Barbara had met her...at the Tennessee Library Association. ...[Anne] did a great film on storytelling...[*The Pleasure is Mutual*]. She actually gave us a [16mm] copy...to travel around with. We used to show sections of it as we did workshops around the country. But she was retired by then, and she was living in Westchester County, up above New York City. [On tour] we called her, just thinking to say hello, and she instantly recognized Barbara's voice, and invited us over. We went to her house, and then, she invited us to the White Plains Library Conference. We did a presentation there. That's where we met Augusta [Baker]²⁹⁴ and so many people that took us to other people (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 59).

²⁹⁴ Born in Baltimore and trained in Library Science at what is now called SUNY-Albany, Augusta Baker joined the New York Public Library in 1937, as Children's Librarian for the Countee Cullen branch in Harlem. She went to the main branch in 1961 and became Children's Coordinator there that year. She remained in that position, while also supervising storytelling for all the branches, until her retirement in 1974. She and co-author Ellin Greene published a classic text on storytelling practice: *Storytelling: Art and Technique* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1987). Her story "Uncle Bouqui and Godfather Malice" appeared in *More Best-Loved Stories told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1992). She told at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. She died in March of 1998 and was honored posthumously with an NSN Lifetime Achievement later that year; Ellin Greene received her own Lifetime Achievement recognition from NSN in 2002. For more see Baker's obituary, written by Wolfgang Saxon in the *New York Times* (6 March 1989). <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/06/arts/augusta-b-baker-86-storyteller-editor-and-children-s-librarian.html> Accessed online 21 March 2014.

Augusta Baker was a library luminary: the first African American woman to become coordinator of Children's Services at the New York Public Library – in 1961.²⁹⁵ Regan-Blake recounts:

Augusta Baker...was really known in the library world. She was, for most librarians [of that generation], their first...experience [of] storytelling in libraries. She...was the head of children's services [at the] New York Public Library. And she was a Black woman, [who] attained that job early on before that was usual...She was an extraordinary woman and such a gift to all of us.

She had a very formal way of teaching storytelling: she used to light a candle and that would create [an] atmosphere [that said] the time to begin the stories was at hand. Speaking of hands, she never used her hands; she never let her storytellers use their hands. [Her students] would sit or stand...straight. But Augusta herself...[was] this vibrant woman who was full of energy and love of stories.

When I met her [in 1982]...I didn't really know what her philosophy of storytelling [performance] was. But when I look back on it [now], what an

²⁹⁵ In our March 31 phone call, Regan-Blake said that Eleanor Roosevelt, first lady of New York State in the late twenties before becoming first lady of the nation, had championed Augusta Baker's getting into Library School at SUNY, Albany after the administration balked over admitting a Black woman to the program. Regan-Blake said, too, that after Baker's retirement, she moved to South Carolina, which named her as the state storytelling laureate. Cosponsored by the University of South Carolina School of Library Science and the Friends of the Richland County Library, the 28th Annual Augusta Baker's Dozen Storytelling Celebration, will take place at the Richland Library in Columbia from April 23-26, 2014. The Children's Room of the main branch of the Richland Library features a mural of Maurice Sendak's characters from *Where the Wild Things Are*, "the first and only place where the renowned author allowed his work to be used as public art" because of his friendship with Augusta Baker. For more, see: <http://www.columbiacvb.com/listings/Richland-Library/15721/> accessed online 8 April 2014.

incredible woman [she was] to instantly be able to embrace Barbara and I. Here we were in our bib overalls, flannel shirts, Grosgrain boots. We weren't acting things out; we were telling the traditional stories. But we certainly were using our hands and we weren't lighting a candle. She just thought we were terrific, and right away put her stamp of approval [on us] and started telling everyone in the library world they ought to get these two girls. [*tapping her finger on something*] "Get those Folktellers and bring 'em to your library. You bring 'em to your conference." She was another very influential person that impacted my life in incredible ways...Augusta [*laughing*] came [to Jonesborough] the next year, 'cause I really wanted that.

Augusta is really the one – when [Americans] started turning away from our [local] storytellers and ourselves and our own stories, and really focusing on those televisions and going to the movies and finding our...entertainment in other ways...that were apart from us – Augusta is one of the key people who kept storytelling alive in the libraries...[*snapping her fingers*] There was never a thread dropped, and some of that was because of Augusta...

She also was very inspirational to Maurice Sendak...one of [his] mentors. When Maurice was a young boy, growing up in New York City, he would go to the library and he knew Augusta; they had a very deep friendship (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 54-57).

Children's Book Writers Champion Oral Storytelling

The connections that the Folktellers made in the library conference world also gave them entrée to children's book authors and illustrators whose work they used.

Regan-Blake remembers:

It was through knowing [librarians]...that I first met Ezra Jack Keats, an incredible illustrator and author...It just makes sense that all of these people embraced storytelling because they were telling stories themselves. But he is one of the ones that told a lot of people about Barbara and I...We did a house concert at his house. And he always wanted to go to Jonesborough (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 54-57).

Regan-Blake remembered another author with whom she found a special connection:

Once I had moved to Asheville [in 1978], I remember hearing that [author] Jane Yolen²⁹⁶ was going to be doing...a conference...nearby...So I went down and met her, and again [had that experience of] recognizing [one another] as being related. I had the chance to take her back to the airport. We had [a] two-hour drive from...western North Carolina back to the airport and became fast friends... We were sitting in the airport, and it was as if a bubble came all the way around us and surrounded us. As she said [later], the stories I was telling transported her to a

²⁹⁶ Called "America's Hans Christian Andersen," award-winning author Jane Yolen has published over 300 books – everything from Easy Reading to adult nonfiction and Science Fiction and Fantasy. Her picture book *Owl Moon* (New York: Philomel, 1987) won a Caldecott Medal in 1988. Yolen has received two Nebula Awards, three Mythopoeic Fantasy Awards, a World Fantasy Award and more. She edited *Favorite Folktales from Around the World* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). She was a special guest at the 1991 National Storytelling Festival, wrote an introduction to *Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1991: 13-16), and received a Talking Leaves Oracle Award from NSN in 2003. For more see: <http://janeyolen.com> Accessed 21 March 2014.

different place and gave her a whole new image and feeling of storytelling. To think of that powerful woman who's...such a gift to children's literature, to literature in general, and to realize the impact of the told story on her...[made me feel it was] all the more important to get [the gift of storytelling] to as many people as I could, realizing that as soon as people saw the gift or heard it, that they would remember [it] for themselves (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 57-58).

The Folktellers Discover the Healing Arts Community

Regan-Blake shared a story about the Folktellers' initial resistance to invitations from the Healing Arts community in Boulder, Colorado. But attending her first Healing Arts festival, in fact, gave her threads to follow that took her deeper into her own artistic and spiritual practices. She remembers:

[Back in 1977] Barbara and I were invited...to the Healing Arts Festival in Boulder, Colorado...I remember the envelope: it was put on by the Boulder School of Massage Therapy...The only kind of massage we knew at that time was more of the back alley, kind of nudge-nudge stuff and [we wondered] "who is writing us?" That was our first letter from Colorado actually. We opened it up and saw that they wanted us to come to a Healing Arts Festival and we didn't know what that meant...And we were already booked [for those dates], so we weren't able to come. With a little bit of [*phew*] relief, we wrote them back and said [we couldn't come]. Well, they invited us to the next year. And once again, with a little bit of [*phew*] relief, we were not able to come. But within...a few days of when we had told them we couldn't come to the '78 [festival], they invited us to the '79. And we weren't booked. [*laugh*] So we decided we should go...

When we got there, it's one of those things. It was the absolute perfect year for us to be there...

This is my philosophy of life: that things unfold as they should...I think that was the way it was with this Healing Arts Festival...Here were shamans from South America, people from Greenpeace; the person that started *New Age* magazine was there. People that were doing work with humor and relieving stress [like] Norman Cousins. It was an incredible gathering of people. It went on for seven days. All day long for these seven days, there would be all these different workshops. Walker Mossingo, the person that put on that festival, wanted storytelling to be a part of it. So Barbara and I told stories every night. And the first night, there were maybe eight people there... But the word spread real quickly. By the fourth evening, almost the whole conference was there... We did [an] evening set with Paul Winter²⁹⁷ and he played some music to one of our stories...

Two of the other people that I met there were John Basinger²⁹⁸ and Sam Edwards²⁹⁹... John is one of the people that was influential in supporting and

²⁹⁷ A native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, Paul Winter has toured the world as a Grammy-award-winning jazz saxophonist and composer. He formed the Paul Winter jazz sextet in 1961, and the Paul Winter Consort in 1967. After releasing twelve albums for major labels, he founded his own label, Living Music Records, in 1980. That label has been home to his recordings interweaving jazz compositions with the voices of whales, eagles and wolves – what he calls his "musical-ecological sound vision." Of the 45 albums on that label, seven have won Grammys. The Paul Winter Consort members have been artists in residence at St. John the Divine cathedral in New York City. For more see: <http://www.paulwinter.com/paul-winter/> accessed online 23 March 2014.

²⁹⁸ A hearing actor and storyteller versed in American Sign Language, John Basinger is a long-time member of the National Theater of the Deaf, and taught theater and ASL for twenty years at Mohegan Community College in Norwich, Connecticut. His

encouraging the National Theatre of the Deaf when it was first beginning. He was one of the first people that toured with them. John is a hearing/speaking person...Sam was a hearing impaired person and incredible performer, an incredible dancer – the way he moved [to music]...was the beat; he could feel that through his feet...I think sometimes when people have certain disabilities, maybe people are afraid to approach them. But Sam was the kind of person you just [wanted] to sit at his table, to be around him and you [wanted] to learn sign language. But you didn't have to have it to be able to communicate with him.

John and Sam were doing workshops at this Healing Arts Festival. I went to one and just fell in love with both of them. I remember a long walk the three of us took. I said, "I want you'all to come to NAPPS in October." So they were

story, "Chester Behnke Goes Hunting," is included in *More Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1992), 30-39. He performs John Milton's "Paradise Lost" as a one-man show. He first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival with Sam Edwards, representing the National Theater of the Deaf, in 1979. For more see: <http://www.paradiselostperformances.com> accessed online 21 March 2014.

²⁹⁹ Teacher, dancer, poet and storyteller Sam Edwards was a graduate of Gallaudet University and taught American Sign Language at the New York Society for the Deaf. As a member of the National Theater of the Deaf, he toured to Europe and the West Indies. According to the preface of Stephen C. Baldwin's *Pictures in the Air: the Story of the National Theatre of the Deaf* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1993): "George McClendon's 'The Unique Contribution of the National Theatre of the Deaf to the American Stage' (Master's thesis, Catholic University, 1972) draws considerably on information supplied by the late Sam Edwards, former NTD member" (xiii-xiv). Edwards first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival with John Basinger, representing the National Theater of the Deaf, in 1979. He died in 1989. The Sam Edwards Deaf Playwrights Award is given by the New York Deaf Theatre in his memory. Deaf Mosaic (a described and captioned media program) produced an hour-long 1989 video "The Deaf Way One," including clips of Edwards talking about living with HIV (about 41 minutes into the video), see: <http://videocatalog.gallaudet.edu/?video=15158> Accessed 21 March 2014.

featured that first year in '79, the following October... It was real storytelling that they were doing, but it was such a different type of storytelling. It was a visual storytelling... To me, to be able to tell a story in two languages simultaneously is such a gift to the listeners. I was very taken with Sam [but he] passed away a few years after that. John started working with Bernard Bragg.³⁰⁰ Then the two of them came [to the National Festival] as a team [in 1982].

John, again, is another important person in my life. We kept in very close contact and did several things together...He and his daughter, Savanna Basinger, Barbara Freeman and I – the four of us – co-wrote *Mountain Sweet Talk*, the play that we did for all those years [in Asheville later on]; John also directed it. John and Barbara and I...did a [five-day] workshop at Warren Wilson, a local college here [in Asheville]...

John had such a way – because of his knowledge of sign language – he had such a concept of the landscape of stories. Whether you were actually moving through [the stories] as we did in *Mountain Sweet Talk* or if you were sitting...you could place anything anywhere you wanted, and then all you had to do was look back [at it]. So if a farm was over *here* and the town was *here*...as a storyteller...all you had to do when you [talked] about the farm was look this

³⁰⁰ Born in 1928 in Brooklyn, New York, Bernard Bragg grew up signing with his two Deaf parents. His father was Deaf actor Wolf Bragg. Bernard studied theatre at Gallaudet College, graduating in 1952, and going to work for the California School for the Deaf. He also studied mime in Paris with Marcel Marceau. With other Deaf actor activists, he co-founded the National Theatre of the Deaf in Connecticut. He has published *Lessons in Laughter – The Autobiography of a Deaf Actor*, as signed to Eugene Bergman (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989). He first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival with John Basinger, representing the National Theater of the Deaf, in 1982.

way, and then all of a sudden, the whole farm scene that you had described was [there]... John [has] worked with a lot of different storytellers and certainly has been a real teacher to me on using that sense of space...and a sense of the physicality of the story all the way around you as you're telling [your story] (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 10-15).

The Healing Arts Festival offered Regan-Blake both a vocabulary and some fellow travelers for the direction her work was beginning to go. She remembers:

That whole Healing Arts Festival, when I look back on it now – that's been nineteen years ago – it was one of those marking lines in my life in general, [and] especially as a storyteller. Everything changed...after that...Peggy Taylor, the woman that started *New Age* magazine, was there, and Rex Weyler, who at the time was working with Greenpeace. Within a month, Rex had gone to Boston to work on *New Age* magazine. He was really enthralled with the idea of storytelling [and] wanted to do a story on Barbara and I. He ended up traveling with us for three and a half days up in New England, and put us on the cover of *New Age* magazine. Which all of a sudden opened us and NAPPS and storytelling to another whole grouping of people – the people that were interested in [consciousness]-raising and were looking at ways that we can really look inside ourselves and then look outside of ourselves towards community.

About six of the people that I met at that festival were the ones that put on another gathering that I just got back from last week [at the Hollyhock Canadian

Learning Centre],³⁰¹ a wonderful place up in Canada on this tiny island – Cortes Island – off the coast of British Columbia. And I feel now, 19 years later, that [my visit to Hollyhock is] another one of those marking places in my life.

I've always felt that storytelling is healing. I've [heard] that time after time, either from people coming up to me after a performance [or]...writing me later...But I think what my focus now is shifting to – I still [don't] quite have all of the words for it – but it's as if now, instead of storytelling being what pulls me along and draws me along, I think maybe it's the healing it does. Storytelling is my vehicle for getting to those places where I can help facilitate healing, both on an individual basis, a group basis, [a] community basis, and also a planetary basis (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 15-17).

Opening Doors to Healing through Story

Pondering storytelling as a healing art, Regan-Blake relates two incidents in her career during which the sensitivity that she brought to a performance, or a particular story choice, offered a small act of grace for an audience member:

Barbara and I were telling stories in State College [Pennsylvania]...in the 80s sometime. We were telling to 4th and 5th graders. Even though Barbara and I had heard each other's stories many, many times, we still really listened to each other in performance. And this particular day, as Barbara was telling a story, I had the physical impression of Gingko [my calico cat] being on my lap; I could feel the

³⁰¹ According to its mission, Hollyhock Canadian Learning Center "exists to inspire, nourish and support people who are making the world better." For more on see: <https://www.hollyhock.ca/cms/>, accessed online March 21, 2014.

weight of her on my lap...I shook my head and went back to listening to Barbara, and then...I could feel Gingko's fur.

I am very attached to my cat; she's been a real teacher to me in lots of ways. [That day] I really thought that she must have died, that somehow this was her impression or her spirit coming to my lap. Barbara finished up her story, and then we stood up and did a story together...[Then] we ended the program, and as the children were going out the door, one of the teachers came over and said, "I want to tell you something about that little boy." Just then, a fourth grader turned around; he waved and smiled and walked on out the door.

Once the theater was emptied, she came back up to us and...said, "Today is the first day that child has spoken in two weeks"...She said that the child's home had...burned down and everyone in the family was able to get out, but they weren't able to save their cat. [Through a plate glass window] they had watched...their cat die. As soon as she told me that, I started crying, still listening. She said, "When he came back to school, he quit talking. And he quit talking at home too...It was during the stories, while you were telling the stories, that he turned around and said, 'They're really good, aren't they?'" And that was the first time he had spoken in two weeks...I'm not exactly sure how that happened, but somehow I think that that child's energy or the child's cat's energy somehow went to Gingko and back to me...

She continues:

[Another time] I was in the Philippines, telling stories for the Department of Defense Dependent Schools...on one of the air force bases there. Those bases are

very isolated. Some of the service people [stationed there] would go out and meet the people of the community, but often people don't do that. We were telling stories, again, to 4th, 5th, and 6th graders...I like the concept of a story coming and tapping me on the shoulder, wanting to be told; I try to stay really open to that in the performances that I do.

And that day, this tap-tap-tapping was for a Richard Kennedy story called "Oliver Hyde's Dishcloth Concert." And I love the story. It's a wonderful old-timey feel to it...but I don't usually tell it for that age group. So I kind of brushed away that tapping and went along... But it tapped harder, and I thought, "I need to tell that story." So I told it and the children seemed to really get into it... It's about a man who used to play the fiddle and was the center of the town's activities at barn dances and such. [But] his wife dies, a brand new bride, and he ends up busting his fiddle, breaking it into pieces. Then he sets himself off from the rest of the community. When people try to go visit him, he always has this dishcloth over his head. [It's] just too strange, [and] people quit coming. Then one day, a friend comes and asks Oliver to come and play for his daughter's wedding. It's how the community brings Oliver back in.

I told that story, and afterwards, a woman that had been sitting in the back...came up to me. Her face was filled with emotion and such power...I knew we needed to be alone. So we walked down a hallway and she poured out her heart and said, "I am Oliver Hyde." She said...[attending] that [performance] was the first time she had been out of her house since she had moved to the Philippines with her husband and children...She had felt so alone, not being with

her extended family, and hated being over there [in the Philippines], and that she had shut herself off in the same way Oliver did. And she said, "I don't know what made me come today, but I came and I sat in the back"...Her son had taken home a paper, inviting the parents [to the show]. She said, "Something told me I should [come]... and you told that story for me! I'm Oliver Hyde"...

And I feel that those things are happening all the time. Whenever storytelling is going on – whenever storytellers and story listeners come together – we don't always get that kind of direct feedback. But I'm so grateful that I've had those moments [when]...there's no doubt in my mind [that something important has happened]. And I continue to trust that every time I'm telling a story, every time I'm offering that gift, someone out there... is getting something from it that could be very important to them (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 17-20).

Using Storytelling to Pay for Ray Hicks's Hospital Bills

Because of the economic vulnerability of both freelance performers and traditional people, the revival community has rallied around the needs of some of its pioneer performers. More than once, Regan-Blake and Freeman have led the charge.

Regan-Blake relates:

Back in 1977, Ray Hicks was driving on his mountain roads...[They can be] icy ...at night in the wintertime, and his truck went off the road and crashed. The doctors later said there was no way that Ray could have climbed out of that truck because he had broken his back, but somehow he [did] and made it to a neighbor's place. Otherwise he would have died that night.

Barbara and I arranged a fund-raising event for Ray over in Jonesborough. [The] Highwood String Band³⁰² came down. They were very popular, and so they drew a whole lot of people. Ezra Jack Keats came and...donated money to the benefit for Ray. Sandy and Caroline Paton, who still have Folk-Legacy Records – they're the ones that recorded Ray back in 1961; they also recorded Richard Chase, Nimrod Workman, a lot of other folks – they donated a lot of Ray's records. That was back in the days when we had...[vinyl record] albums. We raised five or six thousand dollars for Ray on that day and [were] able to help him with all of the bills...that he had accumulated (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 44-45).

Midwife to the Birth of a Conference and a Congress on Storytelling

As the fabric of the community grew more varied, board members began to conceive of another event to strengthen community bonds: a national storytelling conference. Regan-Blake remembers how the idea first came to fruition:

Diane Wolkstein³⁰³ [was] featured at the festival in [1977]. She's the one that had the vision for a conference. Jay O'Callahan was on the board of directors at that

³⁰² The Highwood String Band is considered "one of the most important forces in Old Time Music." For more see: <http://www.whyoldtime.com> accessed online 21 March 2014.

³⁰³ Another of the "New York goddesses of storytelling," Diane Wolkstein founded the tradition of telling stories at the Hans Christian Andersen statue in Central Park in New York City. She published both picture books and scholarly collections. One of the "sacred texts" of my early career, *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales* (New York: Schocken, 1997), featured tales she collected in Haiti. With Samuel Noah Kramer, Wolkstein published *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), retelling the five thousand year old myth for modern audiences. In fact, her legendary oral telling of "Inanna" at NAPPS did not shy away from the myth's earthy content; it marked the first

time and he...worked with Diane a lot on pulling that conference together. It was held at Washington [College Academy just west of Jonesborough]...Rustic is [what] we would say of that campus, but again, people thronged there. We would invite five different people, not all necessarily professional storytellers... Most...were people [for whom] storytelling was the main thread of what they did, but we had psychologists and voice teachers and ministers – [people who represented] a lot of different avenues of storytelling. We would bring them there [to Washington College], and then about 100...or 125 people would register and come and be there for the whole weekend. A lot of magical things happened there.

Jane Yolen came there. [And] Gioia Timpanelli.³⁰⁴ And the one that did... the [Christmas] Revels in Boston...Jack Langstaff³⁰⁵ came. And Jay O'Callahan's

(and last) time the word "vulva" was spoken into a microphone in Jonesborough, Tennessee. The founding mother of the National Storytelling Conference, and a trickster extraordinaire, she was an important player (based on my firsthand memory) in a legendary incident at the 1985 National Storytelling Conference at Washington College; Sobol refers to this incident in the chapter named for it – "Blood on the Porch" (pp 189-221) – in his book *The Storytellers' Journey*. Wolkstein received the NSN Circle of Excellence Award in 1996, and the NSN Lifetime Achievement Award posthumously after her sudden death in 2013. For more see: <http://dianewolkstein.com/about/> accessed online 23 March 2014.

³⁰⁴ Called "the Dean of American Storytelling," Brooklyn-born Gioia Timpanelli is the author of *What Makes a Child Lucky* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008) and *Sometimes the Soul: Two Novellas of Sicily* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998). The latter won the American Book Award. A gifted scholar and oral composer of traditional tales, she contributed "Stories and Storytelling, Italian and Italian American – A Storyteller's View" to *The Italian American Heritage – A Companion to Literature and Arts*, edited Pellegrino D'Acierno (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 131-148, and wrote "The Sacred Does Not Shun the Ordinary" in *Sacred Stories – A Celebration of the Power of Stories to Transform and Heal*, edited by Charles Simpkinson and Anne Simpkinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 93-99. A respected colleague of Gary Snyder and Frank McCourt, and a frequent collaborator with James Hillman and Robert Bly, she was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival

voice teacher...[David Blair McClosky who] worked with President Kennedy in Kennedy's early days of campaigning when he would lose his voice so much, a man with a worldwide reputation.³⁰⁶ And they were coming for [very little pay]. I remember pushing for those fees to get higher and higher, but we were struggling so, and would offer as much as we could. And all these people...were willing to come. Joan Bodger,³⁰⁷ a psychotherapist that used storytelling in her work with her clients – she came and gave us a demonstration of how she did that.

That whole conference was very important. People loved it... There's something about waking up in the morning and having breakfast with the people that you're going to be listening to or telling to later on that afternoon. It was a

in 1983, and was honored with the NSN Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002. For more see: <http://www.gioiatimpanelli.com> accessed online 23 March 2014.

³⁰⁵ A concert baritone and music educator, Jack Langstaff was the founder of the Christmas Revels in New York in 1957, and in Cambridge in 1971. The annual event now occurs across the Northeast, drawing on local talent in music, Morris dancing, costume, dance, story and song. In the Cambridge Revels Jay O'Callahan plays the recurring role of Old Rom, the storyteller. Langstaff published *Over in the Meadow* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973). He died in 2005, but the Revels roll on. For more see: <http://www.revels.org/about-revels/history/john-meredith-langstaff-founder/> accessed online 16 March 2014.

³⁰⁶ Author of *Your Voice at its Best* (Boston: Boston Music Company, 1959) and *Voice in Speech and Song* (Boston: Boston Music Company, 1975), David Blair McClosky founded the McClosky Institute of Voice to address and heal vocal disorders. See: www.mcclosky.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=3 Accessed 24 March 2014.

³⁰⁷ A Toronto-based librarian, writer and storyteller as well as a Gestalt therapist, Joan Bodger wrote *The Crack in the Teacup – The Life of an Old Woman Steeped in Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 2000), a rowdy memoir by an unruly woman with references to her misadventures at the University of Missouri. She died in July of 2002. For more see: <http://dianewolkstein.com/2002/09/joan-bodger-mercier-a-love-letter/> accessed online 16 March 2014.

real opportunity for a lot of people to tell stories during the weekend. It was magical times there.

Let me think [when the conference started]... The 10th festival was in '81. I would say probably 80s³⁰⁸... We were still really working out the festival [laugh], figuring all of that out in the 70s. I think we didn't move to the conference until later. Laura Simms was involved in the festival by then too, and also was involved in that conference.

The Conference remained on the campus of Washington College Academy until 1987. That year the 10th Annual National Storytelling Conference was paired with the First National Congress on Storytelling. The events were held back-to-back – the Congress July 16-19 and the Conference July 19-21 – at Fontbonne College in St. Louis. Those twin events were the first ever sponsored by NAPPS that did not occur in or near Jonesborough.³⁰⁹ Regan-Blake speaks about that change of format and venue:

I...remember Laura Simms and Clare Cuddy³¹⁰ and myself at one of the board meetings in the 80s, talking about having a different kind of a congress where we would bring together storytellers... We didn't know that that was going to mean that...the Washington College conference was *not* going to be [any more]. We

³⁰⁸ In his history, Sobol confirms that the conference was first established in 1978 (158).

³⁰⁹ By 1987, the national community was growing and NAPPS members who weren't located in the Southeast were clamoring for more accessibility to NAPPS events. Booking flights into the Tri-Cities Regional Airport (which still serves the Festival location) remains a costly challenge in 2014.

³¹⁰ Having previously worked at the National Air and Space Museum, Clare Cuddy is currently the Education Manager of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. She served on the NAPPS board during my tenure there.

thought of it more...as a different thing...another thing that was necessary...[or] would be a good thing for all of us to have...We went over [to Jonesborough] for a board meeting and we stayed three days after the board meeting, just brainstorming on the Congress and what could happen with that.³¹¹ Then it turned out that they³¹² stopped having the conference at Washington College, which was a shame. I would have loved to have seen both things happen (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 50).

Though the Conference was not her "baby," Regan-Blake did play a role in securing the presenters:

I'm the kind of person that's very involved in whatever I'm involved in; I'm usually not on the sidelines much. Jay [O'Callahan] and...Diane Wolkstein [and some others], those were the people that should be credited with that conference, with the idea. But I was one of the ones bringing people into it, again...There were a lot of people by then – or not a lot, but a lot more than the two of us, Barbara and I – by the late 70s and early 80s. There were a lot of people telling stories, but still not many people traveling and doing it full-time as their living.

A lot of people...were either connected [to] a university or had other means of employment, and so they weren't traveling as much. So, again, because I

³¹¹ The first Congress event in 1987, the first to take place outside Jonesborough, was another ground-breaking event in which Regan-Blake had a hand. When it finally came to fruition three years after she left the board, she was neither consulted nor invited to take part in the programming. Emotionally, this was something of a wound – and one she would remember – though she understood that new board members had their own need to create a final version that bore their handprints and not hers.

³¹² "They," in this case, refers to the NAPPS organization; Regan-Blake rotated off its board after ten years of service in 1984.

was talking storytelling wherever I went and talking NAPPS and the festival and the conference then, I was in that opportunity to meet so many different people. And...one of my gifts is being able to organize those kinds of things. So even though the conference was run by other people, Diane and Jay and other folks still welcomed any input (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, page 57).

A Commitment to Craft, a Growing Awareness of Cultural Sensitivity

Folklorist-turned-storyteller and storytelling studies scholar Kay Stone writes:

Folktales by their very name reveal their origins in oral traditional communities. Here stories were learned as part of one's heritage in a particular family, within a community united by ties of language, culture, religion, history...In the United States the oral tradition thrived in the semi-isolated mountainous regions of the south and northeast, where the old European tales lasted well into the twentieth century. The Harmon-Hicks family of North Carolina is the most frequently cited example... (*Burning Brightly* 15).

Stone continues:

Traditional narrators are so highly regarded at festivals today that their actual skill (or lack of it) as artistic narrators is often disregarded. Some have been unable to adjust to the concert stage while others – notably Ray Hicks and Joe Neil MacNeil... – have succeeded in adapting themselves and their stories to this new context. There are also many people who are not so easily identified as either traditional or non-traditional tellers. Some – Donald Davis and Jackie Torrence of North Carolina, for example – grew up in oral milieus but were also influenced by

the self-conscious setting of festival stage performing. Others who have claimed traditional backgrounds are on more tenuous grounds (*Burning Brightly* 17). She concludes: "Still, what unites all of these people is a real or an idealized connection to storytelling as a respected artistic expression" (*Burning Brightly* 17).

When it comes to a claim of authenticity as a traditional teller, a continuum shading from orality to literacy can be seen among the tellers featured at the National Storytelling Festival over the years. Even the Folktellers' work could be placed on a sliding scale between one and the other, for it drew on the oral interpretation of literature, traditional folk tales and jokes that the duo heard growing up, tales, riddles and songs they collected orally from audience members and other tellers, personal narratives, and – in their play *Mountain Sweet Talk* – some original stories.

Starting with her own evolving performance modes, and informed by the practitioners she met in her travels, Regan-Blake experienced a growing discernment about the different kinds of stories and storytellers who belonged on the Festival stage. Her first commitment was to craft, not storytelling genre or tradition. She says:

I felt such a commitment to the quality of what was going to be...on the stage at the National Festival. One of the reasons for that [is this:]...if there was somebody that wasn't a very good piano player but they thought they were, and they...got themselves a brochure and...got somebody to hire 'em, and people...went to the performance and realized it wasn't very good, well, that probably was not going to stop [the listener] from going to another piano performance. But I felt that in storytelling it might: that if they came to the National Festival and there were people on stage that weren't that good, that

maybe [the audience] wouldn't come back again (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 51).

Regan-Blake also favored showcasing traditional talent on the festival stage:

In those early days, especially in the late 70s, I was so protective of [who told at the festival]...wanting the most traditional that we could get. Not that everybody was a traditional teller. But if we were going for traditional, we looked to who knew that culture, as opposed to someone that had come in and learned some of the stories from that culture, even if they were from that background (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 51).

Their travels – and spunk – led the Folktellers to the door of an eminent folklorist who would give them an ear and an earful, and afterward come to the festival to curate sessions with traditional tellers. Regan-Blake remembers:

Kenny Goldstein was someone else that was very important in my life and in the life of storytelling in this revival. We heard about him, Barbara and I, in the early days... After about a year and a half of travel, we were going through Philadelphia. When I look back...we were...[you] might even say, brazen, but I think it was more naiveté. We thought everybody would love storytelling and would love to know what we were doing because they might want to do it. So we never hesitated to call someone, again not so much with a pride of thinking we were the stars of this, but much more just with this gift.

I called Kenny Goldstein, and he said, "Oh, come over instantly." And so we went over to his office. He was the president of the American Folklore Society at the time, and he was head of one of the [nation's] most respected folklore

doctoral programs at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. And he was a bigwig in the...folk music world. He had done collecting all over the world... We walked right into his office. And he said, "So you're storytellers. Tell me a story." We stood up and...told Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, going back and forth. He loved it! "So tell me another story." I told him that "Two White Horses" story, drawn from traditional [material] that Elizabeth [Seeman] had written down. And he just loved it. He said, "Wait a minute." He went out... went into the library, and he pulled together as many of his students as he could. "Tell us another story." So we sat there and told stories for ten people. Then he said, "Come back tomorrow morning. Tell us some stories." He brought us back the next day, and he had gathered...his whole folklore department. We were in this room, and he was recording us. This is on tape somewhere.

This was in '76 or '77. We learned a lot of lessons that day. At the time this happened...[to] Barbara. It probably could have been either of us, but Barbara had grown up hearing the "tar baby" stories.³¹³ Her brother had read them to her, the Uncle Remus stories.³¹⁴ We had, I guess, mentioned [it] the day before – Kenny

³¹³ "The Tar Baby" is a figure made of tar and turpentine to entrap the wily Br'er Rabbit in animal tales told among African American people in the Deep South. Joel Chandler Harris published one version of this story as the second tale, "The Wonderful Tar Baby Story" in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (See citation in the note below). To read it, see:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/Harris2/ch02.html> Accessed online 23 March 2014.

³¹⁴ "Uncle Remus" is the fictional African American storyteller invented by Euro-American journalist Joel Chandler Harris to recount the collection of animal tales, songs and folklore he heard from African American narrators in the South. Though some of the individual stories appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* where he worked, Harris later published the tales in a book *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (New York: D.

was very interested in what stories we were telling, and so we'd given him a list of some of the stories. That day, he asked us [to tell stories again] and I told the mountain story...[We told] *Where the Wild Things Are*; he requested that one...Then he said, "Barbara, tell that Uncle Remus story." So Barbara started in and told "Tar Baby;" she was wonderful telling it. We told a couple more; then [the floor] was opened up for questions. One of the women in the doctoral program...a Black woman...she raised her hand and said, "I resent the fact that you're telling [the] 'tar baby' story." She said, "I was called 'tar baby' when I was a child, as a taunting epithet"...

Kenny wanted us to get that lesson, 'cause he was afraid that if we didn't, other things were going to happen to us... It was a...hard lesson, but he wanted us to get it in a protective...place...³¹⁵ It really opened our eyes to that, and in some ways started me developing my philosophy. For the most part – now, I don't call this 100%, but close to it – that people tell stories out of their own tradition. We

Appleton and Company, 1881). See: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/harris/harris.html> accessed online 23 March 2014.

In part, because of the stereotypical "old uncle" aspect of the book's narrator, and because of Harris's attempt to capture the racialized Deep Southern dialect of the speakers from whom he heard the stories, the collection has been met with controversy over the years. Harris acknowledged his debt to the narrators of the "Uncle Remus" stories in his fictionalized autobiography, first serialized by newspapers, and then published in book form as *On the Plantation: The Story of a Georgia Boy's Adventures During the War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1892). For more see: <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/plantation> accessed online 23 March 2014.

³¹⁵ In *By Word of Mouth*, a film shot by Steven Kostant at the 10th anniversary National Storytelling Festival in 1982, African American storyteller Jackie Torrence asserts (as she did throughout her career) that the Br'er Rabbit stories belong to both African American and Euro-American cultures. (Native American tribes indigenous to the Southeastern United States also told stories about Rabbit as a trickster.)

look for the people in those other traditions to tell those other stories, to make sure that people hear those stories. I mean [this] from a [professional] performance, on-stage [perspective]. I think it's the role of teachers and librarians to expose their students to as many different kinds of stories as they can. The best [way] is to bring people into the classroom or the library from that particular culture. If they can't always do that, to get tapes or videos of the people from that culture and bring it to their students. If they can't always do that, then to read some of the traditional collections...not the ones that have been rewritten by other cultures. I encourage that. But for people that are telling on stage, I think that was an early lesson for me to be sure you know [the culture] – even though, in some ways, that was Barbara's culture, 'cause it was certainly Southern – [the experience] let us know that we had to be aware (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 51-54).

Frank and Ann Warner Share Lessons Learned with the Folktellers

Regan-Blake and Freeman had an opportunity to meet and get to know another famous duo, Frank and Ann Warner, folklore collectors who had met and championed the Hicks family from early on. Here's what Regan-Blake remembers:

Another man that I've thought [of] during these two days of talking about all of these beginnings is Frank Warner. Frank and Anne Warner were people that Barbara and I met...probably in '76...at Blue Lake in New York...We were doing some performing there and, again, [the Warners] embraced the storytelling. That's what I've found so much in the folk music world. It wasn't any sense of "Wait a minute, you're in our territory" or "Now, what is this storytelling thing?" It was just instantly open arms, encouragement. And so many people calling

other people and saying, "You've got to hear this. You have to have this on the main stage all over the country." Frank and Anne Warner were certainly people that did so much for us and did a lot for collecting in general...for storytelling and for the music.

Back in 1938, they had heard about...a dulcimer that Nathan Hicks had built down in Banner Elk, Beech Mountain area in North Carolina. Frank wrote and asked if Nathan would please build him a dulcimer. And so...they started a correspondence. Anne knew that times were hard then – late 30s and early 40s – and she started sending packages of clothes and household items down to the mountains. So Nathan Hicks and his wife, Rena, asked if the Warners wouldn't come and visit them. In 1938, they drove all the way down to this place [Beech Mountain from New York]. Today, [in] 1998, [it] is difficult to get to [the Beech] and you really have to know your way; I can only imagine what that trip must have been like. [The Warners] met Frank Proffitt on that first trip. They also met Rena and Nathan's children, one of whom is Ray Hicks. And they met a lot of other folks there in the mountains – some of the Presnells and the Harmons. And [collecting] became, for [the Warners], their life's work.³¹⁶

Even though Frank actually worked for the YMCA and traveled all over the country and a bit around the world, doing his YMCA work, every year they would take their whole vacation [to collect songs and stories in North Carolina]. And as their own children came along, Jeff and [Garret], [the Warners] would

³¹⁶ To get a sense of the impact of the Warner's collecting, see The Folk Alliance's tribute to them at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpyzauPzKjE> Accessed online 16 March 2014.

take their children down there. The whole family then would spend the two weeks in the hills in western North Carolina. And they became part of those mountain peoples' extended family...[and] managed ways to get some of their goods, their handiwork, their quilts and baskets and things out to the larger world. [They helped the Hickses, the Harmons and the Presnells bring] in much needed cash so that taxes could be paid so that the land could stay within those families. The Warners...got RCA to put together one of the first portable battery-operated – I think at the time, they weren't even really batteries, it was more of some kind of a cell – for a reel-to-reel, to be able to go down to the Hicks and Proffitt family and record some of the songs.

When we met [the Warners], they were filled with all the stories of those travels and were so delighted that we were telling stories, were delighted that I knew Ray Hicks and Rosa Hicks, and [they] wanted to tell me all their stories. And that's what they did. We spent a lot of time with them. They lived in Long Island, in a lovely place that had a big fence around it, so when you went inside that fence, you felt like you were in a different world. As opposed to a populated metropolitan kind of area, you were [sitting] out with Frank...with his husky dog, sitting right beside him. And Frank telling the stories of how he had met the Hicks.

One of the stories [was] about how when Lindsay Hicks got drafted into the war and his wife, May Hicks, she ended up taking a bus all the way up to New York City because Lindsay's address said "A.P.O., New York," and she wanted to go find her man and tell him goodbye. She hadn't had a chance to kiss him

goodbye. They told the story of how [May] made a call [to them] from Grand Central Station [to ask for help in finding Lindsay] – [she had] never been outside of Banner Elk.

They were filled with stories, and I remembered drinking them in – trying to make sure every pore was open, so that I could hear what they had to say. They heard lots of stories [themselves]...in the 30s, 40s, and 50s and on into the 60s. [The Warners] were responsible for bringing Caroline and Sandy Paton to the mountains. And eventually [the recordings the Patons made] were the first recordings...from Folk-Legacy Records...the first recordings that were made of Ray Hicks, and the beginning of...getting the word out about Ray and about other mountain people.

It was Frank [Warner], along with Alan Lomax that collected from Frank Proffitt, "Tom Dula," that song. Which [became] a real lesson to all of us in lots of ways 'cause what happened: Frank Proffitt's parents knew the characters in that story. He knew Tom [Dula] and Laura [Foster] and the other people in that song, and he had sung that song. Frank Warner and Alan Lomax took it back to New York and maybe from [the] naiveté of all of us somehow, the Kingston Trio got a hold of it, made millions of dollars.³¹⁷ It took a lawsuit and lots of years before any of those monies came back to Frank Proffitt and his family. Frank Warner

³¹⁷ According to "The Kingston Trio Place," Peter J. Curry's website dedicated to the song: "The Kingston Trio's recording of 'Tom Dooley' which topped the music industry charts in 1958, and reportedly sold in excess of six million copies, is credited with starting the 'Folk Boom' of the late 1950s and early 1960s and generating a worldwide interest in roots music that continues today." For more see: <http://www.kingstontrioplace.com/tdooleydoc.htm> accessed online 23 March 2014.

was finally able to make an agreement that from that date on...the Proffitts would always profit from some of those monies. That's a big lesson for all of us.

We talk about "who do these stories belong to?" [and] "who do the songs belong to?" Certainly they are in the consciousness of all peoples. Yet the particular people that revere and honor those stories and songs enough to remember them and pass them along, then those are the ones that should be given some acclaim. Also if it's in the financial world today, they should be getting some of the monies back (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 2-5).

The Culture-specific Clocks and Calendars of the Storyteller

Winnipeg-based folklorist Kay Stone writes: "There is...a rich and ancient tradition of aboriginal narration still very much alive on reservations in the United States and the reserves of Canada, and in urban centers as well" (15). And, indeed, besides folk musicians, itinerant troubadours, Appalachian tale-tellers and balladeers, platform tellers, humorists, librarians and children's authors, the Folktellers encountered indigenous storytellers in their travels as well. About the venues in which traditional storytelling flourishes, Kay Stone writes:

For traditional narrators, adults were the listeners on both the festival stage and in [their own] home...communities, except of course in the home where women narrated for children. Traditional audiences were relatively small and intimate, a few dozen at most and often much smaller, and tellers and listeners were part of the same geographic and cultural community (*Burning Brightly* 17).

In fact, transplanting traditional stories and their tellers into the constructed environments of a festival presents some challenges. In Canada the Folktellers would

meet Ron Evans,³¹⁸ a Métis – a person of mixed blood, in this case, French and Chippewa-Cree – and a keeper of the talking sticks.³¹⁹ Though the Folktellers' connection with Evans was immediate, their ability to communicate clearly was problematized by different cultural, regional and temporal sensibilities. Regan-Blake remembers that meeting at the Mariposa Folk Festival³²⁰ on Toronto Island in Lake Ontario:

It was a famous festival [and] you had to take a ferry to get out there. It was like transporting yourself to a magical land. They had demonstrations of different

³¹⁸ Ron Evans told at the National Storytelling Festival in 1979, 1982 and 1984 before leaving the Festival scene in Jonesborough for good. When he participated in the *American Storytelling Series* (Volumes One through Eight), from the Wilson Video Resource Collection released in 1988, he told a story called "Why the Leaves Change Color" (Volume Two) that captures the collision of European and indigenous cultural views of the natural world. In the print *Teachers' Activity Guide* that accompanies the video series, Ron Evans explains his cultural identity:

"Métis...means a half-breed with some European cultural heritage. In my culture half-breed is not a racial term. It is a cultural term meaning people who have kept the cultural characteristics that resulted from the intermarriage with White trappers and canoemen during the fur trade from the 1500s to the 1700s. The name Chippewa-Cree goes back to when we were referred to as refugee Indians among the Chippewa and the Cree. It was the United States government that later called us Chippewa-Cree. In Canada, we were called Saulteaux or Mackinow. We call ourselves Bungee, meaning "tiny little bit" – a remnant of the great Algonquin tribes from the Northeast that were driven west to the Dakotas, Montana and Canada (30). (Chippewa is also spelled Ojibwe, Ojibwa, and Ojibway.) For more about the history of Chippewa-Cree Tribe see: <http://www.chippewacree.org/History.html> accessed online 17 March 2014.

³¹⁹ In some indigenous cultures in North America, a talking stick is an instrument for identifying the designated speaker in council gatherings.

³²⁰ Founded in August of 1961 in the town of Orillia in Central Ontario, Canada, the festival was named Mariposa in honor of the name Stephen Leacock used for Orillia in his book, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Teddington, UK: Echo Library, 2006). The festival crowds became too much for the town and beginning in 1964, it changed locations several times. Toronto Island was its home during the seventies. According to the website, "It was during the time at Toronto Island that the festival blossomed with its workshops, its artisans area and its 'native people's area.'" The location has continued to change in subsequent decades. For more see: <http://www.mariposafolk.com/foundation/history/> accessed online 15 March 2014.

things going on all over the island as well as six different stages. There were some Chippewa-Cree Native Americans there. They had set up a lodge house like they would have lived in. They had several different people there showing different crafts.

They had asked Barbara and I to lead the storytelling – they called them – workshops. They would get six different people to come on stage. Maybe one [workshop] would be on "ballad songs of the working people," and they would get different people that sang ballads, even from different traditions, some Irish and some southern Appalachian... One person or two people would be the leaders and they would talk a little bit in between, about how things were alike and how things were different. [For] the storytelling workshop, they had asked this woman, 100 years old, to come and tell stories. We had gone by [ahead of time] and met her. At the last moment she wasn't feeling well, and she turned to Ron Evans and said, "You go over there and get on that stage." Ron had never told behind a microphone. He had never told in a set amount of time. First thing we said was, "We're delighted you're going to be up here. Why don't you take about ten minutes?" It was like a concept that was foreign to him. He said, "Ten minutes?" And we said, "We'll help you out on this" (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 40-42).

Bringing a First Nation Person to the Oldest Town in Tennessee

As Regan-Blake discovered, successfully inviting an indigenous teller across national and cultural boundaries to attend a Southern storytelling revival event took patience, intuition, luck, and the right personnel as backup:

I invited Ron to come down the next year for the [1979] Festival. It seems that a lot of...traditional and contemporary storytellers...were put in our path so that they could be a part of that storytelling festival. He [had been] raised in northern Saskatchewan in a very traditional tribe. You could only get to his homeland certain times of the year because it was upstream. You had to go up there in the wintertime, when the rivers were frozen, to be able to get up to his place.

He had a great facility with language, so early on, he learned English; his first language was his native tongue. He used to go with the missionary people around [the tribal lands]. He got this incredibly rich traditional upbringing, and yet he really saw the White world, and he saw what was good about it and what was not so good about it. He had vast experience and was really trained as a keeper of the talking sticks. He's another mentor of mine, a very important person in my life.

I met him at the Mariposa Festival and invited him to come down to the [next] National Festival. When I think back on it, a lot of times I didn't know who was going to be coming until that summer, because a lot of the people that I invited would be at these summer festivals and they would come the following October. We must not have done it quite like it's done today, when we have [the program set] lots of months in advance.³²¹

³²¹ My first invitation to the NAPPS festival came in July 1984 within weeks of my work being seen at a swapping session at the national storytelling conference at Washington College; the invitation was for October of the same year. At the time I assumed I was filling in for someone who had dropped out at the last moment, but now I see that the festival was still flying by the seat of its pants. Twenty-nine years later when I was invited for my eighth appearance at the October 2013 festival, the invitation was issued in February.

Ron had come to the South only once, to help support some people with Native American rights and also Black rights. This was back in the...late 60s or early 70s and he had had a very unpleasant experience and ended up in jail. At that time [he] had vowed he would never come back into the South. And here he met these two Southern belles up in Canada that were charmed by him and he was charmed by us. He really liked the idea of this storytelling festival and he wanted to come, so he agreed to come.

In the early days, I would get over to Jonesborough three or four days in advance and start planning [the logistics for the tellers]. I've mentioned that I'm a detail person and I think that was very helpful. Jimmy Neil would have arranged for microphones to be there. In the early days we were in the churches [for] the evening performances. But as soon as we grew beyond about 150 people for an evening performance, we went to these big tents. Jimmy Neil would have arranged all of that, and gotten the townspeople doing what they needed to do to have things looking pretty and have registration all arranged.

What I was good at was coming in and making sure everything was attended to [regarding] who needed to go pick up [whom]. I still have a copy of the original map I did for Ray Hicks that I would give to people...whoever was going to go pick up Ray on Saturday morning to bring him back. People vied for that honor to be able to spend that kind of time with Ray Hicks.

I had a list of volunteers and what needed to be done...[by] the "ticket-swatch watchers," we used to call them. [The swatch] was a little piece of cloth that people wore to let [the tent monitors] know they had paid so they...[could]

come into the tent. All of those details [like] who was going to be emcee and the whole schedule. In the early days, the schedule was made up as we went, just a few days before the festival. It was always a bustling hub of excitement wherever the office was – either, in the early days, at Jimmy Neil's Parson's Table office behind his restaurant [or] then we had a little upstairs room, one and a half rooms right there on Main Street at Jonesborough. I can remember people coming and going and I'd say, "Well, you get over there and do *this*, and you do *this*, and I'll do *this*..." I feel like a lot of that work was really inspired. Even though it was "from the head" kind of organizing, there was another place that it was from, this intuition. And one of the times that I knew that that was true; it was the year that Ron Evans was coming.

I was to learn later that on the flight down into Johnson City, Tennessee, [Ron] had gotten real misgivings about his decision to come. And he had decided he was going to get right back on the first plane out, that he was not going to stay, that he did not want to even leave the airport. When he got off the plane, several people met him, and one was Gayle Ross. She is a Métis herself [like him], part Native American. And Ron could tell that by her face instantly. He was shocked and surprised by that, 'cause he hadn't expected to necessarily see other Native Americans here in Tennessee. His luggage hadn't come yet – so they said, "Let's go have a cup of tea or something while we're waiting for the luggage." I don't know if Ron told them that he was planning to leave, but Gayle being there gave him just a little sense of "Well, maybe not."

The other person that had gone with Gayle was Larry Syzdek, a friend that I had met at the very first Fox Hollow Festival. It was actually his apartment that I went [to], after that flood, to dry out in. He had started coming to the festival and became a regular every year as a wonderful listener. It turned out to be inspired for Gayle and Larry to go, because as they sat down to have a cup of tea, Larry said, "Now, are you from northern Saskatchewan?" And Ron said, "Yes." As Ron told it later, he [felt] a little patronizing towards Larry: "You've probably been to one of the major cities." And Larry said, "I've actually been on some of the lakes up there." Again, Ron was saying, [he knew] in his heart [*chuckling*] this man could never have gone [there]. It turned out, Larry had canoed the very lake that Ron was brought up on. And Ron instantly took it as a sign that he was to be at this Festival.

Then for probably five or six years, [Ron] was a very important part of [the Festival]. The reason he drifted away and chose not to be a part of the Festival is because [he felt] other people were telling some of what he considered his stories or his people's stories without permission – telling at the wrong time of the year. That's why he [stopped coming] to the Festival. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, 41-47).

Later in the interview Regan-Blake spoke about the nuanced lessons she learned from Evans about the vulnerable nature of traditional stories themselves:

Ron Evans used to talk about his stories as his children, as his breath, and that there were certain stories he wouldn't send across a bridge 'cause he didn't know who was going to be receiving them on the other end. [It was] another important

lesson for me: to be aware that all stories are not to be told in all situations, that our stories are our babies and we have to protect them. [More than that] they're our relatives...our ancestors and the ancestors of all the world. We have to honor and protect those ancestors and our relatives, and be sure that wherever they're brought out to meet new people that there's going to be honor and respect there for them. (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 55).

She said, too:

[Ron] was very clear when he was telling on stage; he would always say where he got the story from, and he would also make it very clear which stories were not to be told by other people. And because of what I was talking about earlier – [in the environs of the festival in the early days] those layers coming away from the heart – Ron felt very safe, and felt that his stories were very safe there. Crossing that bridge into Jonesborough, Tennessee, he felt like he could send any of his children across that bridge. And he found out that he could not...

The fringes of [an extended] family can become dysfunctional.³²² There were people there that either did not hear him or chose not to hear him when he

³²² I remember changing planes in an airport – in Charlotte or Atlanta – headed to the NAPPS Festival about twenty years ago. While waiting for my connecting flight to the Tri-Cities airport, I heard a woman whom I did not recognize, chatting with a group of strangers she had met there at the gate. Having determined that they were first time Festival attendees, she was inviting them to attend a party held on Sunday night after the Festival. That party was held annually in honor of the tellers, and hosted by Cassandra Moore, Carolyn Moore's daughter.

Invitation was by word of mouth, and in Jonesborough word travels fast. The woman had attended the party in the past as a second-hand guest, and, suffused with fellow feeling for all Festivalgoers, extended a third-hand invitation to this new group. Within a year or two of this exuberant invitation at the airport, the party ceased to be held, partly because the exponentially expanding guest list had overwhelmed the hosts. It

[said]...which stories could not be told by other people. And they started telling them...around the United States. As that came back to [him], then Ron chose not to ever come back to the Festival again. Which is a real shame...That draws us back to that making sure – not only with the Festival, 'cause that's only a small part of storytelling in the world – making sure in our own lives and any venues where we present storytelling or wherever storytelling is encouraged that we do respect other people's traditions and we respect those stories. Somehow even though that intent was there at the National Festival, somehow that didn't always happen. We didn't have the control over the people on those fringes. And so Ron never came back, and that was a loss for him, and certainly for everyone that now attends the Festival (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 55-56).

Identifying Issues in the Community: The Need for Cultural Sensitivity

The saga of Ron Evans' disaffection with the Festival experience is emblematic of the difficulties that can arise in transposing a traditional teller from outside the dominant culture to a revival setting. Such tellers may find that the "rules" of the Festival and/or the consumption of the stories by audience members are antithetical to the intimate and mutual compacts made between traditional artists and their audiences in their home communities.

Prior to Evans' first appearance in Jonesborough in 1979, only one other Native American teller had been featured there, 80-year-old Chickasaw teller Te Ata. A polished performer, she enjoyed a touring career that lasted fifty years, entertaining at the White House, Carnegie Hall, and at Stratford-on-Avon, and was inducted into the Halls of Fame

is hard to create a feeling of family within an entire Festival community, and then try to identify and exclude dysfunctional relatives or third cousins thrice removed.

of both her home state of Oklahoma and of the Chickasaw Tribe. According to notes on the book flap of *Te Ata – Chickasaw Storyteller, American Treasure* by Richard Green (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002): "In 1987, Te Ata was the first person ever to be declared an 'Oklahoma treasure.'" Born in 1895, she was 92 at the time of that honor. The note continues: "[Though] Te Ata grew up in Tishomingo [Oklahoma] and at Bloomfield, a tribal boarding school rather than on a reservation, she was raised on her father's Chickasaw stories." Her biographer writes: "She learned her first Indian stories from her father, a Chickasaw tribal official before Oklahoma became a state in 1907. Her college drama teacher refined her talent and contributed to the poise and judgment she need to launch her career" (xii). Te Ata married Clyde Fisher, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1933. Of her storytelling, Green writes:

Te Ata's career took her all over America in venues of all kinds, from great stages to school auditoriums to Indian reservations... Her mission was to entertain and educate, to enlighten and inspire, and she gladly accepted this honor and responsibility during the decades when the dominant white society was not nearly as receptive to minorities as it is today (xii).

Evans arrived onstage in Jonesborough with no touring experience whatsoever. Regan-Blake met him when he was asked to fill in for an elder at the Mariposa Folk Festival in Canada, and brought him to the festival in Jonesborough shortly after that. Even before his plane landed at the Tri-Cities airport, Evans was uncomfortable with the idea of traveling from his home in a remote area in Saskatchewan, Canada to the American South. He presented the Festival audience with what Kay Stone calls "a rich and ancient tradition." He also gave the Festival producers one of their first chances to

provide an appropriate welcome and a protected performing arena for an indigenous teller whose cultural clock and calendar were very different from those of the dominant culture.

During the years he was involved with the Festival, Evans pushed the envelope of session time limits, while also bringing an embodied sense of sacredness to the Festival grounds. He explained to his listeners that some stories were only on loan and not for keeping and retelling by others, and that some seasons were not the time for telling tales. And although Regan-Blake's instincts helped him receive a reassuring welcome when he first arrived, in the long run the Festival setting could not provide a protected container into which Evans could safely release his stories.

A Festival audience drawn from an urbanized dominant culture may have little appreciation for the nuanced cultural constraints of traditional peoples, especially those raised in remote or pastoral settings. Though Evans was not one of our interviewees for the Cotsen Storytelling Project, the issue of when a given culture believes that stories may be told came up in two other CSP interviews. We filmed Navajo teller Geri Keams and her grandmother, Pansy Frank (who spoke only Dineh) in late September of 1997, at a time that Frank had specifically designated. Our interview took place outside Flagstaff, Arizona before the first snows marking the beginning of winter there. At one point early in the interview, Frank paused and told us (with her granddaughter translating): "The wind is listening. I'm not supposed to be telling these stories now." We all held our breath while Frank thought it over, and then she concluded that since she was speaking only snippets of the stories as an illustration of what she told her grandchildren, it was fine. We exhaled and continued with the interview.

Sicilian American storyteller Gioia Timpanelli mentioned the seasonality of stories, too. In speaking of her great-grandmother's storytelling sessions in a village in Sicily, she notes:

[Stories] were told in the evening. First of all, you didn't tell them in the summer. People were working. You didn't tell them in the spring and in the autumn. You respected the seasons. You respected whether it was rainy season or dry season... Wherever you lived in this world, you respected the world itself. Since the world itself is [*laughing*] the grandmother of the old stories, *and* grandfather. So these stories were told in winter, by the hearth (CSP/GT Transcript for Disc 3, page 4).

Thus, the sensitivity to the proper season for telling stories is not at issue solely for indigenous tellers, but rather for any peoples who are tied to the cycle of nature, and the need to work toward a harvest while the weather and daylight allow it. In those settings, it makes sense that only after the harvest is gathered and stored for the winter, and the sun has set, should the harvesters pause, and gather to pass on their tales.

Traditional tellers are not the only ones for whom rigid time limits for telling are a bugaboo. They are problematic for many a Festival teller, even revival tellers representing the dominant culture. The responsibility for keeping performers within their timeframe falls into the hands of the Festival emcees. Some do a better job – and are more gracious about it – than others. In a Festival setting like the one in Jonesborough, it is considered courteous to stay within your time limit, especially if you are sharing a set with other tellers. In fact, it is considered unprofessional to run over. Repeat offenders are criticized by their peers and eventually shunned by festival producers.

In our conversation on April 4, 2014, Regan-Blake made it clear the Festival tradition of closely monitoring teller time limits had been her idea. Performing on the folk music festival, she had seen time and again how repeated encores by favored bands responding to enthusiastic applause could not only shorten, but also completely absorb the time slot intended for the next performer. Or else, the length of the concert would extend deep into the night; the final band of the evening might go on at 1:30 AM and find their listening audience pared down to a handful of exhausted, insomniac fans.

I would observe, too, that staying on schedule is a sacred tenet of an economic booster event committed to a printed program. Providing for tellers from cultural traditions that are more linked to a lunar calendar than Greenwich Mean Time means structuring a more flexible event than a setting in which time equals money. The "disconnect" between audience expectations shaped by the dominant (capitalistic) discourse, and the aesthetic of performers from marginalized traditions offered a teaching moment that Regan-Blake recognized. In the case of Evans, she did all she could to help him adjust to festival logistics like time limits, while appreciating the spiritual gifts he brought to the event like blessing the grounds. But Regan-Blake could not vouchsafe the fate of the stories Evans told; when he realized that sacred tales were being shared by others against his specific instruction and decided to end his association with the Festival, Regan-Blake respected that decision. Later board members and Festival staff eventually renounced the difficulties of curating traditional tellers in favor of economic interests.

Regan-Blake Critiques the Festival's Handling of Traditional Tellers

Our interview took place almost twenty years after Evans' initial visit to the National Storytelling Festival, and more than a decade after Regan-Blake rotated off the

board of the national storytelling organization. Yet she remained haunted by the Festival's lack of discernment about (and later its lack of commitment to) showcasing traditional tellers. She said:

That's one of the things...in the storytelling world that we need to keep looking at, is finding ways to bring in traditional people from other cultures, other than what we think of as the dominant one here in the United States. That we somehow find ways to continue respecting their traditions and their stories and ways that we can all be comfortable together, so that we're not shutting anyone out. It was great having Ron be a part of [the Festival for a time], because he went around, I remember, early in the morning and blessed the whole tent area. [He] gave me a different sense of the sacredness of storytelling and the sacredness that could happen even inside of a tent with, at that time, maybe 800 librarians and teachers [in the seats] (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 47-48).

She returned to the subject of including traditional tellers at the festival later in the interview:

NAPPS has really gotten away from that. I'd like to see the National Festival go back towards...honoring some of these older...people who are really living the tradition. That's one of the problems with having such large crowds at NAPPS. The people that are running the festival today feel like they need someone up there on stage that can [entertain] 1500 people. Your Cora Bardwell³²³ and Alice

³²³ Based in southern Vermont, Cora Bardwell learned recitations from her widowed mother, and was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. Her tale about two boys using foul language received mention in the "Last Laugh" column of the Jan/Feb 1983 issue of *Mother Jones* magazine. See:

Kane³²⁴ and Sarah Cleveland³²⁵ and all of the other people that were the traditionalists [like] Henry Hatch³²⁶...were comfortable with large groups, but not comfortable with *that* large of groups.

We need to be sure the festivals that we're putting on ourselves, and that we're consulting with other people [on], that we bring in that [traditional] element. It's a little bit harder [to do]...A lot of times in the early days, we'd have Kenny Goldstein [and] several other folklorists from around the United States; Amy Shuman³²⁷ was one of them...Whoever had collected from some of these

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/nature-and-environment/storytelling-festival-zmaz83jfzraw.aspx?PageId=1#ArticleContent> Accessed online 25 March 2014.

To hear her talk about her storytelling traditions, see:

http://vermontfolklifecenter.org/multimedia/womenspeak/womenspeak_bardwell/ Accessed 6 April 2014.

³²⁴ Born in Ireland in 1908, Alice Kane moved with her parents to Canada in 1921. Educated in New Brunswick and Montreal, she was a librarian for Toronto Public Library, and involved with establishing the Toronto School for Storytellers. She published *Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1983) and *The Dreamer Awakes* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1995). She was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1985. She died in 2003. The Alice Kane Award is given annually by Toronto Storytelling in her memory.

³²⁵ Sarah Cleveland was a highly esteemed Irish singer of traditional songs living in upstate New York when she was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. She collected songs sung by both parents – Child ballads and lyric songs set to ancient Irish airs – and Sandy Paton made a recording of her singing *Ballads and Songs of the Upper Hudson Valley* (Brant Lake, NY: Folk-Legacy, 1966).

³²⁶ Henry Hatch was a humorist living in Maine when he was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1979. In its "Last Laugh" column in the Jan/Feb 1983 issue of *Mother Jones* magazine, the editors lauded Hatch's Down East telling of Romeo and Juliet.

³²⁷ Though Ken Goldstein and Linda Morley's names appear in Festival programs, Amy Shuman's does not. Either she presented at a NAPPS conference, instead of the Festival or simply went unbilled.

[traditional] storytellers, we would try to bring *those* people to town, have them be a part of the festival. They weren't really performers, but they would sit on stage. When we had the ballad singers from Madison County – Dellie Norton³²⁸ and Sheila Kay Adams,³²⁹ [who] as a young woman came with her great aunt to help get her around town and help her out however she needed – [and] we would have the folklorists on stage with them, so that they could chat with them and talk and bring out some of the stories.

'Cause [the traditional tellers] weren't used to getting up there, performing and [*snapping her fingers*] telling one story after another. [The folklorists and collectors] were very important in making that connection. They were part of the bridge between the [traditional] tellers and the listeners, because [the traditional tellers] – some of them – didn't have quite the same kind of immediate shine [as the revivalist platform performers].

³²⁸ Traditional ballad singer Dellie Norton was first featured along with her daughter Evelyn Ramsey (and her unbilled great-niece, Sheila Kay Adams) at the National Storytelling Festival in 1980. All three women were from Sodom Laurel, North Carolina. Norton, who died in 1993, can be heard in the film *By Word of Mouth*, shot at the 1982 National Storytelling Festival. The work of all three women is highlighted in Rob Amberg's 2001 *Sodom Laurel Album* print and CD anthology. For more see: http://www.mustrad.org.uk/reviews/sod_alb.htm Accessed 6 April 2014. Hear them, too, on the Digital Library of Appalachia: <http://dla.acaweb.org/cdm/search/searchterm/Norton/mode/all/order/title> Accessed 6 April 2014.

³²⁹ A seventh generation ballad singer and banjo virtuoso from Sodom Laurel, North Carolina, Sheila Kay Adams is Dellie Norton's great-niece. She is the author of *My Old True Love* (New York: Ballantine, 2005) and *Come, Go Home with Me* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). A 2013 NEA National Heritage Fellow, she has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival numerous times, starting in 1997, and again in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2013.

It was as if you went out and picked up three gems in a place like here in western North Carolina where you can do that. You can go out and dig in the ground and you can find some garnets; you can even find emeralds and some crystals and a little bit of gold. Some of the more polished tellers, you could just look down and see that gold. And some of the traditional people, you needed to take just a little bit of water...or maybe a little rag and wipe off [the gem before you] show it. That's what the folklorists were doing for us: they were just helping to shine that [presentation] up a bit so that everyone could see that beauty and see what [the traditional tellers] had to offer. I'd really like to see the festivals go back to doing a lot more of that...

Because the only reason we're here telling stories is because people before us told stories. The air that we breathe, we're recycling the [same] air all the time. And as we're taking in a breath to tell the story and we're putting [the story] out there, some of those same bits of air are the same ones that 100, 200, 500 years ago, people were breathing in and out as they told and listened to stories. We need to be sure we have a line coming along from behind us. That's the way we pass it on to the next generation (SCP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 76-78).

The Backstory: Curating Traditional Tellers in a Festival Setting

On March 5th, 2013, I had a phone conversation with Jimmy Neil Smith, by then retired from his decades-long job as NAPPS/NSA/ISC Executive Director, to ask his help in identifying some of the tellers on the earliest rosters of the National Storytelling

Festival.³³⁰ Web searches had not uncovered any information on several. During that conversation (from which I have detailed notes), he confirmed the identities of Bob Abernathy, Brooks Hayes and Jesse Safley, the after-dinner speakers whom Tandy Rice, Jerry Clower's talent agent in Nashville, had provided for the first festival.

Smith also helped me identify three other performers about whom I had found little information: Harriet Allen Insignares, an African American poet and communications professor at Fisk University in Nashville, first appeared at the festival in 1976. Warren Lambert, a history professor at Berea College in Kentucky, appeared at the festival only in 1976. W.W. "Woody" Rowland, a traditional teller from North Carolina, came only once to the Festival, in 1980. According to my notes from our conversation, Smith said:

[Woody Rowland] was suggested by a folklorist. It was a shame. He got on stage, told his stories, struggled a little, and went home after his first performance. I think he thought it was too much to handle. We were not knowledgeable enough in presentation of traditional tellers. That's part of the reason we had a disagreement with the folklore community for ten years – they felt we were [favoring] revivalists and mishandling traditional tellers.³³¹

I asked Smith how he and others had located traditional tellers in the early days of the festival. He said: "What we would do – when I say "we" it was Doc McConnell and me

³³⁰ It was after this phone call that Smith very generously sent me an audio recording of the Sunday afternoon events at the first Festival in 1973. Being able to listen to the Festival events informed my research enormously.

³³¹ Phone conversation with Jimmy Neil Smith on May 5, 2013.

sitting at my office – is call the Smithsonian and Library of Congress and the people there would give us names and contact people. We would have the folklorist as the contact point. It's a shame [about Woody Rowland]."

Though I had spent six years on the NAPPS board (from 1988 until 1994), I had never heard the story of Rowland's early departure. This yarn was left unspun by the NAPPS staff and other board members. Hearing it in 2013 helped explain the enmity towards the festival – and revivalist tellers – that the folklore community was said to have, for the tale of that unexplained enmity was passed along as part of the revival community's mythic tradition.³³²

³³² However, that enmity is not just a myth. I detected examples of it in my reading for this study (for instance, Carl Lindahl in his introduction to McCarthy's anthology of essays, *Jack in Two Worlds*). And I have experienced a sense of marginalization as a revival storyteller and storytelling studies scholar who is currently the Storytelling Section co-convenor of the American Folklore Society. Thus, I have been grateful to find storyteller and folklorist Kay Stone who builds a bridge between the two groups (*Burning Brightly* xvi-xvii).

I'm also indebted to feminist scholars Joan N. Radner and Elaine Lawless, both former presidents of the American Folklore Society. The two have expressed an appreciation for platform performance as well as everyday storytelling.

A performing storyteller herself as well as a folklorist and oral historian, Radner has served as the chair of the National Storytelling Network. "Burnt Into Memory," her oral history performance piece about the 1947 Brownfield, Maine fire was reviewed by Margaret R. Yocom in *Storytelling, Self, Society* 6.3 (2010): 241-244. Radner is the editor of *Feminist Messages – Coding in Women's Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Lawless has collaborated with performance studies scholar M. Heather Carver to create the Troubling Violence Performance Project (TVPP) at the University of Missouri; the TVPP troupe performs the personal narratives of women and men who have survived intimate partner violence. They published an auto/ethnographic account of their collaboration entitled *Troubling Violence – A Performance Project* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009). Lawless is also the author of other ethnographic studies, including *Women Escaping Violence – Empowerment through Narrative* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

Smith's anecdote helps to explain Regan-Blake's despondence over the marginalization of traditional performers that came to be part of the festival programming. And it brings into sharper focus the image of Sobol's "small group charged with a sacred mission" (91) who were, in essence, learning as they went along. Still, the earnestness and elbow grease of the early NAPPS board, and the hard work and particular charms of its two most famous ambassadors, went a long way toward keeping the festival moving forward, winning the enduring loyalty of most of the tellers, folklorists and audiences who came to Jonesborough. We cannot know if it was a curatorial disconnect, or an undiscerning audience's reaction, or what Lindahl calls the oral narrator's own "shy tradition" that sent Woody Rowland home to North Carolina before his stint on stage was done. Despite this and other programmatic gaffes, folklorists Kenny Goldstein and Linda Morley continued to be listed in the National Storytelling Festival program through 1982. After that, the programming began to shift, and in a few years would all but eliminate traditional tellers – except in a single designated slot – from the bill.³³³

³³³ Creating the appropriate crucible for the sharing of traditional tales from any culture outside the lived experience of the teller, the listener or the sponsor remains a very complex equation. While revising this study, I was reminded that my NAPPS board service overlapped with that of Barre Toelken, director of the Utah State University Folklore Program from 1985-2003, and another former president of the American Folklore Society. In the early eighties (prior to his NAPPS board service) Toelken issued a corrective retraction of his forty years of inquiry into Navajo narrative, grounded in that culture's multi-leveled use of spoken word as entertainment, moral worldview, medicine and witchcraft. In his 1987 essay on "Life and Death in the Navajo Coyote tales, Toelken writes: "Even if I reject [the Navajo] warning that there is danger in deeper inquiry into the stories, for me to actually do further work would necessitate a repudiation of Navajo beliefs and values – treasures that I feel ought to be strengthened and nurtured by folklore scholarship, not weakened, denigrated, or given away to curious onlookers" (399).

In his 1996 essay, "The Icebergs of Folktale – *Misconception, Misuse, Abuse*," Toelken notes:

A number of professional storytellers, because they cannot fairly represent other cultures' meanings or contexts in a strange environment, have ceased performing

In our March 31 phone conversation, Regan-Blake told me she had never heard the Woody Rowland story either. But she did remember how troubled her folklorist friend Kenny Goldstein had been by the fact that storyteller and author Kathryn Tucker Windham published numerous collections of "true" ghost stories – what folklorists would call local legends – without including a word about her sources. Windham's reputation for telling Southern ghost stories is what won her that initial invitation to the second

Native American stories; there are others who have never started doing it. Some, like Kay Stone, work strictly within the limitations set by their Native oral informants. Academics, because they fancy they *do* appreciate context and meaning, seem to have no hesitation to tell, retell, summarize, or assign American Indian stories to their audiences without any regard to tribal practice or belief (52).

In the essay, Toelken explains how he delivered a paper at the American Folklore Society (AFS) Annual Meeting, detailing why he no longer felt comfortable discussing Navajo coyote stories in depth because of the implications against doing so within the culture that produced them. Though some of his AFS colleagues understood his decision, others pushed back against that decision, calling it "anti-intellectual." Toelken continues, "strangely enough, while professional storytellers have generally been willing to understand the dilemma more fully, academics have resisted the subject because of its apparently romantic and non-objective implications" (52).

Rereading this essay, I am reminded to take Toelken's argument against performing indigenous tales outside their context and culture ever more deeply to heart for two reasons. First, when he writes of the most typical abuses found when non-Native storytellers perform Native American stories out of context, mentioning how "the story becomes a histrionic exercise for an earnest performer...yelling to imagined characters in the distance (if you told a story in this fashion inside a Navajo hogan, your audience would die of a heart attack)" (53), he is describing a performance I gave just before he spoke at the National Storytelling Congress in St. Louis in 1987. At that conference, he shared his findings from "Life and Death in the Navajo Coyote Tales" in Arnold Krupat and Brian Swann, eds., *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 388-401.

Second, Toelken asserts, "From a Navajo perspective, a story is an embodiment of reality, a creative act in the fullest sense, an evocation of the processes of life, a living drama. For the Navajo, language creates reality, not the reverse....from a Navajo viewpoint we are likely to be run over by our story" (53-54). To me, this is a strong caution about the need for deep discernment among performers, presenters and audience members concerning the unexamined power of stories in intercultural contexts and the responsibility inherent in sharing them across cultural divides.

National Storytelling Festival.³³⁴ And it's true: there are no sources credited in Windham's prodigious array of ghost story books – *13 Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987); *13 Georgia Ghosts and Jeffrey* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987); *13 Mississippi Ghosts and Jeffrey* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1988), *13 Tennessee Ghosts and Jeffrey* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1988), etc.³³⁵ (The reader may be interested to know that this series of books was named for Windham's paranormal roommate, Jeffrey, who shared her home in Selma, Alabama.)

For over 150 years, starting with Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, folklorists collecting oral tales privileged the collected texts without much regard for the narrators who supplied them. But since the performative turn in that field, begun by Goldstein's emerging contemporaries Dan Ben-Amos, Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams³³⁶ in the late 60s, the recognition of narrators and the context in which their stories are collected has become dialogically *de rigueur* in folklorists' practice. Thus, a cultural disconnect between professional protocols played out at the National Storytelling Festival. Kathryn Windham identified herself as a writer/journalist and later a storyteller, not a folklorist. And contemporary attitudes about revealing sources could hardly be more antithetical than between journalistic and folkloric modes of story collection.

³³⁴ In his history, Sobol confirms, "Kathryn Windham and Lee Pennington were invited [to the Festival] on the strength of their books on Alabama ghost stories and Kentucky legends, respectively" (91).

³³⁵ First published in the late sixties, Windham's ghost story books were reissued as her popularity grew.

³³⁶ Their teacher at the University of Indiana, Richard Dorson, called them these three the "Young Turks."

It's unfortunate if Windham's approach to the legends she collected – some of them told as personal stories by the narrators who shared them – had any impact on folklorist-storyteller relations inside or outside the revival. This is especially so given that Windham's strengths as a narrator were not showcased in the delivery of this dramaturgically underdeveloped, if eerie, story material. In fact, she felt increasingly hemmed in by the expectation that she would remain in what came to be (and still is) the Festival's Ghost Story Ghetto.³³⁷ In the late '80s, Windham asked then-board member Beth Horner to tell the NAPPS programming staff that she had more memorable material in her lived experience than in Jeffrey's Dead End oeuvre.³³⁸ Once that message was delivered, Windham blossomed into the First Lady of performed personal narrative. Her narrative turn helped shape future programming that privileged personal narrative at the National Storytelling Festival.

The Difference between Telling and Writing: Orality Precedes Literacy

³³⁷ The National Storytelling Festival ghost story slot as it functions at present takes place in the round in a large open field at night. Some light is directed into the gazebo where the teller stands during her performance in the olio of performers, but her audience is steeped in darkness. Therefore, she speaks into a Stygian void of people lounging on the park's grassy slopes on all sides of her. Often a night train comes roaring past so close to the stage that the teller (and the audience at her back) can hear its metal parts grinding and pinging as it passes.

The fact that audience members can barely make out the teller, and she cannot see any of them dilutes the sense of co-creation between them considerably. That lack of connection (and the fact that the teller gets twenty minutes on each of the two nights of ghost telling) impacts the sale of her material in the resource tent during the festival weekend. Of this arrangement, an unhappy teller once said to me: "It would be more effective if you ran through the crowd stabbing people." But that would discourage ticket sales.

³³⁸ Beth Horner shared this anecdote during her part in the multi-vocal Plenary Session at the 2012 NSN Conference in Cincinnati.

Throughout the narrative as Regan-Blake told about all the different people whom the Folktellers met on the road, and all the assistance they were given by others they met, and all the different events the duo organized or contributed to, she commented on the changes in the festival's character and in the storytelling community's approach to traditional tellers and tales. Here she presents one final appeal for revivalists to recognize that oral tradition stories provide a template for creating all kinds of stories even in a modern world:

In the beginning...let's say in the first...ten to fifteen years of the whole storytelling revival...tradition is what was honored so much. And...nobody wanted to write a book; nobody wanted to put anything down, because we all wanted to tell it. We prided ourselves in not writing books because we were telling the stories. We were getting them out there...[and into] people's ears, so every single inflection and nuance could be there.

Often, people couple *writing* stories with the same talent as *telling* stories, and they're actually two different things. We do a disservice to, especially to children [by saying]..."Everybody can tell a story." In some senses, we can, but we go into classrooms and we expect children to be able to sit down [and]...write a story. What I feel we should be doing instead is sending them to the traditional stories – letting them read or hear those traditional stories, over and over and over again, getting a whole framework [of how stories work].

[Donald] Davis has written an article about that, about working with some fourth graders and how he went week after week, telling them stories. His end goal was to get them to write stories, but he didn't go in and say, "Now, write

some stories." When you don't [yet] have any tools...it'd be as if you were saying, "Now, you go build your house" and not telling anyone how to put up the rafters [or]...how to even do a foundation. As we go to the traditional stories, we get our whole foundation; we learn how to hammer...a little bit, then we can build our house. What Don did...with these fourth graders [was] after so many weeks of telling them stories, then he had them write a story. They knew just how to do it, 'cause they knew...[how] at least [in] those...Western Civilization stories, things happen in sets of threes and how...there was a beginning, a middle and an end... The children knew about that, and so they could, then they could start writing their stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 61-62).

Regan-Blake also speaks to what's lost to story listeners when traditional tales are no longer welcome at a festival, and only personal narratives are privileged:

Somewhere along the line in the world of the storytelling revival, people started telling personal experience stories... We were so in awe of people like Ray Hicks and Sarah Cleveland and Cora Bardwell and the people that...were telling the stories from their own culture. Many storytellers that were coming into the storytelling world wanted to do that. [But] when they looked back to see their ancestors, it wasn't as clear. It wasn't that they could put on the glasses and see, "Ah, that's my ancestor and that's my story." It was more muddled because they had so many different ancestors, so many different cultures. It wasn't as clear-cut what kind of stories they could tell...

People then felt the most comfortable telling...their personal stories, 'cause those *were* their own stories. And there's great benefit in a lot of the

personal stories...Donald Davis...right now is the king of the personal experience stories and does such a wonderful job. But one of the reasons he does such a good job is because he had all those years of telling only traditional stories. So he knew the foundation and the framework. But...we have to...watch [out] when people go and listen to him, [and decide] "I've got stories," and go away, and before doing any of the footwork, before doing any of the preparation, they go and start telling their own personal experience stories, thinking that's what NAPPS wants, and thinking therefore that's what the world wants.

In all of the classes I do, in all of the work I do with other storytellers, one of my key suggestions – stronger than suggestion – one of my key requirements is to go towards the traditional stories. 'Cause...those are the ones that are packed with things we need to know... Those ancestors decided there were things we needed to know; that's the only reason these stories got preserved. That's the only reason they kept being passed along.

Because of the way we're living today or how our lives are different from theirs, sometimes [the connection to the old stories is] not always immediately obvious. So sometimes people go to those stories and say, "Oh, those are *only* old stories." But they're not. They're a part of that same breath that we've all been breathing for all these generations, all these hundreds and thousands of years. It is those stories that [connect] us with these people, [our ancestors].

Alongside those [old stories], [we can tell] our own personal stories, [to] let people know a little bit of who we are, that's something that's wonderful, and it's also a gift. But we need to be sure our gift is grounded [in the old stories]. So

that's my [*chuckle*] current lecture on traditional and personal experience stories (CSP/CRB Transcript 2, pages 62-64).

Conclusion

In revisiting these CSP interviews with Regan-Blake, I was struck by the fact that once more "tending to the community" is a significant trope. Through her travels she identified and issued invitations to virtually all of the first wave platform performers featured in Jonesborough in the festival's first ten years. And she found her way to oral tradition scholars, collectors, folklorists and traditional tellers, and brought them to the festival table as well. I believe her appreciation and commitment to an inclusive storytelling community stemmed not only from her growing up experience amidst talkers and tellers in the South, but also from the flourishing of her relationship with the extended Hicks family over the course of forty years.

Jimmy Neil Smith brought these notable tellers to Jonesborough: Ray Hicks, Lee Pennington, Doc McConnell, and Kathryn Windham, and worked with the Smithsonian Institution to identify traditional talent in the early years of the festival. But through her efforts as ambassador in those first twelve years (and more) of the National Storytelling Festival, as a board member in the first decade of the national storytelling membership organization, and later as a participant in the development of the National Storytelling Conference, Connie Regan-Blake expanded the talent pool exponentially. She directly or indirectly brought library legends (Anne Izard, Augusta Baker, Alice Kane, Maria Cimino³³⁹), balladeers and traditional tellers (Frank Proffitt, Jr., Dellie Norton and Evelyn

³³⁹ New York librarian in the Central Children's Room, author and illustrator, Maria Cimino was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. She

Ramsey, Bobby McMillon, Ron Evans), and folklorists (Kenny Goldstein, Linda Morley,³⁴⁰ Amy Shuman) to the festival or conference. She also engaged pioneers from musical (Gamble Rogers, Utah Phillips, Fred Park³⁴¹), oratorical (Marshall Dodge, Kendall Morse,³⁴² Maggi Pierce³⁴³ and Cora Bardwell), theatrical (Roadside Theater, Ed Stivender, John Basinger), library and educational (Elizabeth Ellis, Gayle Ross, Nancy

published *The Disobedient Eels and Other Italian Folktales* (New York: Random House, 1970).

³⁴⁰ New Hampshire State Folklorist Linda Morley was a featured folklorist at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978, 1981 and 1982.

³⁴¹ Frederick Park, a North Carolina-based purveyor of "contemporary antique recreation," is a musician, storyteller, traditional dance collector and country-dance caller. He first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1979. For more see: <http://www.apalache.com/Dance.html> accessed online 6 April 2014.

³⁴² Maine humorist "Captain" Kendall Morse is a singer and storyteller. He is the author of *Stories told in the Kitchen* (Utica: North Country Press, 1997) and released the album *Seagulls and Summer People* (Camden: Timberhead Music, 1999). He first appeared at the National Storytelling festival in 1980.

³⁴³ Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1931, and living Fairhaven, Massachusetts since the sixties, Maggi Kerr Peirce directed Tryworks Coffeehouse in New Bedford for decades. A singer of traditional songs, teller of traditional tales, sharer of recitations from about her childhood, she first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1980. In the film *By Word of Mouth*, shot at the 1982 National Storytelling Festival, she recounts an exchange she had with an old friend, folklorist Kenneth Goldstein. When he heard her tell stories at the festival, he said: "I've known you for years, but I've never heard you tell a story!" and she replied: "No one ever asked me!" She was awarded the 1974 Eisteddfod Award by the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth for "her dedication to the perpetuation of traditional material," and the 1988 Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Award for "excellence in storytelling." She was inducted into the NSN Circle of excellence in 1997 and honored with the NSN Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001. She has published *A Belfast Girl: A 1960s American folk music legend weaves stories of a girlhood on "the singing streets" of Ireland, marriage in Scotland, and arrival in America* (Little Rock: Parkhurst Brothers Publishers, 2013). For more see her Facebook page, accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/MaggieKerrPeirce/info>.

Schimmel, Julia Ruth Richardson³⁴⁴), natural history (Doug Elliott³⁴⁵), Deaf performance (Sam Edwards and Bernard Bragg), spiritual/ therapeutic (Ken Feit) and literary (Jane Yolen) traditions. In addition, she showcased tellers whose hybrid work bridges the ephemeral oral cultures of their grandparents and their own grounding in a culture that privileges the printed word (Donald Davis, Jackie Torrence and Gioia Timpanelli). And during that first decade, she also supported Laura Simms's efforts to bring performers to the Festival who represented other indigenous (Vi Hilbert) and international traditions like Kel Watkins³⁴⁶ (Australia), Muriel Bloch³⁴⁷ (France), Ephat Mujuru³⁴⁸ (Zimbabwe),

³⁴⁴ A Chattanooga-based storyteller and educator, Julia Ruth Richardson first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1980. A member of the board of the John C. Campbell Folk School, she died in 2003 at the age of 94.

³⁴⁵ A naturalist, herbalist, storyteller and author/illustrator, Doug Elliott lives in Union, North Carolina. He was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. He joined the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2009. He has written and illustrated *Wildwoods Wisdom, Encounters with the Natural World* (St. Paul: Paragon House 1992) among other books and several recordings. For more see: <http://www.dougelliott.com/products.html> accessed online 6 April 2014.

³⁴⁶ An Australian storyteller, comedian, author, and collector of folktales and folklore, Kel Watkins was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. He was winner of the Australian Yarnspinning Challenge in 1996 and 1997, and the Folklore Project Award at the Port Fairy Folk Festival. He was featured in an episode of *Australian Story* (26 June 1996) produced by the Australian Broadcasting Company. For more see: <http://john.curtin.edu.au/folklore/watkins.html> accessed online 25 March 2014.

³⁴⁷ According to a 2010 write-up for her appearance at the French Embassy in Bangalore, India, writer and storyteller Muriel Bloch initiated the “Paris sur Paroles” for the Paris Quartier d’Été festival, where storytellers chose unusual places luxury hotels, cemeteries, banks, town halls, wedding halls, and warehouses to perform. On request of the Festival d’Automne in Paris, she brought together fifteen storytellers from all over the world to perform in their own languages. She has participated in festivals all over the world and is the author of over 20 books. See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/166061373410495/>, accessed March 25, 2014.

and Moses Aaron³⁴⁹ (Australia) to the mix. This is, truly, a remarkable roll call of talent brought to bear on the Festival, its sponsoring and membership organization, its outreach events, and its growing community of tellers and listeners.

What becomes clear, too, in her narratives is that without the depth of Regan-Blake's and Freeman's talent, and the breadth of the Folktellers' touring, and without their personal charisma and dedication to storytelling, that the festival, the NAPPS cause, and revival storytelling would not have attracted the national media attention that it received in those early days. Back "home" in Jonesborough, without Regan-Blake's programming instincts and her organizational skills, the Festival itself would not have grown the way it did in its first decade.

She was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. She was included in the documentary film, "Il était une fois de conteurs" ("Storytellers...Once Upon a Time") in 2001.

³⁴⁸ A world-renowned mbira player and traditional teller, Ephat Mujuru is originally from Zimbabwe. There are five types of mbira and Mujuru played all of them. A traditional instrument of the Shona people, it has been used as a medium for ancestors' voices in ritual, and political expression in times of national strife. In 1982, he came to the US to lecture and teach mbira at the University of Washington in Seattle. He was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1984. He has made numerous recordings both in the US and Zimbabwe. He was leaving London to begin an artist residency at Grinnell College in Iowa when he suffered a massive heart attack and died in 2001. To hear him play, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOVnp8qQW-c> Accessed online 25 March 2014.

³⁴⁹ Born in Calcutta, India of orthodox Jewish parents before immigrating to Australia, author and storyteller Moses Aaron was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1984. He has published seven books since 1996; the first, *Lily and Me* (New York: Random House, 1996) details his friendship with child being treated for Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia, and celebrates life, friendship and storytelling. For more see: <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/belongings/moses-aaron/> accessed online 25 March 2014.

Even a casual reading of her story confirms that the revival movement was as much engendered by the year-round efforts of a talented pair of women – touring from Florida to New England, then coast to coast, and finally internationally, gathering other tellers, famished listeners and enthusiastic supporters everywhere they went – as much as it was by a three-day-long festival event staged annually in upper East Tennessee. Yet, Connie Regan-Blake's narrative has remained in the shadows, obscured by the reflected light of the Jonesborough myth, for the better part of forty years.

Analysis of the CSP interviews and other documents provide some of the clues for how Regan-Blake's contributions to the revival have been so thoroughly erased. Some more clues surface in the next two chapters, which examine Regan-Blake's own intentional unraveling of two tapestries she'd spent decades creating – through her withdrawal from the NAPPS board and the disbanding of the Folktellers.

CHAPTER FIVE: Severed Threads

Introduction

During the CSP interviews at her home in Asheville in 1998, Regan-Blake offered to show us her collection of Festival programs and brochures from the early days of the Festival through 1998. We followed her lead, filming her as she led us through 25 years of ephemera without knowing what seeds of history were pressed between the leaves of those program and brochure pages. Revisiting her words alongside copies of the programs, I see that the collection contains many milestone moments in the evolving shape of the Festival, including the birth announcement for the national storytelling organization, which held its first public membership meeting at the 1976 Festival.

The programs detail the changing formats of the Festival programming from collaborative workshops to shared concerts to solo sets, and the challenges that the growing numbers of listeners visited on the tellers (particularly traditional oral narrators) and the town (particularly the keepers of its historic cemetery). The growing lineups show the board's efforts to showcase a diversity of performers including Deaf performers, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, and some international tellers as well as a plethora of tellers from Euro-American stock. The teller roster also indicates a changing preference in performance content: from the first decade's privileging of traditional sources like Jack tales, ghost stories, ballads and recitations, to a turn in middle of the second decade toward different modes of speech like personal narrative, cowboy poetry, and contemporary singer/songwriting.

The programs record the many moves of the NAPPS office – from Jimmy Neil Smith's file cabinet at the Parson's Table restaurant, to an office above the Laundromat, to the historic but drafty Slemons House, to the newly renovated Chester Inn – leaving the emic reader with the sense that Smith's increasingly urgent ambition to build a bricks and mortar Center to showcase storytelling year round in Jonesborough will come to fruition at whatever the cost. The pieces of ephemera trace the organization's emerging desire for legitimacy, depicted in the range of cover illustrations – from anonymous, hand-drawn images to unattributed graphic designs to reproductions of paintings by a local artist whose well-connected mother could assure he got credit. Regan-Blake's accompanying narrative points out the organization's difficulty in finding an image that would brand "storytelling" as an art form without branding it as a gendered act, or one that had an individual face attached to it. As Regan-Blake relates, this struggle to brand storytelling "universally" morphed into an institutionalized sense among the Festival's Jonesborough-based supporters (town leaders, board and staff) that the art form could be celebrated without regard for the needs of its artist-practitioners.³⁵⁰

The program copy captures the emergence of a number of NAPPS initiatives: a publicly accessible archive and resource library from which storytelling films, tapes and books could be rented; paid staff for the archive; an effort to reach out to other regional organizations around the country; a crack at publishing story collections in print, and producing audio anthologies; an attempt to attract corporate sponsorship; the addition of

³⁵⁰ Interestingly, many of the residents of Jonesborough have incorporated the NAPPS institutional ethos, calling the Festival weekend simply "Storytelling" in a communal speech act that suggests how easy it is to erase the artists while saluting the art form.

numerous separate ticket events to increase revenues, and a capital campaign.³⁵¹ Given the organization's dependence on Festival revenues (which could be adversely affected by

³⁵¹ Smith established the National Storytelling Press, developing book and audio projects. The Press released its initial audio anthology as a double LP and cassette in 1983; it released four titles in 1991 and a boxed set of five cassettes in 1993. An examination of the NAPPS board records may provide a clearer sense of whether the costs were recouped in these entrepreneurial projects, but that is fodder for another study. At any rate, book and audio projects were a limited sideline to the organization's event-producing activities.

By the late nineties when it became clear that without other funding and a proper storage facility, Smith's ambitions for a library-and-archive were untenable, the archivist who had been hired (briefly) at the end of my board tenure was let go. The archival holdings – including the various NAPPS periodicals; documentary films about the festival; a handful of print anthologies of stories of age-specific how-to storytelling techniques; commercial and archival recordings from the Festival and the organization's papers – were donated to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in April of 2001.

Largely due to the board's unwillingness to support the Executive Director in taking on a mortgage to buy or build a facility, the NAPPS organization split in two in 1998. As a result two entities were created: the International Storytelling Center (ISC) – of which Smith remained the Executive Director – produced the Festival and later a Teller-in-Residence program. The National Storytelling Network (NSN), the membership arm of the organization, produced the annual conference, published the magazine and inherited the National Storytelling Press, which released one more CD anthology in 2003. In the negotiations over the split, ISC agreed that NSN would receive 18% of the gross from the Festival as a royalty for its two decades of shaping and producing the event. The ISC director of programs asked to report to only one board, and NSN conceded that ISC would be solely responsible for producing and programming the Festival.

Smith's success in finding corporate sponsorship of the Festival was spotty and the idea remains controversial within the community. After the split, a donation to ISC by a then-board member associated with Krispy Kreme netted naming rights for the 99-seat theatre inside what is now called the Mary B. Martin Storytelling Hall on the International Storytelling Center campus.

Smith's hard won capital campaign resulted in the purchase of real estate on Main Street in Jonesborough and the building of the International Storytelling Center, which opened with significant cost overruns in 2002. Construction was paid for and the campus surrounding it developed by a \$2.47 million dollar Rural Development Community Facilities loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as well as \$750,000 in loans from Washington County and the City of Johnson City, plus gifts from investors like the one who named the Mary B. Martin Storytelling Hall. Once the building opened, ISC began hosting weeklong Teller-in-Residence programs from May to October. According to Director of Programs Susan O'Connor, the residencies never paid for themselves.

bad weather or a downturn in the national economy), the overreaching nature of some of these initiatives emptied the Festival's pockets. At that point in the Festival's life, lean

By 2010, ISC was stumbling under the weight of the mortgage and humbled by declining audiences during the recession. According to the founder, the festival lost 16 percent of its business between 2007 and 2011 (qtd. in Ken Little's February 3, 2011 article, "Court Battle is latest twist in tale between festival groups" found at <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/feb/03/court-battle-international-storytelling-festival/?print=1> accessed 3 May 2014.) The organization declared bankruptcy on December 31 of that year. Jimmy Neil Smith stepped down as Executive Director on January 1, 2011.

During bankruptcy proceedings, a federal judge deemed contractual relations between ISC and NSN null and void; thus NSN lost its 18% share of the gross from the Festival. The court documents stated: "[NSN] continues to share in festival revenues 'but has failed in its mission to enhance ISC through membership and related services' (qtd. in Ken Little's February 19, 2011 article, "Storytellers turn a page in Ch. 11 bid" found at http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/feb/19/storytellers-turn-a-page-in-ch-11-bid/?partner=yahoo_feeds, accessed 10 September 2013). The Town of Jonesborough, in the voice of its attorney Jim Wheeler, publicly declared their support of the ISC's desire to break away from NSN in language that riled the revival community. Joseph Sobol, a resident of the town, published a May 8, 2011 Op-Ed piece in the *Johnson City Press*, reminding the local townspeople that the storytellers who had nurtured the Festival from its infancy were the members of NSN. Revival community leaders – Regan-Blake among them – led a campaign urging more conciliatory language and actions by ISC toward NSN.

The Festival and the Teller-in-Residence program continued while the ISC was restructured. That restructuring was completed in the summer of 2012. In February of the following year, the town of Jonesborough bought the International Storytelling Center from the lienholder, USDA Rural Development, and leased it back to the ISC. In October of 2012, six revival community leaders – again, Regan-Blake among them – met with the ISC board to urge them to address the wounds inflicted on the storytelling community by ISC-vetted statements and actions.

The revival community believes that the eloquence and efforts of those six storytellers moved the board to select its new Executive director; Kiran Singh Sirah was hired in the summer of 2013. By spring of 2014, he had secured sponsorship for the Teller-in-Residence program, to end its running in the red, though he remains cautious about the strings that can be attached to corporate investments in a cultural institution.

NSN has had its own financial crises, brought on by a spendthrift director and an inattentive board, but it avoided its own bankruptcy by cutting its staff and its ambitions to the bone, even alternating a national conference with "The Year of the Region" events during its leanest times. Three years ago, the board began its efforts to relocate the membership organization to a major city with a lively arts economy and an international airport. The decision for its new hometown was announced this year. NSN is moving its office to the Woodneath Story Center at the Mid-Continent Public Library System outside Kansas City, MO, in 2015.

years could be read in a change from glossy brochures to programs printed on paper with a matte finish.

The programs also record the rise of the androcentric version of the Festival's organizational creation myth. And with the rise of that sound-bite-friendly story, the programs document the gradual erasure of Regan-Blake in the institutional history and her increasing marginalization on the Festival stage in the years following the end of her decade of board service in 1984.³⁵²

Woven into, then snipped out of the NAPPS Tapestry

On her website, Regan-Blake lists these among her many accomplishments:

National Storytelling Association

Founding Member, Board of Directors (1974-1984)

Artistic Director of the National Storytelling Festival (1978-1983)

Chair of Board of Directors (1981-1984).³⁵³

As she indicates in the CSP interviews, the vice-chairing (1974-1980) and then chairing of NAPPS, and her handling of Festival teller relations went on year-round without recompense or title across ten years. Her Internet summary above is a forensic one; the words "Artistic Director" were not actually used during her term on the board. But regardless of her official designations, from 1974 onward Regan-Blake was consulting with Jimmy Neil Smith on the organization, and from 1975 forward – through her

³⁵² Regan-Blake's experience of being excluded from storytelling revival history after the end of her board tenure reminds me of the erasure of Pulitzer Prize-winning Susan Glaspell in the years following her departure from the Provincetown Playhouse in 1921. For more see Cheryl Black, *The Women of Provincetown – 1915-1922* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

³⁵³ Connie Regan-Blake, "Achievements," last modified 2013, accessed March 25, 2014. <http://www.storywindow.com/awards.htm>.

extensive touring and detail-oriented instincts – she functioned as the Festival's premiere talent scout, artistic director and teller wrangler.

In 1984, long before she left the Folktellers partnership, Regan-Blake began another important leave-taking: she exited the NAPPS board after ten years of service. Rotating off the board meant turning the artistic direction of the National Storytelling Festival over to someone else – in this case, her immediate successor, storyteller, board member and soul sister Laura Simms.³⁵⁴ It also meant leaving behind the intensely collaborative working relationship she had developed with Festival founder Jimmy Neil Smith.

By the time she left the board, she had much to be proud of. Her history with the National Storytelling Festival had encompassed a number of firsts, including the revival community's first growing pains and logistical, economic, aesthetic, and programmatic changes to the Festival itself. Untangling herself from the workings of the board and relationships within the organization, Regan-Blake experienced a sense of accomplishment as well as a sense of loss. She would now have an opportunity to spend the countless unpaid hours she had devoted to NAPPS on other endeavors, but she would lose the authority to control, in any way, the organization's story as it was beginning to be

³⁵⁴ One of the founders of the New York Storytelling Center, Laura Simms joined the NAPPS board in the late seventies, so her term overlapped with Regan-Blake's for several years. Committed to a perspective on storytelling that encompassed the whole world, Simms embodied a global sensibility that enhanced Regan-Blake's homegrown commitment to oral traditions. Simms also became one of Regan-Blake's sartorial consultants. In an email Regan-Blake writes of an event they attended together in Washington state: "It was one of those highlights for all of us I think. I remember being taken by Laura's beautiful clothes. [Barbara] and I were still dressing in jeans, flannel shirts and grosgrain boots. We shifted because of Laura's influence. I seem to remember David Holt being involved in that shift to different clothes, but can't remember if he was there too" (Personal email from Regan-Blake on March 24, 2014. Used by permission).

told. What she did not anticipate was how quickly the threads she had added to the fabric of the Festival and the organization would be cut away. Of that cutting of threads, Regan-Blake had very little to say in 1998, though I include her more recent remarks about it in an April 13th dissertation dialogue later in this chapter.

During this part of the CSP interview, Regan-Blake remarks: "I have had the honor to be on stage at all 25 festivals. I think I'm the only one...either as a teller or as an emcee..." She continues: "Rather than waiting to be asked to do emceeing, my practice has been, in the last few years, to call them and tell them that I'll be emceeing, and they graciously accept that, and let me emcee each year...[if] I'm not featured" (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 58).³⁵⁵ By ensuring that she emceed during off-years, Regan-Blake found a way to continue being present at the Festival she had shaped, diversified and expanded, at least for three days every October.

Regan-Blake's Memories of a Quarter of a Century of Festivals

Looking over her near-complete collection of programs and brochures from the first twenty-five years of the National Storytelling Festival, she briefly alluded to some of the changes that came with the growing of the event, both on her watch and after her board service. In the early years of the Festival, some programs were simply printed sheets of paper listing the tellers and locations of events; others were far more elaborate productions that ebbed and flowed with the Festival's finances. A shift from glossy to

³⁵⁵ At this writing, Regan-Blake has continued her practice of emceeing every year that she is not a featured teller at the Festival. With seventeen appearances as a teller, she still holds the record for being the second-most featured female at the Festival; the late Kathryn Windham is ahead of her by several. But after being featured at seven Festivals in the first decade, Regan-Blake's performances have become considerably fewer and farther between: four times in the second decade; four times in the third decade, and two times in the fourth.

matte paper or changes in the programming schedule could indicate developments on the board, in the NAPPS office, or within the meetings of the Jonesborough civic trust. Changes made in response to the emerging revival community and the needs of a growing paid staff can also be documented in this collection.³⁵⁶

On the surface, the programs show that the number of featured tellers grew rapidly, just as the revival community and Festival audiences did. But a deeper reading of Regan-Blake's narrative stroll through this collection of ephemera reveals a number of crisis points that the NAPPS organization and the Festival faced across its first quarter century. Most of these crises were merely hinted at in Regan-Blake's spoken narrative, in her narrative omissions, and in the programs and brochures she perused on camera. Still, the crises themselves left enduring marks on several who had given their time, talent and money to the cause, including Regan-Blake herself. Details of some remain outside the scope of this study,³⁵⁷ but others will be addressed below and in the conclusion of this study.

The ephemera collection displayed by Regan-Blake telegraphed the ongoing economic pressures placed on a fledgling organization by a Founder (and eventual Executive Director) who was more a hometown visionary than businessman. The board's desire to raise artist fees and keep festival tickets affordable competed with Smith's efforts to build an archive, hire more staff, and purchase real estate. These pressures were

³⁵⁶ A nearly complete collection of National Storytelling Festival programs is part of the International Storytelling Center archive at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. I went to the Library of Congress in November 2013, and accessed that collection as part of my research.

³⁵⁷ For a detailed history of the storytelling revival's first twenty years seen through a (feminist) male gaze, please see Joseph Sobol's masterful study, *The Storytellers' Journey*, referenced multiple times herein.

exacerbated by the organization's effort to produce records and books whose production costs then must be recouped. Mounting costs motivated a turn toward a "hard sell" of storytelling and away from the needs of featured tellers. Financial concerns also spurred a quest for a branding "image" that would engage a listening public that would soon be hurtling toward a digitized future. The increasing significance and commercialization of the festival generated tensions in the revival community already concerned about the privileging of board members on the festival stage, and the wider community's perceived lack of access to the festival stage. Even among featured tellers, there was a growing antipathy about their small fees in the light of the festival's growing revenues; their frustrations were expressed directly and indirectly.

Spinning an Historiographic Web from Several Strands

In this next section, I present Regan-Blake's narrative stroll through her Festival ephemera collection. To unpack her changing relationship with the NAPPS organization and the storytelling revival's history embedded in her narrative, I draw on my own memory, the materials found in the International Storytelling Center's collection at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress (and my own ephemera), email exchanges with Regan-Blake, other storytellers, and staff members (past and present) of the Festival's producing organization,³⁵⁸ and the call and response of my dialogical conversations with Regan-Blake as she read an earlier draft of this study.

Since the reader does not have the benefit of seeing the program designs, I have interwoven Regan-Blake's narrative with brief or detailed descriptions of the materials and their contents, as need be, and explications of personal, organizational and revival

³⁵⁸ Again, that producing entity is currently called the International Storytelling Center (ISC).

history found therein. She explains: "This is actually my collection of programs from all of the National Storytelling Festivals...I didn't get the first one" (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 53). Since she arrived late to the Clower concert, Regan-Blake may never have seen the program for the first Festival. She remarked to me over the phone on March 31, 2014: "I did not know that Bill Monroe was there, until fairly recently [when] somebody told me that. It was like: 'God -- is that right? -- And we missed him!?!'"³⁵⁹ Had she realized that Bill Monroe was appearing, she and Freeman might not have meandered quite so much on their way to the concert that Saturday night in 1973. But given that the printed program gives Clower's concert pride of place, and also describes Saturday's three mediocre after-dinner speakers as storytelling "masters," Regan-Blake might well have discarded it. At any rate, saving the program was not on her mind as she and her cousin walked around Jonesborough after the show, spellbound by their new (and lifelong) companions, Ray and Rosa Hicks.

The missing program warrants describing for its archival interest and the stories it points to in the ongoing history of NAPPS and the Festival founder. The first of two double-sided, letter-sized sheets, stapled at the top left hand corner, touts "An Evening with Jerry Clower – The Mississippi Storyteller of Coon Hunting Story Fame." The words "The National Storytelling Festival" appear in smaller print at the center of the page and below that "Special Guests – Bill Monroe, The King of Bluegrass, Member of Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Avery County Cloggers." There are thumbnail

³⁵⁹ Telephone conversation with Regan-Blake on March 31, 2014.

photographs of Clower and Monroe. The backside of that first sheet lists the Festival sponsors.³⁶⁰

In an email on March 26, 2014, Smith shared this memory of that event: "Jerry Clower was being entertained at the Parson's Table before his Saturday-night performance at David Crockett High School, and service was so slow at the restaurant, we were worried that Jerry would be late for his own performance. But he wasn't."³⁶¹ Keep in mind that Smith was not only the chairman of that brand new Festival, but also the owner of that brand new restaurant, opened the same year the Festival started. He would go on to open two other eating establishments before going into bankruptcy and closing all three in 1984. That's when he would become fulltime paid staff for NAPPS, assuming the title of Executive Director.

The second page of the 1973 program provides a list of Sunday's free festivities. These sessions had titles stressing the mountain heritage evoked by the event. Titles like "Living Arts and Crafts;" "Mountain Folk;" and "Swappin' Yarns – An opportunity for YOU to tell tales and spin yarns with the masters."³⁶² Counting Clower, and the three after-dinner speakers hired by Jimmy Neil Smith through Clower's talent agent, plus Ray

³⁶⁰ The first Festival's sponsors included the Tennessee Arts Commission and several local businesses (in smaller type): Banking and Trust, Dillow-Taylor Funeral Home, First Federal of Jonesboro-Erwin, First Peoples Bank, Hamilton Bank and (in even smaller type) Fosters Exxon, John City Press-Chronicle, Luther's Union 76, auks Jonesborough Pharmacy and Nayno's Fashions.

³⁶¹ Personal email from Jimmy Neil Smith, March 26, 2014. Used by permission.

³⁶² The backside of the program's second page is a press release to "Promoters of National Storytelling Festival and An Evening with Jerry Clower Concert" from "Jimmy Neil Smith, chairman, National Storytelling Festival," detailing the cost of the Saturday evening concert (\$3.00 for adults and \$1.50 for children) and its location at the David Crockett High School gym near Jonesborough, and making it clear that Clower would appear only at the concert and not at Sunday's free festivities.

Hicks, the total number of featured tellers was five, all of them male. Those who rose to tell during the swapping session – including Regan-Blake and Freeman – are obviously not included in the count.

In our dissertation dialogues, Regan-Blake felt it was important to stress this point: Almost a thousand people attended the Clower concert on Saturday night; between 35-60 (depending on who was counting) showed up for the free Sunday afternoon Festival. As Regan-Blake notes in her 2012 NSN Conference plenary speech, Smith is to be commended for choosing the Sunday afternoon event as his model for the first decade of Festivals. Still, as the audiences (and expense of the Festival) grew in the second decade of the event, the model sometimes skewed back in the direction of a Jerry Clower extravaganza.

Regan-Blake continues: "This is the 1974 [program from the second Festival]... We had a few things in people's homes during the day, and in the evening, we held an event at the local school... about 150 people came... And a Sunday afternoon event. Then here's the third one [1975], fourth [1976], and [1977]... You can tell that the numbers of tellers started really increasing" (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 53).

Saying, "*we* had a few things in people's homes" at the 1974 Festival, suggests that Regan-Blake had begun to take some ownership in the event that first featured her that year. There were seven featured tellers in 1974 (eight if you count Doc McConnell who appeared without billing as part of Doc Randall's Ole Medicine Show) including the first two women to be featured: Alabama ghost story collector, Kathryn Tucker Windham, and Chattanooga children's storyteller, "Connie Regan."

The 1974 program had much more character than its predecessor. It was cream-colored with sepia toned ink, a double-sided, bi-folded, two-page affair with a drawing of the Christopher Taylor cabin on the cover. The historic log cabin had been newly moved to downtown Jonesborough (where it still functions as an information center for the Festival) from its original site about a mile out of town. But the drawing depicts it in a pastoral setting, and the yard is populated with figures in 18th century period dress.³⁶³ The use of the cabin image is a clear bid to associate the National Storytelling Festival with by-gone days, mountain traditions and imagined happier times – unless, of course, you were a woman with an endless list of back-breaking chores and babies to feed (if they lived long enough), an enslaved person living as someone else's chattel, or a Native American about to be relocated or exterminated by the Anglo American settlers. This uneasy overlay of an unexamined distant past used in service to hawking the Festival,

³⁶³ On the back of the program is a write-up about the cabin's provenance. It notes:

In 1788 and during the dying days of [the state of] Franklin, a tall, sandy-haired young fellow galloped into Jonesboro. Staying briefly in the old town [at the Chester Inn], he sought lodging at the Christopher Taylor House. Twenty-one year-old Andrew Jackson, later to become hero of the battle of New Orleans and seventh president of the United States, lived with the Taylor family during his five-month-stay in Jonesboro. While living in Tennessee's oldest town, he was admitted to the Tennessee bar, tried his first Tennessee case, and fought his first duel. The Christopher Taylor House billed by historians as the first Tennessee home of Andrew Jackson and the state's oldest still-standing structure, now welcomes visitors to historic Jonesboro.

A polarizing figure in real life – for closing the Second Bank of the United States and initiating the forced relocation of thousands of Native Americans from the Southeast to West of the Mississippi River – Jackson was nonetheless warmly embraced by the civic leaders of Jonesborough for the historical traction his brief residency gave the town. That warm embrace set the stage for a layer of cross-cultural disconnect when the festival began to feature Native American tellers. The following year Chickasaw actress Te Ata, the festival's first indigenous teller, "re-living Indian legends, rituals, and customs in native dress," appeared at the Presbyterian Church and in the Christopher Taylor Park near Andrew Jackson's old stomping grounds.

while covering up the complexities of the actual people who lived and died in the hills of upper east Tennessee, became emblematic of both the commercialization of "the National," and the institutionalized disregard that motivated the Festival's organizers in their treatment of the tellers in later years.

The 1974 Festival format included tours of historic buildings and solo or group performances on flatbed hay wagons and front porches, in churches and middle school gyms. Each session highlighted different themes: ghost stories, children's stories, yarns spun on "Jonesboro history," folk songs and poetry, old time music and "storytelling fun." The overall event opened and closed with an olio – described in the program as a "hodge podge" or "an array" of performances by the various featured tellers. According to Regan-Blake, Smith introduced the vaudeville term "olio" into the Festival lexicon. In a vaudeville olio, several performers take a turn onstage, each one "greasing the stage" for the next act. Except for the home tours, this performance format would continue down through the years.

The third annual Festival program in 1975 contained a map of locations intermingling recommended restaurants (including those run by Smith) with performance venues. To his economic disadvantage – for instance, he treated a (growing) NAPPS board to dinner at his own expense – this braiding together of Smith's vision for storytelling and his business interests would continue until he left the food service field behind.

The '75 Festival featured eight credited tellers plus a group that Regan-Blake had met during her days at the Chattanooga Public Library: The Roadside Theater was described as "a gang of youthful but masterful storytellers...headquartered in

Whitesburg, Kentucky." Alas, the three people representing the theater group go unnamed in the program;³⁶⁴ nonetheless they bring the total number of performers to eleven. Barbara Freeman appeared without billing under the aegis of "Connie Regan and friends," so that makes a final total of twelve. The teller pool was consistently growing.

Kathryn Windham and Regan-Blake returned that year, joined by the Festival's first Native American teller, a Chickasaw actress named Te Ata, so diversity entered the frame. Add to that list of female performers, Freeman and Angelyn DeBord, who performed unbilled as a member of Roadside Theater. Thus, the total number of women appearing at the 1975 festival was five out of twelve billed and unbilled performers.

In our first dissertation debrief on March 31—before she had seen this chapter -- Regan-Blake asserts, "In the first ten years, we were *not* privileging the efforts of White male humorists." She goes on (and I answer her) below:

CONNIE: I realize that you come in the footnote and talk about [Susan O'Connor's programming the Festival in later years]... I just felt that the first ten years, or at least when I was there, that we were not...[doing that]. [Your note] sounded like all of it [the whole history of the festival skewed toward men.]

MILBRE: [I'll admit here that] one of the years the festival was the most out of balance in terms of gender parity was the first year I was listed on the festival program committee. [*laugh*] The fact of the matter is [in the CSP] narrative, you mention encountering more men than you mention encountering women and I...think that's probably the reality of who was on the road at that point...But when you set the narrative aside and just look at the data, then there's a pretty

³⁶⁴ My research suggests that Tom Bledsoe, Ron Short and Angelyn DeBord represented the Roadside Theater at the 1975 Festival.

serious skew towards men and humorists and they're from the Eastern seaboard and a lot of them are from the South, so that's just how the data shakes out.

CONNIE: I'll be curious at some point to see those graphs. I guess I just have such a strong memory of that balance. It meant [so much] to me: having half women and half men was always the goal...when I was doing the hiring and booking for the festival. So that's why I put a little comment on that.³⁶⁵

It was not a "little comment," it was an important point being made by the revival's feminist foremother concerning her intentions for the Festival. Regan-Blake strove for gender parity on the Festival stage, while the wider cultural narrative (and later the inclinations of the NAPPS staff) drove more male tellers her way (or to the stage) than female ones. My research shows that in the Festival's first decade (1973-1982), more men were featured than women every year except 1978 and 1981 (For details, see six graphs in the Appendix A).

In 1976 and 1977 the programs were very plain and text-heavy; the copy details how Festival programming continued to evolve. The '76 program indicates that a thirty-minute film of the 1975 festival was shown for the first time.³⁶⁶ A "hayride for kids" up

³⁶⁵ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on March 31, 2014.

³⁶⁶ According to the '76 program, the featured film, entitled "Storytelling: Remnants of the Past," "will soon be seen on nationwide Public Broadcasting System with WSJK-TV representatives as our hosts."

Both Smith and Regan-Blake remember the film's title actual title as "Yarnspinning." In an email to me on April 4, Smith writes:

In 1975, the film production staff at the PBS station in Knoxville came to the Festival and produced a film. It was 16 mm. I can even remember their names also 40 years later. They were a delightful trio: Elaine Tomber, Jim Tindell, and Bob Hutchinson. The film was used on the PBS station, of course. But NAPPS got a copy of it and, yes, it's in the Library of Congress collection as 16 mm and VHS video.

to the old cemetery culminated in a ghost story concert. After the final olio on Sunday afternoon, the first public NAPPS membership meeting was held.³⁶⁷ A book and record display was set up in the Christopher Taylor House with tellers autographing them at a reception on Saturday afternoon. A "Swappin' Ground" was instigated so that audience members could tell stories themselves in a casual setting in Christopher Taylor Park.³⁶⁸ The 1976 programming alternated between 45-minute mini-concerts and workshops by the twelve tellers who were featured. Of these, five were women. Diversity scored another win when the first African American teller appeared at the event: Harriette Bias Allen Insignares, a poet and professor of communications at Fisk University in Nashville.

Regan-Blake continues:

By the time we got to [the fifth year] 1977, we had quite a listing of tellers...Doc McConnell, Bobby McMillon, Lee Pennington, Hattie Presnell,³⁶⁹ I was featured

In a phone call in response to this chapter, Regan-Blake mentioned that the same Knoxville PBS crew made the Folktellers' VHS/DVD tapes some years later.

³⁶⁷ This note appears on the back of the '76 program:

The National Storytelling Festival is also the official NAPPS national convention. A highlight of the convention will be the first annual NAPPS membership meeting. All members are encouraged to attend...The meeting will feature a review of the past year, a look into the future, and the election of a new board of directors...The present seven members are chairman Jimmy Neil Smith, Doc McConnell, Connie Regan, Barbara Freeman, Kathryn Windham, Lee Pennington and Ardi Saint-Clair.

Of the 1976 board members, all but Smith and Saint-Clair were among the featured tellers onstage.

³⁶⁸ The swapping ground was hosted by one of the performers, and other featured tellers were scheduled to drop by and swap a tale. For tellers from the audience, registration was required.

³⁶⁹ According to Mike Yates: "Hattie Hicks Presnell was born in 1907 [in Watauga County, North Carolina] and was the daughter of Buna and Roby Monroe Hicks. The ballad singer Lee Monroe Presnell was both her father-in-law and her great-

– [as] Connie Regan – Jackie Torrence, Kathryn Windham, Diane Wolkstein.

And you can see [from the lineup] that we're really moving out to other parts of the world, other than just the people that were from this area. But we also had Guy Carawan; Richard Chase was there that year. Marshall Dodge from up in Maine, Barbara Freeman, Ray Hicks, Stanley Hicks³⁷⁰ and David Holt. So we were already really growing... (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 53).

In 1977, the lineup almost doubled from the year before, but women lost more ground. Of the seventeen tellers, only seven were female.

Much of the programming on Saturday took the form of 90-minute themed workshops on different subjects, offered by collaborative panels of the featured tellers. These collaborative workshops reflected the format that Regan-Blake and Freeman had witnessed at folk festivals across the country and in Canada. An olio took place at the Methodist Church on Friday evening. The NAPPS membership meeting occurred on Saturday afternoon in a fellowship hall. That night something new happened: three

uncle. Although known as a singer herself, her short stories *Jack and the King's Chest* and *Cuckle Pea and His Sister* remind us of yet another mountain tradition." (Quoted on the website "Folkopedia" accessed online 25 March 2014 at http://folkopedia.efdss.org/wiki/Hattie_Presnell.)

Hattie Hicks Presnells' life was briefly profiled in Robert Isbell's book *Ray Hicks: Master Storyteller of the Blue Ridge* (formerly titled *The Last Chivaree – The Hicks Family of Beech Mountain*) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 19-20. Presnell was featured at the National Storytelling Festival only in 1977. She died in 1996.

³⁷⁰ Born in 1911 in Watauga County, North Carolina, Stanley Hicks was a banjo and dulcimer maker, woodworker, traditional teller and dancer. He was the brother of Hattie Hicks Presnell, and a cousin to Ray Hicks. All three shared the family storytelling and ballad-singing heritage. (For more see: <http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory/stanley-hicks> accessed online 25 March 2014.) Stanley Hicks was a 1983 NEA National Heritage Fellow. He was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1977 and 1982, and died in 1989.

different concerts with different groupings of the tellers took place simultaneously in the Park and in two churches.

Gone was the hayride, but "an old-fashioned stroll to the Old Jonesborough Cemetery" netted the hardy listener – for the road to the historic graveyard is a steep grade – a concert of scary stories there. The registration-required swapping ground, the autographing session, the film screening, and a free Sunday afternoon olio in the Park remained parts of the programming that year.³⁷¹ It was also the year that Smith began publishing a monthly NAPPS newsletter, the *Yarnspinner*,³⁷² partly at his own expense – a generous gesture that would continue to complicate his personal finances, and impact his relationship with the board and the community.

Regan-Blake goes on:

I'm actually missing 1978, that program; I hope to get it sometime. But then we pick up with '79 and '80. You can tell, I think, the different times and the funding that we had [available] to be able to do programs...Between these two particular years, we [used]...the same design, so either we were running out of time and

³⁷¹ On the back of the single-sheet, double-sided program, the results of the 1977 NAPPS board election are shown: board membership remained the same but for the loss of Saint-Clair, and the addition of David Holt. The NAPPS office had moved as well. The program notes: "The NAPPS staff is opening its doors to our new National Storytelling Resource Center...located in the upstairs offices above the Jonesboro Laundromat, just across the street from the Christopher Taylor House. There you will be able to meet the NAPPS staff, look at our center and see the beginning of the NAPPS Library."

The NAPPS staff at that point consisted of volunteers like Smith, Regan-Blake and the rest of the board as well as one or two CETA workers in some years. Over the next decade and a half, the NAPPS library, containing resources it gathered, ones it produced and its own historical papers would morph into an archive project, complete with the brief tenure of a professional archivist, supported by grants and donations by board members.

³⁷² The *Yarnspinner* would remain in publication until 1993.

maybe out of money too. But the Festivals were still wonderful (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 54).

The International Storytelling Center's archival collection at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress is also missing a program for 1978, so perhaps there wasn't one. What the archive contains instead is the September 1978 issue of the *Yarnspinner*³⁷³ newsletter, and from its text much can be gleaned.

That year there were seventeen presenters; notably for the first time in the Festival's history, women outnumbered men. Ten of the featured tellers were women, including Sisters' Choice (Nancy Schimmel and Carole Leita), a duo inspired by the Folktellers. And for the first time since she hopped up on the stage to tell in the open swap in 1973, Regan Blake was not featured. (Nor was Freeman.) Still she was on hand to emcee.

Also new to the "teller" roster were two folklorists: Linda Morley and Kenny Goldstein. With folklorists on hand to help curate the listeners' experience, traditional

³⁷³ At the top of the first page of the newsletter are the words: "The National Storytelling Festival." At the bottom, it reads: "Saving the Art of Storytelling." In between are several paragraphs detailing the program and logistics of the upcoming event, including this summary: "The three days of storytelling activity will feature yarnspinners from California, New York, Maryland, Florida, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Georgia. Sessions showcasing individual storytellers will revolve around Western tales, women in folktales, children's stories, Black tales, moonshine-busting sheriffs, ballads, and the stories of Stephen Vincent (sic) Benét."

The newsletter closes with this valediction: "Yours in the cause (and joys) of storytelling, Brett S. Harrell, Director." Harrell was a CETA worker in the NAPPS office. Regan-Blake remembered in our conversation of April 9, 2014, that Harrell was definitely the leader of the three CETA workers in the office at the time. I would submit that his signatory wearing of the Director's mantle suggests the casual structure of the NAPPS organization at the time.

narrators Sarah Cleveland, Cora Bardwell and Lewis Goffe³⁷⁴ (whose name was alternately spelled Goff in the same program), performed two themed sets together as well as their solo sessions. And, besides their solo shows, African American tellers Janie Hunter, Jackie Torrence and Mary Carter Smith (listed in that set as M.C. Smith) shared a session on "The Black Tradition." Both the themed programs and the presence of folklorists confirm the early efforts on the part of Festival organizers to build a bridge between traditional oral narrators and a growing audience of listeners who may never have heard tales from those traditions before.

The September '78 *Yarnspinner* indicates that for the first time, there were to be three simultaneously held *Friday* afternoon concerts before the usual opening olio. Diane Wolkstein³⁷⁵ and Jackie Torrence gave workshops on Saturday afternoon; Goldstein, Morley "and Friends" gave one on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday afternoon just before the supper break, was the annual NAPPS membership meeting, followed by this feature: "In Concert – The NAPPS Board of Directors." In the next decade of the event the

³⁷⁴ Lewis C. Goffe, a professor at the University of New Hampshire appeared at the National Storytelling Festival only once – in 1978. In a feature provocatively entitled "National Storytelling Festival Can Be Disconcerting Affair," the Charleston, South Carolina *News and Courier* reported that Goffe "recreated a 19th century New Hampshire schoolroom in 'declaiming' a set piece, 'The Independence Bell.' The sentimental patriotism and grandiose gestures of the recitation brought chuckles, but if you looked at Goffe and saw instead a proud little boy demonstrating to the school board how well he had studied, the effect was touching." The article was provided by the Knight News Service to the *News and Courier* on 26 November 1978. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2506&dat=19781126&id=qIhJAAAAIBAJ&sjid=8wsNAAAAIBAJ&pg=1196,6384326> Internet; accessed 9 April 2014.)

³⁷⁵ Throughout its history, the NAPPS organization grew in the direction of its board members' strengths. In 1978 it held its first National Conference on Storytelling on the campus of the historic Washington College Academy outside of Jonesborough. Board members Diane Wolkstein and Jay O'Callahan spearheaded that effort with surprising alacrity, given that Wolkstein came on the board only the year before.

practice of featuring the NAPPS board members at the Festival would become a bone of contention.

As Regan-Blake says in her narrative, for the next two years, the programs are very similar in design, printed on no-nonsense cardstock. In 1979, the two-year-old national storytelling conference event gets a shout-out on the text-heavy cover of the Festival program: "The National Conference on Storytelling, held each spring, features learning-oriented workshops..." The phrase "held each spring" belies the emergent nature of the conference event, and captures Jimmy Neil Smith's recurring tendency to spin an image of substance out of gossamer threads. Also mentioned is the "National Storytelling Resource Center [which] houses a library/archive that contains, on audio and video tape, over 500 performances by storytellers from across the country. A cataloging system makes the material readily accessible..." Smith, ever the ideator, articulates this new (potential) income stream for NAPPS: "a variety of audio and video cassette tapes featuring different storyteller and storytelling styles can be purchased and rented through the Center – a brochure listing tape offerings is available upon request." Thus begins Smith's quixotic quest to create and support numerous projects – an archive and a resource center, in this case – to diversify and guarantee both the significance and the economic stability of the organization.

The Festival audience was growing: in 1979 three tents and a "pavilion" were used for the first time as concert venues. There were sixteen tellers including the members of two groups: the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) and Roadside Theater. NTD was represented by two (named) male tellers, and Roadside Theater by three

performers (two men and a woman).³⁷⁶ Of the sixteen tellers, seven were women, including Regan-Blake and Freeman.

In 1980 because of the burgeoning crowds, ghost stories were now held "beside the Old Jonesborough Cemetery."³⁷⁷ There were fifteen featured tellers in 1980. Six were women, including a mother-daughter team of traditional teller/balladeers: Dellie Norton and Evelyn Ramsey. In fact, a full third of the tellers on the program that year were traditional oral narrators, including Ray Hicks, his nephew Frank Proffitt, Jr., and his relation by marriage, W.W. "Woody" Rowland, who left the festival precipitously after his first set.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ John Basinger and Sam Edwards appeared as NTD and Tom Bledsoe, Angelyn DeBord and Ron Short, returned as the Roadside Theater.

³⁷⁷ During our April 9th dissertation dialogue over the phone, Regan-Blake confirmed that the ghost story concert was moved because the previous year people walking through the historic cemetery had allowed their children to run slipshod over the graves themselves, and town leaders wanted to bring an end to this behavior. The event had never actually been "in" the cemetery, but took place on the hillside in front of it with tellers standing either on the side porch or in the driveway of Cassandra Moore's house at the top of the hill. (This was the home of Carolyn Moore's daughter, where Regan-Blake and Freeman spent their first night in Jonesborough in 1973.) In an attempt to discourage children running amok through the graveyard without parental supervision, Festival programmers shifted the listeners' on-the-ground seating to the other side of the Moore's home. Now the performers acted as storytellers and sentries, standing with their backs to the cemetery, *between* the audience and the historic graveyard. Let this be a cautionary tale for other festival producers: audiences need educating at every turn. Every moment is a teaching moment.

³⁷⁸ See Smith's recounting of Rowland's untimely departure from the festival in Chapter Four. The 1980 program assures its readers that:

Woody Rowland loves to tell Jack tales and true Appalachian stores that he claims are "stranger than fiction." Having grown up as the great grandson of the master storyteller, Council Harmon, Woody possesses a strong story heritage in the traditional vein. Presently living in Waynesville, North Carolina, he is a frequent guest storyteller in the public schools, and has completed a video taping for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Of the next Festival Regan-Blake recalls:

In 1981, we went to an image. That's always been a hard thing within the storytelling world...creating an image for storytelling. We...[gave] a first try at having a picture there. We didn't necessarily want it to be a man or a woman to define storytelling, so we used a chair. And because we were in the 20th century, we added the microphone there. 'Cause that's what we were doing as we were growing, and getting bigger and bigger crowds. We were grateful to have a microphone so that we could get [the voices of the tellers] out to...what [were] now, thousands of people (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 54).

To clarify for the reader: the 1981 program cover featured a line drawing of a wooden chair with a straw-covered seat facing a microphone on a boom stand. Printed in blue ink against a cream-colored page, the chair and mic cast their shadows on a boundless stage; a wide, slate blue border frames this inanimate scene.³⁷⁹ In the lower left hand corner of the drawing is a slogan: "Support your local Storytellers [image of heart] NAPPS." This slogan was repeated on bumper stickers, which along with tee-shirts and buttons, were

What he apparently hadn't done is come face to face with a revival audience in one of three 400-seat tents. And that year, there were no professional folklorists in attendance to help build a bridge for his stories to cross over to reach his listeners.

³⁷⁹ At the bottom of the 1981 program cover is a note: "This year's National Storytelling Festival is funded in part by a donation from Weston Woods Studios of Weston, Connecticut (sic); on (sic) of America's foremost producers and distributors of quality storytelling educational materials." The Folktellers had met Weston Woods' founder Mort Schindel during their travels. Because of them he became a supporter of the NAPPS organization in its financially lean days. This program note appears to be a veiled reference to the fact that Schindel had supplied \$10,000 to hire Jean Smith as NAPPS' paid executive director in 1981, mentioned in Chapter Three.

now available with "books, records, tapes and other storytelling materials" being sold in a white gazebo on the front lawn of the Christopher Taylor House.

In 1981, for the second time in the Festival's history, women had a slight edge, for they were seven of the thirteen tellers.³⁸⁰ First-timers included Elizabeth Ellis and Gayle Ross as the duo Twelve Moon Storytellers; Rosebud Yellow Robe, the eldest daughter of a Lakota chief, and Ghanaian teller Alex Okyere, who specialized in "Ananse the spider" trickster stories.³⁸¹ That year also marked the first appearance by Donald Davis, whose future impact on the Festival, the board and the revival cannot be underestimated.

That year Davis told his Uncle Frank's family stories, set in the Southern Appalachians and seamlessly embroidered with trickster characters and fools from folktales. In the coming decade, however, Davis would leave behind Uncle Frank's stories of "Jack and Tom and Will" and the "Jolly Family" – Scots-Irish Protestant versions of the fools of Chelm³⁸² – and begin to perfect the art of the humorous personal narrative. With Kathryn Windham (once she liberated herself from telling only ghost

³⁸⁰ One invited, first-time-at-the-Festival teller was not there in 1981. His absence was acknowledged with this note: "In Memoriam. This year's National Storytelling Festival is dedicated to the memory of Ken Feit, a storyteller whose life was tragically lost in an auto accident during the summer. He was to have been a featured storyteller at this year's festival." In view of Feit's unexpected death, the drawing of an empty wooden chair silently facing a microphone takes on an added poignancy.

³⁸¹ New York City-based storyteller Laura Simms had come on the board during this period; her contacts began to open up the Festival roster to international tellers.

³⁸² Chelmites are notorious fools in the Jewish tales of Eastern Europe.

stories at the festival), he would lead the charge away from oral tradition tales to the Festival circuit's version of contemporary auto/biographical solo performance.³⁸³

The cover of the tenth anniversary festival program in 1982 features a sepia-toned drawing³⁸⁴ of a storyteller in overalls and a porkpie hat, clearly meant to evoke the figure of traditional teller Ray Hicks. The habit of using Hicks's image or photograph to promote the festival without actually naming him would become an issue that Regan-Blake has addressed repeatedly in her communications with the board in the years after her service. Here, however, she does *not* mention it:

³⁸³ Donald Davis's material took this turn somewhere between his release in 1983 of an audio cassette entitled *Mystery and Magic* featuring two folktales, "Mollie Mop Top" and "Jack Learns the Answer," and his 1991 audio cassette *Something Old, Something New*, featuring "Old Man Hawkins's Lucky Day" (a tall tale told to him as a true story by his father) and "Dr. York and the Typhoid Shot" which the teller describes in his liner notes as: "a totally original work of loosely autobiographically based fiction." In those notes, Davis continues: "Taken together the two stories run the gamut from my own traditional beginning place to my present original work in story creation. I hope that you enjoy the variety."

This same evolution of story content in his repertoire can be traced across the publication of three of Davis's earliest books: *My Lucky Day: Tales from a Southern Appalachian Story Teller* (Murfreesboro, NC: Johnson Publishing Co., 1983) and *Listening for the Crack of Dawn* (Little Rock: August House, 1990). His book *Barking at a Fox Fur Coat* (Little Rock: August House, 1991) contains a combination of Davis's family stories passed on by – and starring – his Uncle Frank, many of which are liberally sprinkled with mountain Märchen motifs, and his personal narratives crafted as "loosely autobiographically based" fictions. Whatever the genre, Davis's is brilliant work.

His success in selling the (seemingly) personal story – augmented by the equally dazzling work of Kathryn Windham, and later Bill Harley, Carmen Deedy, Bil Lepp and Willy Claflin – has led that genre to become the most highly prized one at the National Storytelling Festival – and consequently at other storytelling festivals across the country – for almost twenty-five years.

³⁸⁴ None of the cover illustrations mentioned so far are signed. Nor is the artist named in the programs.

This is the 10th festival, held in 1982. When we were putting together this festival, the board and [I] had decided that it would be good to have back all [of] what we thought of as the popular tellers...

I've spoken a couple times about that inspiration that seems to come [to me]...I had another [one]...another gift from the spirits: I thought..."Really what we should do is invite back everyone"... That's what had created this incredible event. So we did. We invited everybody back [from the nine festivals before that] and...everybody that could, came...

No one person had as much time as we would have had if it had only been [a roster of] what we were thinking of as the "popular tellers"...[Instead] people got to be in the same little town, on the same sacred ground, with all of those tellers.³⁸⁵ It proved a model for us, so that...for our 20th festival, we did the same thing: we decided to invite everyone back (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 54-55).

The program cover has this note: "A special gathering of 50 featured storytellers to celebrate our 10th year in Jonesborough, Tennessee." I count forty-eight presenters listed by name: twenty-six men and twenty-two women. Three more tellers are honored "in memoriam:" the first Puerto Rican librarian at the New York Public Library Pura Belpré (1899-1982), Marshall Dodge (1935-1982), and Marshall Ward (1906-1981).³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ When Regan-Blake says, "No one person had as much time as *we* would have had if it had only been [a roster of] what we were thinking of as the 'popular tellers'..." she intimates, and rightly so in those days, that the Folktellers would have been included in a smaller lineup based on popularity.

³⁸⁶ For a photograph, taken by Scott Dedson, of most of the 10th anniversary tellers gathered together: see Connie Regan-Blake's website at <http://www.storywindow.com/gallery.htm> Accessed online 27 March 2014.

This was also the year that feminist storyteller/scholar Diane Wolkstein told the Sumerian myth, "Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth." Her performance of this mythic and earthy story – about "the world's first goddess of recorded history" – became a legend in its own right.³⁸⁷ During my first NAPPS board meeting in Jonesborough seven years later, Beth Horner still remembered Wolkstein's chanting this verse:

Inanna placed the *shugurra*, the crown of the steppe, on her head.

She went to the sheepfold, to the shepherd.

She leaned back against the apple tree

When she learned against the apple tree, her vulva was wondrous to behold.

Rejoicing at her wondrous vulva, the young woman Inanna applauded herself.³⁸⁸

As Horner told it, the word "vulva" delivered by Wolkstein on a stage in Jonesborough, Tennessee shook the very walls of the tent, and reverberated down Main Street. In our April 9th dissertation dialogue, I asked Regan-Blake if she witnessed this historic moment as well. She replies:

I remember [it]...visually because she laid down on the stage [when she said it]. I was surprised and I was delighted. I can [still] feel the shock wave hitting you,

³⁸⁷ The quote, depicting Inanna as "the world's first goddess of recorded history" is from the back cover of the book, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth – her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1983) edited by Diane Wolkstein and Sumerian scholar Samuel Noah Kramer, published the year after this performance. I am dating Wolkstein's performance based Beth Horner's account of hearing the myth during one of her first visits to Jonesborough as a Festival volunteer. In Horner's account (partially shared on a recording of a multi-vocal plenary session at the 2012 NSN Conference), she mentions seeing Ron Evans, Michael Parent, and the Twelve Moon Storytellers perform. They appeared together – along with Wolkstein – in 1982, the year before she and Kramer published the Sumerian myth.

³⁸⁸ Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna*, 12.

and then [my own] big smile. I definitely thought it was bold... There was probably some whispering about it... If there were complaints from festivalgoers, Jimmy Neil might not have told [the board since Wolkstein was on it].³⁸⁹

Wolkstein's telling of *Inanna* would not be equaled in terms of pushing the envelope of audience comfort at the National Storytelling Festival, until Spalding Gray (and others) took the stage in 1985.

Regan-Blake continued to walk us through Festival history, saying:

Then this Festival [program] cover, 1983, is actually the cover of our first double album and cassette that NAPPS put out [entitled *Storytelling: The National Festival*]... I worked on [the recording] with Lex Cochrane [a sound engineer at Weston Woods Studios, who had moved to North Carolina] and Barbara Freeman. We went through, as you can imagine, hours and hours [of tape], all from the first ten Festivals, to cull what we thought was the most representative and the best stories. And that was quite a project. (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 55).

That 1983 twice-used cover design by Dana Irwin features a painting of one of the Festival's striped tents with listeners gathered inside.³⁹⁰

Women tellers had the (infrequent) edge in 1983, for they numbered seven of the thirteen who were featured. It was a high-octane gathering of women, and upped the diversity quotient considerably. Library luminaries Augusta Baker and Maria Cimino

³⁸⁹ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on April 9, 2014.

³⁹⁰ The program was printed in green ink on green paper, but a full-color image was used for the audio album.

were there alongside festival favorites Jackie Torrence and Carol Birch. Lushootseed author and elder Vi Hilbert attended for the first time,³⁹¹ as did French teller Muriel Bloch and Gioia Timpanelli, of whom author Frank McCourt said: "No one in the world can tell a story better than [she]."³⁹² Laura Simms's influence is clearly visible, as well as Regan-Blake's, in this remarkable roll call of the storytelling community's distaff talent.

It was Simms who brought Vi Hilbert to the Festival, describing her at the 2012 NSN plenary session as "a great elder of the Skagit Nation who had invested her life – she was a hairdresser during World War II – [in learning] her Lushootseed language and then devoted her life [to preserving it]...She was old at the time, and actually at the time, younger than I am now, [*Simms and audience laugh*] come to think of it [*Simms and audience laugh*]" (2012 NSN Conference Plenary Session Transcript, pages 25-26). By bringing Hilbert to Jonesborough, Simms further marks the storytelling movement's public ground as a place where women, including older, indigenous, working class women – who tend to be invisible in other popular culture events and in the media – belong. This was groundbreaking work for women in performance that ought to have resonated far beyond the marginalized borders of performance storytelling. That's what I

³⁹¹ Hilbert was named a Washington State Living Treasure in 1989. A 1994 NEA National Heritage Fellow, she was honored with an NSN lifetime Achievement Award in 1998. We conducted a short interview with her for the Cotsen Storytelling Project. She published *Haboo: Native American Stories from Puget Sound* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985). She died in 2008. For more see: http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&File_Id=7130 Accessed online 25 March 2014.

³⁹² McCourt is quoted, singing Gioia Timpanelli's praises, on this website: <http://www.blueflowerarts.com/gioia-timpanelli> Accessed 10 April 2014.

mean when I say that storytellers are cultural workers, and that's why their hidden history has to be known.

At the bottom of the 1983 teller list is a note in small print: "This festival is dedicated to Jimmy Neil Smith, founder and past chairman of NAPPS, in appreciation of his efforts to revitalize the art of storytelling." That Smith was honored in this way in a year that the Festival privileged female talent is somewhat ironic. The 60-minute documentary film *By Word of Mouth: Storytelling in America*, shot by Steven Kostant at the previous Festival, was also introduced at this year's event. The on-camera interviews in that film give weight to what soul sisters Simms and Regan-Blake had been doing to elevate storytelling in American consciousness.

The next year, 1984, held numerous changes for Regan-Blake – and for the NAPPS organization. For one thing, Regan-Blake married Phil Blake in September of that year. And that fall Jimmy Neil Smith became fulltime paid staff for the NAPPS organization. She recalls: " It was at my wedding that [Jimmy Neil] *announced* to me he was now director instead of on the board. [*laughter*] That's a little-known fact that, I guess, now is known" (2012 NSN Conference Plenary Session Transcript, pages 10-11).³⁹³ Finally, 1984 was Regan-Blake's last year on the NAPPS board after a decade-long term. It was the occasion of her last Festival as Artistic Director as well. Laura Simms officially took up the artistic direction in 1985. Meanwhile, Simms oversaw the

³⁹³ In our conversation on March 31st 2014, Regan-Blake went on to say that Smith's announcement about being the NAPPS Executive Director was problematic on many levels because, first, he was communicating this significant bit of business in the midst of her wedding celebration; second, that he did not *ask* her (as chair of the board) or consult with her about becoming the paid Executive Director of NAPPS, he *told* her about the change. Third, the reason he was free to tend to NAPPS business full time in 1984 was because his three restaurants had driven him into bankruptcy.

birth of a new NAPPS magazine, the *National Storytelling Journal*.³⁹⁴ Regan-Blake would continue to consult with Smith and the board for a year or two, but the rest of the Festivals she reminisces about were programmed by others.³⁹⁵ Regan-Blake says:

This was the 12th festival [in 1984]. This was the first year that Laura [Simms] was *very* involved in booking a festival. And [we had] all new people...³⁹⁶ This was the year we had Ephat Mujuru from Africa. We had Moses Aaron from Australia. [Laura] really helped us move things out to where we weren't [featuring tellers] only [from] the United States. We started becoming an international festival. That was a great year. And I think, for me, that symbol on...that program reminds me of that (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 55).

The symbol on the 1984 cover was a drawing of a lizard surrounded by a circular border, printed in sepia tones against wheat-colored cardstock; both lizard and border are decorated with patterns reminiscent of Dream Time art by the indigenous peoples of Australia. A note at the bottom reads: "Lizard is a universal image in the oral tradition,

³⁹⁴ The *National Storytelling Journal* lasted from 1984-1988. The first editor was journalist Jill Oxendine, Jimmy Neil Smith's sister. Her successors were Greta Talton, and then Mary Weaver. In the late eighties the *National Storytelling Journal* became *Storytelling* magazine. Neil Tsacrios followed by Judith O'Malley came on staff (both briefly) as editor of the magazine and the head of the short-lived National Storytelling Press. Jill Oxendine returned as editor when those hires did not last.

When the National Storytelling Association split into two entities – what would become the International Storytelling Center (producer of the festival) and the National Storytelling Network (the membership organization) in 1998, the magazine went with the membership organization, and Oxendine's on-again/off-again editorship came to an end.

³⁹⁵ Once Smith hired Susan O'Connor, first part-time and then full time, as the NAPPS Director of Programs, the Festival was programmed by staff. That would happen in the late eighties or early nineties.

³⁹⁶ Anne Izard, Rosalie Sorrels and I were among the new tellers featured in 1984.

appearing in many stories as a messenger of god and symbol of birth and death. Some stories say that the hand of man was fashioned after the lizard." The use of this symbol, the style in which it was drawn and the bit of scholarship included on the cover suggests Simms's hand.³⁹⁷ A fourth tent was added for the first time, indicating that audience numbers continued to grow. And, significantly, of the fourteen tellers in 1984, fully half were female. This gender parity was Regan-Blake's parting gift to the Festival and the community.

Regan-Blake goes on:

And then 13th [in 1985] – on into [the 14th] – this was kind of a big year. 1986 was Tennessee's Bicentennial... We had gotten grants for Doc McConnell, Barbara Freeman, and myself to travel all across Tennessee [to]...seven different places, mostly... connected with the public libraries. We did storytelling performances. I gave a workshop in each of those places. And then the Festival was a culmination of that. This was really a down-home kind of a Festival. So we...shifted again from going out to the whole world, coming back to really more grassroots kinds of storytelling for '86...

MILBRE: That was the Tennessee Homecoming Year?

CONNIE: It was. That's what it was called (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 55-56).

In the passage above, Regan-Blake's narrative skips over the 13th annual festival in 1985 with no details, jumping immediately to the Tennessee Homecoming event in 1986.

This is a telling omission. 1985 began propitiously enough for NAPPS, even

³⁹⁷ Alas, no artist's name is attached to the image.

though there had been a changing of the guard. The organization had new digs in the historic Slemons House in Mill Spring Park in Jonesborough. With Regan-Blake gone from the board, Laura Simms was now officially the event's Artistic Director; it even said so in the Festival program. Though Regan-Blake was not featured in 1985, she did attend as an emcee. Perhaps her silence about this groundbreaking Festival speaks to the distance Regan-Blake needed to create between her retired-from-NAPPS-self, and what went on in Jonesborough. But she wasn't wholly uninvolved in the programming that would rock the rolling hills of upper east Tennessee. In the 1985 program the credit list runs long, including "Jimmy Neil Smith, executive director, Laura Simms, artistic director, Connie Regan-Blake, consultant." The list of credits continues, indicating the ongoing involvement of present and past board members as well: "Doc McConnell, technical director; Ed Stivender, assistant to the directors..."³⁹⁸ And in an email on April 10, 2014, Simms wrote: "The decision for storytellers was a group decision in the end so I had a lot to say and convince...but there were others that had a say too" (personal email).³⁹⁹ All of these bits of information confirm that what happened at the 13th annual Festival was not simply Simms's doing. But as the (female) Artistic Director, she took the heat from the fallout.

³⁹⁸ The program also lists these Festival workers including a growing number of NAPPS staff: "Connie Denny, Jane Martin and Carla Papy, administrative assistants to the Festival directors; Dennis Freeman, director of volunteers; Fran Snyder, coordinator of publicity; Jenni Bourne, documentarian; Terry Daenzer, lighting and electrical; Doug Dorchug, sound and recording..." The acknowledgements continue and then end inexplicably with a comma – "and Carol Birch, Phil Blake, Milbre Burch, Clare Cuddy, Donald Davis, Doug Elliott, Barbara Freeman, Steven Gorn, David Holt," (sic) – in an unsuccessful attempt to identify the Festival's (volunteer) emcees.

³⁹⁹ I have not edited this statement by Simms; the ellipsis used here is hers.

Given that 1985 marks the moment when the revival "matriarchy" lost its power and the patriarchy assumed control,⁴⁰⁰ Regan-Blake's having nothing to say about this Festival in the CSP interview remains mystifying. After all, she and Simms and the rest of the NAPPS board had laid the groundwork for this event together. Of the seemingly collaborative vision of the board at that time, Simms says:

They...asked me to come to the festival [in 1979]. And I remember taking a walk with Jimmy Neil Smith...over a little bridge...where there's [now] an enormous tent, but then it was just a little grove of trees. And he said to me, "Maybe you should come to the board meetings and you should bring a kind of New York urban storytelling [perspective]." And I, as one can say in the hubris of youth, [said], "I'll bring the entire world." And actually that's what I set out to do. I engaged in what I think of as the most extraordinary conversation [with the other board members]... We talked about stories and storytelling. We talked about why [we] tell stories, what happens when a story is told, and how are we going to make festivals and conferences that inform people way beyond just entertaining them. We were interested, not just in...producing, [a] comfort-driven, American dream, but we were...committed [to] America dreaming, wide awake...[In] the making of those Festivals [and] the conferences, something extraordinary...began to happen ...that really [shook] up the comfort zone...What happened on those stages was something we talked about for years (2012 NSN Conference Plenary Session Transcript, pages 14-15).

⁴⁰⁰ In *The Storytellers' Journey*, Sobol devotes an edifying portion of his chapter entitled "Blood on the Porch" to the 1985 Festival and its fallout. See pp 197-200.

The community would talk about it for years as well.

The cover for the 13th annual Festival program seems innocuous enough, an off-white, bi-fold with sepia-colored ink. The typography appears in a sweeping calligraphic hand; there is a border along the bottom that suggests a mosaic of Moroccan tile.⁴⁰¹ But far from being a Southern grass roots event like the one that followed it, the Festival in 1985 was legendarily diverse in its selection of fifteen tellers. Of these, six were women, including first-timers Peninnah Schram, founder of the Jewish Storytelling Center in New York City, renowned Irish-Canadian librarian Alice Kane, and poet Connie Martin, who was a frequent collaborator with Robert Bly.

Often in the Festival's past, female tellers provided the diversity in the lineup.⁴⁰² But this year there were several male first-timers whose presence not only embodied diverse traditions, but also pushed the envelope beyond the audience's comfort zone. There were: Bengali folk artist Purna Das Baul and Ethiopian *krar*⁴⁰³ player Selesh

⁴⁰¹ In the 1985 program is a note in memoriam to African American teller and musician Horace "Spoons" Williams (1910-1985) who had been featured the year before.

⁴⁰² Throughout the first ten years, the race or ethnicity of its featured distaff performers allowed the Festival to appear to be diverse, while still privileging Euro-American male tellers. That strategy has worked to the detriment of Euro-American female tellers, and male tellers of color alike. Women were also frequently hired for the ghost storytelling slots, which upped the estrogen at the Festival without costing the producing organization as much as hiring women for the Featured teller slots would have. The saved money could then go toward hiring another male Featured teller.

Once modeled by "the National," this strategy has been exported to spinoff festival events. Regan-Blake notes in our March 31st dissertation dialogue: "More recently what [a lot of festivals around the country] are doing is getting national tellers for the guys and getting two token females for the regional [slot]. Then they don't have to pay [the women] as much and yes all that...is a mess in lots of ways" (telephone conversation).

⁴⁰³ A *krar* is an Ethiopian harp.

Damessae, neither of whom spoke much English; University of Massachusetts English professor Robert Creed who recited the epic of *Beowulf* in Old English; author Simon Ortiz from Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico; actor/storyteller Jon Spelman, whose repertoire included "Letters from Nam" (as in Viet Nam) and an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; new vaudevillian Jackson Gillman, and monologist Spalding Gray.

Here Simms reminisces about the diversity of the National Storytelling Festivals that she had a strong hand in producing, before revealing its resultant impact on her own life:

[In 1983 Vi Hilbert] stood on stage...with Ron Evans, keeper of the talking sticks, and they told fart stories.⁴⁰⁴ That was nothing compared to when Spalding Gray came [in 1985] and said the "F word" [*chuckle*], which was really a source of tremendous storytelling in Jonesborough...Audiences were riveted. There was laughter, and there was mime, and there was comedy, and there was everything else. It was balanced with this dreaming wide awake of how [were] we going...to keep open the channels of story in our world, so we [could] access what makes us human beings. We were a force that was interested in [investigating] what are the roots of aggression and conflict and injustice in the world. And we talked about these things at our board meetings...(2012 NSN Conference Plenary Session Transcript, pages 16-17).

⁴⁰⁴ Ron Evans was featured at the Festival in 1979, 1982 and 1984. Though his name was not on the program in 1983, Regan-Blake had previously stated that he was involved with the festival for five or six years. So his telling stories with Hilbert in 1983 makes sense despite the fact that he was not billed as a performer that year.

When the festival programming flexed in the direction of a borderless celebration of diverse narrative performances, and stretched to include non-English-speaking Indian and Ethiopian verbal artists, Old English epics, and the postmodern, urban storytelling of Spalding Gray, its reach exceeded the grasp of Jonesborough's civic leaders and the festival's general audiences. Pushing the envelope of the listeners' aesthetic palates potentially jeopardized the town's economic interests. And indeed some audience members were less than pleased by the experimental, expansive, and edgier direction of these Festival events. Unhappy customers could translate into empty seats and loss of income for a growing organization with increasing costs and only one sure revenue stream. And while the town of Jonesborough had become more appreciative of the festival, it had also become more dependent on festival attendees supplying its economic lifeblood. Within these developing tensions, something had to give.

Simms concludes: "I – with Connie – created...international festivals, and I was literally run out of town" (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 15). In the wake of the 1985 festival, with Regan-Blake gone from the conversations around the board room table, Simms felt increasingly marginalized by other board members more in tune with Smith's Jonesborough-centric aspirations. Gender politics were at work in the changing board dynamics as Smith aligned himself with the new chair, a Euro-American, Southern male storyteller and a Methodist minister with Appalachian roots. Simms says: "I withdrew from the Board when Donald Davis took over making decisions that had until that time been more or less group agreements or at least up for dialogue. He took over the

festival, making it a Southern event that year and [demoted] me to some kind of administrative assistant where I had been the artistic director after Connie."⁴⁰⁵

In his history, Sobol quotes Davis, the man who became the NAPPS chair at the beginning of 1986: "That 1985 festival was one where I got over one hundred and fifty letters of complaint about the festival. I mean, violent letters of complaint" (198). Sobol quotes a phone interview with Regan-Blake in which she *did* speak about the fallout from this Festival: "There was ...feedback saying, 'Where're the ones we're used to seeing? And where are the *American* storytellers" (199). Sobol writes: "Davis...took a hardheaded business point of view toward the artistic issues involved" (199), and then quotes Davis, who was speaking as the new-NAPPS chair:

The test was, who was going to define storytelling? The test was, does the audience define storytelling, or does the presenter define storytelling? Is this a sellers' market or a buyers' market? And, as with all things, it's a buyers' market... A sellers' market might work the first year. But then it's defined by the consumer. And I think that was proved out, in that we had during some of those years, some big financial losses. And some membership drops. The '86 festival went way overboard in the other direction, to try and recoup financial losses. And there's a lot of misunderstanding of that by artistic people who felt that their judgment was being excluded, that they were being excluded...And I was sitting at the place of saying, "If we hurt feelings, that's too bad. What we've got to do is survive at this point, and then redirect." (199).

⁴⁰⁵ Personal email from Laura Simms on March 1, 2014. Used by permission.

In my reading of Davis's statement, he is speaking of Simms and Regan-Blake and their feminist aims for the event. And I wondered if the organization's redirection away from the women's joint vision for storytelling and the Festival might have stilled Regan-Blake's voice on this topic during the CSP interview.⁴⁰⁶ Still, she was a savvy touring artist, and even though it meant another leave-taking – this time from her more inclusive vision of the Festival – she and Freeman took the work that was offered them for the 1986 Festival "Homecoming" celebration.

⁴⁰⁶ I re-listened to the tapes of our dissertation dialogues on March 31 and April 9, and discovered that *I did not ask* Regan-Blake to address her silence with regard to the 1985 Festival. Kicking myself, I was momentarily reminded of the Judith Stacey quote: "feminist researchers are apt to suffer the delusion of alliance more than the delusion of separateness" (116). Or perhaps I just needed a close reader of this study to point out to me that I had left Regan-Blake's silence on this point un-interrogated.

At any rate, I wrote Regan-Blake an email on April 10, explaining that I was revising this chapter and couldn't believe that we didn't address the fact that she almost completely omitted a mention of the 1985 festival in her narrative. I asked her what she thought today about why she said so little in 1998 about this groundbreaking event that had long-lasting results when people complained.

I reminded her that though she had left the board, she was listed as a consultant to this festival. And since the fallout of the 1985 programming (and Simms's tension with Donald Davis) eventually precipitated her successor's leaving the board, I felt fairly certain there was a story there that I hadn't heard Regan-Blake tell as yet. Within a few hours, she wrote back:

I'm surprised – but I honestly have no idea why I jumped over it. I have no memory of that. In the video, do I have that program in my hand? Any body language that you saw that might be a hint? ...

I have no negative feelings about that year except that I remember really feeling for Laura. She had worked so hard and it was distressing to me that she received so much flack.

I was excited to have a sense of different cultures in town – from languages heard, to colorful dress to music that was unusual to my ear – there was an exotic flavor to it. I do remember the buzz around town about Spaulding (sic) – and hearing that some folks were shocked but I can't remember if I was in his tent – or if I just heard about it.

Sorry I can't give you more. If anything else comes to me, I will write (Personal email from Regan-Blake on April 10, 2014. Used by permission).

Under Davis's and Smith's recovery plan,⁴⁰⁷ the 1986 festival program touts "Tennessee's unique Homecoming '86 celebration, a statewide program that salutes the heritage of Tennessee" on a glossy, red, white and blue brochure. Hosted by the Folktellers and Doc McConnell, the program featured them along with ten other tellers with Tennessee ties; Alex Haley, the best-selling author of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Vanguard Press, 2007) was there as the Festival's special guest. Of the fourteen presenters (including Haley), eight were women, a slight edge over the number of men.

The 1986 program describes the Festival's first "Storytelling Showcase," "a fun-filled salute to...the role the state [of Tennessee] has played in the revival of storytelling throughout America and the world."⁴⁰⁸ This two-hour concert event featured "some of America's best storytelling entertainment: an hour of humorous stories and an hour of

⁴⁰⁷ Regan-Blake credits Donald Davis with persuading Jimmy Neil Smith to begin offering discounted advance orders for tickets to the Festival. In more fiscally savvy hands, this move might have allowed the organization to create and maintain a year-round cash flow, but since the Festival remained the only income stream for an organization with a growing staff, numerous paid consultants, and a growing list of initiatives, it only postponed the economic crash that was coming.

⁴⁰⁸ Aggrandizing tropes, such as the 1986 program's celebration of "the role the state has played in the revival of storytelling throughout America and the world," and an earlier one about how the 30-minute 1975 documentary film would "soon be seen on nation-wide PBS," capture the increasingly ambitious hopes of the Festival founder for his hometown event. Though Smith could envision all the potential that lay in his entrepreneurial/aesthetic creations, his attempts to bring all his ideas to fruition would splinter the national storytelling organization in 1998, and bankrupt the Festival in 2010. Though he is now retired from the organization, Smith continues to consult with the staff on projects, and his sometimes overreaching prose can still be found on the website in phrases like: "The world's storytelling renaissance began in Jonesborough, a tiny town in the mountains of Tennessee almost 40 years ago." See:

<http://www.storytellingcenter.net/experience/about-isc/our-story/the-history-of-isc/>

Updated in 2014. Accessed April 11, 2014.

ghost stories featuring [an unspecified] sampling of our guest tellers with a special visit by author Alex Haley." Sponsored by Pepsi Cola and Burger King, the showcase was held at Freedom Hall, "a spacious entertainment center...located in the heart of nearby Johnson City." It was free to those attending the festival; otherwise adults paid \$5.00 and children under twelve paid \$3.50 to attend.

Sobol describes the showcase in Freedom Hall this way: "The intimate figure of the homespun storyteller [in a civic auditorium in Johnson City] was reduced to a tiny swatch on a giant stage framed by massive stacks of P.A. equipment. The festival had circled back to where it began, with Jerry Clower at the Davy Crockett High School, and, as Regan-Blake said of that night, it was "like TV...it was gone when it was gone" (219).

Moving forward from her past experiences on the NAPPS board, Regan-Blake also moved ahead in her reminiscences about the Festival:

Here is '87. Jay [O'Callahan] featured heavily in this particular Festival⁴⁰⁹... You can see again...where some of the years kind of double up [on the cover design]. And then we got a real change [of look] in 1990 – [a] very different look for our Festival (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 56).

⁴⁰⁹ This was O'Callahan's fourth appearance at the festival since his first invitation in 1980. And it would have been the first time that his 1986 live double cassette recording, *Village Heroes* (Marshfield: Artana, 1986) would have been available at the resource tent. That album includes "Edna Robinson," commissioned for the 250th anniversary of the town of Harvard, Massachusetts. He told it at the festival along with another major work, "The Herring Shed." After cutting his teeth on children's stories, many of them set in the magical land of Artana, O'Callahan became best known for his original and commissioned works for adult audiences. These tended to be elaborate character studies of people and places; some were biographical, some fictional, and some fictionalized explorations of the lives of his family members, or his own boyhood.

Rather than a 1987 program, Regan-Blake displays a glossy brochure that features the graphic image of three tellers: unattributed likenesses of Vi Hilbert, Jay O'Callahan, and Ray Hicks. Hosted by festival favorites (and NAPPS board members) Ed Stivender and Donald Davis, the 1987 event featured fifteen other tellers as well. If O'Callahan was featured heavily that year, the distaff got short shrift. Among the seventeen presenters, only six were women.

At first, I assumed that their close friendship might have fueled Regan-Blake's memory of O'Callahan's importance to the festival in 1987, but there was more to her statement than even she remembered. I turned to O'Callahan's website and determined that he had produced recordings of some substantial new work prior to that festival appearance. In reading a draft of this chapter, Regan-Blake admitted that she could no longer make sense of her remark about her friend. When I reminded her of his new (in 1987) monodramas, "Edna Robinson" and "The Herring Shed," she realized that this Festival was the first that scheduled the tellers in extended (hour-long) solo sets. Though this innovation may have been tailor made for O'Callahan's new performances pieces, extended solo slots have remained in place for tellers who request them.

1988 would be a banner year for Jimmy Neil Smith whose book-length collection of stories, *Homespun – Tales from America's Favorite Storytellers*, was published by Crown. That was also the year that the NAPPS organization moved into the long-neglected, now newly refurbished Chester Inn, located on Main Street next door to the Christopher Taylor House.⁴¹⁰ Something else was new as well: though it featured tellers from the regular Festival lineup, the Ghost Story concert had become a separate ticket

⁴¹⁰ Built in 1797, Chester Inn is the oldest standing inn in the State of Tennessee.

event in Mill Spring Park. The printed program that year was lush;⁴¹¹ a full page was devoted to each of the featured tellers.⁴¹² But of the fifteen performers, only a third were women.

That programming decision reflected a turn, not only away from women tellers, but also a turn away from including their role in the revival's history. The 1988 program contained a garrulous, page-long history of NAPPS, mentioning Jimmy Neil Smith as the founder, and Kathryn Windham as the first dues-paying member. The write-up also mentions the Chester Inn's most famous guests: Presidents Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson and James K. Polk, as well as Tennessee's first governor John Sevier. For all that this history reaches back 150 years to recognize some of the town's most illustrious residents, it makes no mention of the NAPPS organization's foremother who had left the board only four years before.

The program also includes a page-long history of the Festival, honoring Smith, Jerry Clower and Ray Hicks by name, and citing "a former Arkansas congressman [who] spun a yarn or two." The Festival history goes on to make these oblique references to the event's earliest ambassadors: "two librarians from Chattanooga recounted children's stories of mystery and magic. It was a lazy Sunday afternoon spent among strangers – yet

⁴¹¹ The 1988 program copy included an effusive listing of festival staff and emcees, the festival planning committee (made up of four board members including me in my first year of service), the seven-member board of directors, and the seven members of the NAPPS staff. Also recognized were the ten members of an emergent advisory council made up of representatives from these regions: the Great Lakes, New England, Pacific, Midwest, Rocky Mountain, Southeast, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northlands and Northwest.

⁴¹² The lineup included Pete Seeger, one of the founding fathers of the folk music revival, and, thus, a grandfather to the storytelling revival. Also noteworthy was the festival's first Asian American teller, Brenda Wong Aoki.

there was a connecting energy, an invisible thread that bound together all those who were present." It continues: "Next year...there was no big-name teller, just a few good folks who could tell a good tale. There was a bewhiskered hospital maintenance supervisor from nearby Rogersville, a college professor from Kentucky who wrote poetry and sang old, mountain ballads, and a former newspaper reporter who claimed a ghost lived in her Alabama home." As fanciful as this prose may be, only a Festival insider with a long memory would recognize the Folktellers, Doc McConnell, Lee Pennington and Kathryn Windham from their descriptions. Without a seasoned festivalgoer (or a written guide book) to tutor them, first-time audience members would have no idea who these people were.⁴¹³

The 1989 program again recounts the festival and organizational history, but this time, the two histories share a page. In this smaller space, the names of Jimmy Neil Smith and Jerry Clower warrant a mention, but Ray Hicks is gone. So are even the descriptive references to Regan-Blake, Freeman, McConnell, Pennington and Windham. Instead space *is* devoted to the NAPPS board's response to an increasingly urgent demand for input and access to the organization, mounted by storytelling activists in outlying communities across the country. The program narrative reads:

NAPPS, during the past three years, has become increasingly national in scope and outreach – organizing the National Storytelling Advisory Council to more effectively represent its many and varied constituencies...In the future, it is the

⁴¹³ My own six years of board service began in 1988, and whatever orientation I may have been offered – mostly through gossip shared privately by veteran board members – I was not schooled in the pioneering efforts of the organization's founding mothers and fathers. For the most part, it was listening to the tellers' oral histories for the Cotsen Storytelling Project that taught me about these early chapters of revival history.

mission of NAPPS to make storytelling an even more vital thread in the fabric of contemporary life – not only as a means of entertainment and personal communication, but as a viable professional tool."

What the Festival program does not acknowledge is that NAPPS had snipped away several vital threads of its known past, while rushing toward an unknown future.

The 1989 program cover boasted thumbnail photos of the Featured tellers without naming any of them. Of these sixteen Featured performers, only six were women. And for the first time, three additional tellers were hired to perform *only* at the separate ticket Ghost-Storytelling event.⁴¹⁴ From the start, the designated ghost story tellers were offered less money, because they performed in only two twenty-minute-long slots all weekend.⁴¹⁵ In 1989, two women and one man filled this Ghost Story teller role.

⁴¹⁴ Ghost story tellers were encouraged to include their recordings or books in the Resource Tent alongside the featured tellers. The sale of resources offered tellers a second income stream derived from their appearances in Jonesborough.

⁴¹⁵ In January of 2012, I queried Susan O'Connor, the National Storytelling Festival's Director of Programs since the early nineties, asking her about the development of fee scales for the various teller categories at that time. In an email on January 18, 2012, she replied:

I don't have those kinds of records, but here's what we currently pay:

Featured (returning): \$2000 + travel, food, lodging

New Voices: \$1500 + travel, food, lodging

Ghost: \$800 + travel, food, lodging

Cabaret: \$1200 + travel, food, lodging

Exchange Place: \$200 + food

The New Voices designation is new since the CSP interviews. The New Voices tellers – who may have decades of experience by the time they get to Jonesborough – have a lighter telling schedule than the Featured tellers. This is in recognition that an "emerging" artist might not yet have several hours of material at the ready. In Festival culture, stories are not to be repeated over the weekend. Both New Voices and Exchange Place tellers have returned to the main stage as Featured Tellers within a year of their first appearance at NAPPS.

Former Featured tellers are invited to return to the Festival during years that they are not performing, without paying for a ticket to General Admission events. They are

According to the program, the proceeds from the ghost stories "will help provide much-needed financial resources to support NAPPS' special projects." One of those special projects was Smith's first effort to secure a building to house the growing collection of archival recordings from past festivals in a temperature-controlled environment. Another was that year's revamping of the *National Storytelling Journal* into a more newsstand friendly quarterly publication, *Storytelling Magazine*, now edited by Mary Weaver.

Despite the worthiness of these causes, from the 1989 Festival forward, NAPPS gained an income stream while creating a Ghost Story ghetto – a handful of devalued performance slots that more often than not featured more women than men. It might seem a plus to have a new door onto the Festival stage, but the ghost storytellers were all former Featured tellers, so this was essentially a demotion. And assigning more women than men to the Ghost Story ghetto meant that the Festival programming could "get away" with having fewer women in the more generously paid Featured position. That meant more of the Featured teller slots could be filled by men.

not, however, invited into the dining hall for Featured tellers, nor do they receive tickets to any separate ticket event. If former Featured tellers agree to emcee at the Festival, then food and housing are provided for them. But they receive no fee for their services, and must pay their own transportation costs. Emcees *are* featured (with a picture, a bio and contact information) inside the Festival program and their materials are offered for sale at the Resource Tent.

Traditionally the Festival takes 20% of the sales at the Resource Tent and the tellers go home with 80%. There have been a couple of years recently when the Festival divided resource sales 30/60 without negotiating the change with the tellers. After organized pushback from the talent, the 20/80 split was returned to the contract.

The NAPPS/NSA/ISC board records are now held in the International Storytelling Center collection at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. These should contain as full a history as a researcher might hope to find, tracing the evolution of the Tellers' fees from the \$100 that Regan-Blake quotes in her narrative of the Festival's early years to the amounts shown above. This obviously bears more study.

In any given year the gender disparity between women and men in Featured teller positions might be incremental or it might be notably egregious. Either way, over time the effect was a cumulative one. And this hiring practice signaled audiences – and producers of spinoff festivals who "shopped" at "the National" – that there were more worthy narrators among men than among women.

The "change of look" in 1990, mentioned by Regan-Blake above, was the advent of two-color glossy Festival programs. That year there were sixteen Featured tellers, including Ray Hicks in a single afternoon concert. Six of these were women, including the Folktellers who presented their play *Mountain Sweet Talk*. Three more tellers performed only at the Ghost-Story Telling in Mill Spring Park; this time it was two men and one woman. The 1991 festival program was another two-color glossy affair, and that year saw the festival's first corporate sponsor, Mott's USA. Fifteen tellers were featured; six were women. Again the distaff provided two of the three tellers for the Ghost-Story slots. Also on hand was "America's Hans Christian Andersen," the award-winning author Jane Yolen, who wrote the introduction to a newly published collection, *Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1991);⁴¹⁶ she autographed copies of the book in the "Mott's Meet the Tellers Tent."

⁴¹⁶ Strangely, this collection does not bear Jimmy Neil Smith's name as editor, nor does it bear the name of another individual. Instead, the title page reads:

Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival
Selected and edited by the National Association for the Preservation and
Perpetuation of Storytelling
National Storytelling Press
Jonesborough, Tennessee
Distributed to the Book Trade by August House Publishers * P.O. Box 3223 *
Little Rock, Ark. 72203

The (glossy, two-color) program for the twentieth annual festival in 1992 inexplicably features a jester in a belled cap and gloves, juggling the silhouettes of a fish, a boy on a hobbyhorse, a leaping hare, and a pig. Regan-Blake recalls:

1992 was the twentieth [anniversary festival]. This whole long list that we see on the side here are all those tellers – all the tellers from the nineteen years previous that were then invited to come back. And what a celebration that was...It was a joyous time and I think spoke so highly of the whole storytelling community, 'cause there was not this fighting to get to main stage, and fighting to get to the best spot...We were all so thrilled to be there, being able to listen to all these stories plus tell some. So that was a real exciting year. Even though the cover and the artwork was not one of my favorites, it was a good year... (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 56).

Jerry Clower was invited back as the Guest Host for the twentieth anniversary. Not counting Clower, there were 83 featured tellers: thirty-eight women and forty-five men. This tally includes two (unnamed, un-pictured, and so unidentified for posterity)

In 1992, NAPPS would publish a second collection: *More Best-Loved Stories Told At the National Storytelling Festival* with the same collective/phantom editor. I wrote Smith an email to inquire about this and he wrote back:

[The book] probably should have had an acknowledged editor. If it had, it would have been Mary Weaver and me. I initiated the book project, collected and selected the stories and bios, did some editing, and oversaw the printing. Mary did most of the editorial fine tuning and advising and guidance on multiple matters. Jane Hillhouse did the graphic design... I can't remember for sure, but we pitched BEST LOVED STORIES (and other publications) as a product from and by NAPPS and not from any single editor (Personal email from Smith on March 30, 2014. Used by permission).

members of the Roadside Theater.⁴¹⁷ At the end of the Festival, Tom Raymond of Fresh Air Photography took a picture of the assembled talent in Mill Spring Park.⁴¹⁸

A company called Hometown Entertainment shot footage at the 1992 festival, and later released a "20th Anniversary Video of the National Storytelling Festival, a commemorative documentary." Though the Folktellers are briefly seen in a collage of quick clips showing tellers on stage one after another, they were not among the performers interviewed on screen. The same company released three video anthologies of storytellers in performance, also shot at the 20th anniversary Festival. The title of the series was "Tell Me a Story – 1, 2 and 3." The Festival tellers featured in the series were David Novak, Jon Spelman and Ed Stivender; on Volume One; myself, Jay O'Callahan and Diane Ferlatte on Volume Two; Heather Forest, Waddie Mitchell and Carol Birch on Volume Three. When we talked about those videos on April 9th, 2014, Regan-Blake had no memory of the documentary film or of any other releases made from footage shot at the 20th anniversary Festival. Her remove from Festival events – and their subsidiary offshoots – was growing wider. In the second decade of the National Storytelling Festival (1983-1992), she was featured only four times; though she emceed every year in between those paid gigs.

⁴¹⁷ My research suggests that Angelyn DeBord and Tom Bledsoe returned as Roadside Theater in 1992, but this bears more study. At this writing, I have included them in the female/male tally above.

⁴¹⁸ I was featured at the 20th anniversary festival and can be seen in the group photo (and on the Hometown Entertainment film) with my six-month-old daughter, Katy Blake, sitting on my hip. The image can be found (though it is currently mislabeled as a photo from the 25h anniversary festival) on Connie Regan-Blake's website at <http://www.storywindow.com/gallery.htm> Accessed online on 27 March 2014.

Perhaps because of that remove, or because she was growing weary on the day of the CSP interview back in 1998, Regan-Blake makes quick work of the rest of the programs in her ephemera collection: "And then moving [to] '93. I'm actually missing number '95 too. And then these are...the more recent ones. They've been making posters – and selling those posters at the festival – out of some of the drawings [by Bill Bledsoe]" (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 56). There's both revival history, as well as her own now considerable detachment, embedded in the program contents and in her brief remarks.

The text-heavy cover of the 1993 festival program sports three generic graphics (a crescent moon, a turtle and a tree) along a right hand border. The paper has a matte finish for the first time in a number of years, indicating financial woes at the NAPPS office that had surfaced during the summer.⁴¹⁹ The program copy features a brief recounting of the Festival's well-honed Smith-and-Clower creation myth. It also boasts an unrelated

⁴¹⁹ On June 22, 1993 at the summer meeting of the NAPPS board, Smith, as Executive Director presented a letter, disclosing that he had "dropped the whetstone" of the organization's finances, and that he must needs re-sharpen his fiscal focus to bring the organization back from the brink to which he had (un-transparently) led us. That letter caught the board (of which I was a member at the time) unawares; the news was chastening not only because the Executive Director worked for us, but also because there was some chance that board members could be held responsible for any debts the organization was unable to pay. After what then-board member MaryGay Ducey would call a "Come to Jesus" moment in the boardroom, we did not fire Smith, but kept him on staff with more supervision by our Finance Chair while Smith strove to undo what he had done. One thing we realized in that meeting was that Smith's firing would cause an uproar among the revival constituency who viewed him as the patron saint of storytelling. The "whetstone" letter was difficult to read in 1993, and painful to see again in the International Storytelling Center collection at the American Folklife Center in D.C. last November.

Five years later, Smith's determination to purchase property and build a National Storytelling Center precipitated a split on the board, and subsequently divided the national storytelling organization in two. Despite his checkered history as a CEO in charge of ensuring that a restaurant or a non-profit is on fiscally responsible footing, he went on to become the Executive Director of the International Storytelling Center, producer of the National Storytelling Festival.

photograph of a Native American teller in full tribal regalia; a caption reads, "Kevin Locke, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, tells stories with hoops." There remains a troubling juxtaposition to be seen in the recounting of a hometown boy's dream of saving his historic town – famous for hosting the architect of the Trail of Tears – against the image of an indigenous person dancing in tribal dress. But with Regan-Blake gone from the board for nine years, the commercial use of an "exotic" teller from a "traditional" culture was now deeply engrained in the sponsoring organization's ethos.

Twenty individual tellers were featured in 1993, nine of which were women, including the Festival's first Hispanic teller, Mexican American Olga Loya. Also there was the Little Theatre of the Deaf, represented by five unnamed members – two women and three men – pictured in a thumbnail photo. Two men filled the Ghost Story slots. And, for the first time, three *more* performers – two women and a man – were highlighted in a brand new separate ticket event, in this case, a shared, adult-themed Midnight Cabaret concert, starting at 10:30 pm.⁴²⁰ There have been no complaints (and little use of) either the V-word or the F-word because this slot is intended to be the Festival's equivalent of Adult Swim.

During 1994, the NAPPS organization left behind its quirky but beloved birth name – the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling – and claimed a more business-like moniker – the National Storytelling Association (NSA)

⁴²⁰ 1993 was the first year that the Festival welcomed six regional tellers from around the country to what's called the Exchange Place. Another effort to reach out to the national storytelling organization's various regions, the Exchange Place offered an up-and-coming regional teller a chance to tell a single 12-minute story at an afternoon concert during the Festival weekend. The Exchange Place remains a popular part of the Festival at this writing, and sometimes unearths a regional performer who returns to the Main Stage as a Featured teller another year.

– in an attempt to rebrand itself with a more credible, corporate image.⁴²¹ Around this time that Susan O'Connor who had come onto the NAPPS staff part-time rose to the full-time Director of Programs. With that the board divested itself of the last of its duties in programming the Festival.

Despite the financial woes of the previous year, the 1994 Festival program features a (rare) full-color image: the Jonesborough courthouse clock tower rising above the peak of a striped tent. The Yarnspinner's Party was introduced in 1994 – a separate ticket event kicking-off the capital campaign to build a "National Storytelling Center." By then, Smith envisioned a bricks and mortar building to house year-round storytelling events in Jonesborough. There were fifteen featured tellers – seven women⁴²² and eight men – plus a themed showcase of three male and one female cowpoke-poets. Add three Ghost-Story tellers (two women and one man). That year a woman won the coveted Midnight Cabaret slot; she was accompanied by a male musician.

The 1995 program cover featured the Jonesborough courthouse once more, but below it were a parade of African animals, a visual reference to that year's (and the

⁴²¹ In his history, Sobol recalls the first discussions of a name change at a 1992 board meeting he attended. Two years later Smith put out a press release saying: "NAPPS's name once considered catchy and cute is no longer as useful to the association as it once was... Today, the full name often hinders us from gaining true credibility as an important national organization... Our agenda is changing, and to be effective in national, even international advocacy programs, we must present the most positive, professional image possible" (220-221).

⁴²² In 1994, I made my third appearance at the Festival. Despite Jimmy Neil Smith's ambitions, the Festival remained the producing organization's only income stream. The Festival, therefore, bore the brunt of paying all the organization's bills year-round. I remember from firsthand experience, that there were some years when the featured tellers' take from sales at the Resource Tent would be among the last bills paid.

Festival's final) themed showcase. There were 25 featured tellers,⁴²³ of whom twelve were women, including a Festival first-timer, Cuban-American teller/author Carmen Deedy who would join the ranks of Festival favorites and further increase the popularity of personal narratives on the Jonesborough stages. That tally takes into account five performers of color representing African, Afro-Caribbean, and African American traditions. Add two venerable performers who hosted the showcase (a man and a woman). But wait! There's more! In 1995, the separately ticketed Midnight Cabaret expanded to two nights, featuring festival favorites (and former NAPPS board members) Donald Davis and Ed Stivender. Add two women and one man in the Ghost Story slots, and, finally, a special Sunday morning sacred telling with a (male) member of the Network of Biblical Storytellers.

The 1996 festival program cover utilized a painting (and poster for sale in the Resource Tent) by local artist Bill Bledsoe: a leprechaun in profile standing at the foot of a tree, overlooking the festival grounds.⁴²⁴ That year of the seventeen featured tellers, seven were women. There were three Ghost-Story tellers (two women and one man), and

⁴²³ In the tally of the lineup were two duos whose members were identified: Ethno-Tec (husband-and-wife team Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and Nancy Wang), and the Storyweavers (husband-and-wife team Lucinda Flodin and Dennis Frederick). Also in the tally are the members of the musical group, Tales and Scales. Though their individual members are unidentified; the photograph of the group shows four members (two men and two women).

⁴²⁴ Perhaps Bill Bledsoe's name was recorded because he was both a (male) professional artist and the son of Toby Bledsoe, a staunch supporter of Jimmy Neil Smith, and the owner of a Bed and Breakfast in town; Bill's mother, Toby, eventually served as mayor of Jonesborough, Tennessee.

I am assuming that Bledsoe was paid for contributing this and other designs for use on Festival program covers, and for sale as posters during the event. But at this writing, I have not gone through the NAPPS board records at the Library of Congress to determine what was his fee, or how else Bledsoe may have been compensated.

two Midnight Cabaret artists (a man and a woman). This Festival boasted a "Salute to Storytelling Achievements," presenting the National Storytelling Association's "prestigious" (read: first-time ever given) Lifetime Achievement and Circle of Excellence Awards.

A Lifetime Achievement Award is self-explanatory; Ray Hicks, Mary Carter Smith and Kathryn Windham were the initial awardees. The Circle of Excellence awards "presented to artists who are recognized nationally by their peers to be master storytellers who set the standards for excellence and have demonstrated, over a significant period of time, a commitment and dedication to the art of storytelling."⁴²⁵ These so-called Oracle Awards were *the first ever to be conferred* by the national storytelling organization in its history.

In discussing the 1997 Festival, Regan-Blake touches on the awards' hard-won significance in the revival community:

[At the conference in 1996]...a group of people...had been...inducted into a Circle of Excellence [for the first time]. This festival [in 1997 featured]...all the members of the Circle of Excellence. Plus some newcomers, like Sheila Kay Adams and Angela Lloyd⁴²⁶ – people that had really taken the storytelling world

⁴²⁵ NSN website, accessed April 10, 2014, <http://www.storynet.org/oracle/index.html>.

⁴²⁶ Storyteller and washboard virtuoso Angela Lloyd is based in Victorville, California. Her eclectic repertoire includes original tales of great whimsy, traditional tunes linked to fairy tales like "Thorn Rosa," and selections from Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003). Carol Birch, Bill Harley and Lloyd released a joint album entitled *Carl Sandburg Out Loud* (Seekonk: Round River Records, 2002); it won a Parents' Choice Silver Award. She was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1997, returning again in 2003 and 2011. She was welcomed into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2013.

by storm. Everywhere they went, people were loving them, but they just hadn't quite made it to the festival yet. It was great to see that new blood...New blood...[that is] for this particular festival...[since] they were already accomplished storytellers...

MILBRE: And the Circle of Excellence [designation] is awarded by...?

CONNIE: The board of NAPPS [now called NSA] and the membership of the national association...No awards had been done over all those years...We didn't want a sense of competition [within] the storytelling world, but then the board realized that we do need to be honoring the people that have given a lot. So that particular year, sixteen people were inducted into that circle.⁴²⁷ And now, each year, two or three more are [awarded]...and they're always featured...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 56).

Of the 1997 festival, Regan-Blake also remarks: "'This was another really important year, with it being the 25th National Storytelling Festival'"⁴²⁸ (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 560). Again, Bill Bledsoe provided a painting (and a poster) for the

⁴²⁷ The first year that the NSN Circle of Excellence Awards were given, the honorees were: Brother Blue, Donald Davis, Marshall Dodge (posthumous), Ken Feit (posthumous), Barbara Freeman, David Holt, Doc McConnell, Jay O'Callahan, Lee Pennington, Gamble Rogers (posthumous), Lynn Rubright, Laura Simms, Mary Carter Smith, Ed Stivender, Jackie Torrence, Kathryn Windham and Diane Wolkstein. By 1996, almost all of these honorees had not only been featured at the festival but also had served on the NAPPS board.

⁴²⁸ The 25th anniversary event in 1997 included a "Storytellers Reunion: on Saturday, during which Circle of Excellence tellers reminisced, "about Jonesborough festivals from years gone by." In celebrating 25 years of the National Storytelling Festival, the event also featured an opportunity for Oral History collecting from audience members. A program note identified the Oral History collecting as "a Library and Archives project."

festival program cover: an aerial view from just behind the courthouse cupola, looking down at the townscape. That year there were twenty-five featured tellers – fourteen women and eleven men. Former Folktellers Barbara Freeman and Connie Regan-Blake appeared as solo artists, but performed a set together. In addition, there were two Ghost-Story tellers – a man and a woman.⁴²⁹ On Friday night folksinger Rosalie Sorrels did the Midnight Cabaret; Saturday night featured a set shared by cowboy bard, Waddie Mitchell, and cowboy balladeer, Don Edwards.

Regan-Blake ends her narrative stroll through the Festival ephemera, saying, "1998... This will be our 26th annual festival, and it's coming up this October, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, [the] first full weekend in Jonesborough, Tennessee" (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 58). Ever the gracious ambassador for a Festival that does not publicly acknowledge her role in its shaping, Regan-Blake made sure to include the dates of the then-upcoming 1998 festival in her interview.

The festival in 1998 featured twenty featured tellers, half of them female. Women filled the two Ghost Story slots. One of the Midnight Cabarets featured a Cuban American woman; the other featured an African American man. That year's program devoted a page to a fundraiser: in celebration of the Chester Inn's 200th birthday, a limited edition of lithographic prints, "Chester Inn" by Jerry Honeycutt, could be purchased for \$200 each. The two hundred available prints were numbered in sequence from the year of the Inn's founding: 1797 to 1997. Promotional copy in the program reads:

For 200 years, the historic Chester Inn has been a Jonesborough landmark. Now, the structure is the home of the National Storytelling Association and cornerstone

⁴²⁹ I was featured as a Ghost-Story teller along with Joe Hayes in 1997.

to the development of the National Storytelling Center...When you give and join the Patrons' Circle [by buying a print] you will have the honor of supporting the art of storytelling and the development of the National Storytelling Center.

Despite the celebratory tone in the program, a storm was brewing: the Executive Director and his supporters had irreconcilable differences with others on the board who saw the danger of investing the organization's focus and funds in the building of a bricks and mortar Storytelling Center. By the end of that year, the National Storytelling Association (formerly NAPPS) would split into two organizations – one, a festival producing entity and the other, a membership association.⁴³⁰ It was to be the end of an era. But our interview with Regan-Blake took place in August, and the forthcoming split of the organization she had helped to found was not part of the CSP conversation in 1998.

The Themes Found in the Ephemera

Over those first twenty-five years the Festival's early commitment to authenticity, intimacy, inclusiveness, tradition and hospitality would transform into its exploitation of the tellers' images, their resources, their patience and their fondness for one another and their adopted homeplace in the name of affordably attracting ever larger audiences.

Looking over the programs, particularly from 1984-1998, an emic reader can track several trends. First, is the growing tendency on the part of the Festival staff and board to depend on women of color and female Ghost Story tellers to address the lack diversity represented by Festival favorites who were mostly Euro-American men. The second is the seeming institutionalization of a Festival-producing ethos that featured performance groups without naming the individuals within them in the printed program.

⁴³⁰ Former NAPPS board member Ed Stivender famously described the outcome of the split as: "Daddy got the house; Mommy got the kids."

Thirdly, the content of the stories told onstage notably changed in this period, foregrounding humorous personal stories over tales from the oral tradition. Fourth, a commerce-driven expectation that former Featured tellers would work as Ghost Story ghetto performers and emcees (for low or no pay) just for a chance to be seen on the streets of Jonesborough was indicative of the tellers' ongoing struggle for fair pay.⁴³¹

While the National Storytelling Festival ought to have set the standards for teller compensation, it began to fall markedly behind the frontrunner, the Timpanogos Festival founded in 1989 in Orem, Utah.⁴³²

What the Ephemera Record Reveals about Regan-Blake

The programs and brochures in Regan-Blake's prized collection show that she told at the Festival seven times in the event's first decade (1973-1982). This tally includes her swapping a story onstage in 1973. In other words, she got six paid gigs at "the National" over the course of ten years,⁴³³ measured against the countless hours that she spent

⁴³¹ By the third decade of the Festival, the performers were pushing back, but that is a story for another study.

⁴³² Admittedly, the Timpanogos Festival was founded by Karen Ashton, then president of the Friends of the Orem Public Library, and wife of Alan Ashton, co-founder of WordPerfect, so it was considerably better capitalized than "the National" from its very beginnings.

⁴³³ Regan-Blake is currently gathering her papers to send to the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. In doing so, she came across the first payment she received from the National Storytelling Festival – a \$100 check – for appearing as a featured teller in 1974. A scanned copy of the check can be seen in the "Illustrated Timeline of the Narrative" found in the Appendices of this study. In a phone conversation on Friday, May 2, 2014, she reported that she had located a document that showed all of Folktellers' gigs and their fees from 1975-1977. That document showed that she also received \$100 for performing at the Festival in Oct. of 1975 (the year that Freeman performed as an unbilled and unpaid teller under the heading "Connie Regan-Blake and Friends." In October of 1976, the first year Barbara Freeman was a billed performer, the Folktellers were paid \$200 total. In October 1977, possible through some of the CETA

working for the organization in that same period. Happily Regan-Blake derived enormous satisfaction from her work as one-half of the NAPPS organization's Most Valuable Player Team, the Folktellers, and her life as a touring storyteller fed her soul and (eventually) her bank account. Working with and for NAPPS she forged deep and (mostly) abiding kinship ties with Jimmy Neil Smith, her performing partner Barbara Freeman, the other members of the early NAPPS board, local Festival supporters like the Moores and the Kennedys who provided housing and/or performance venues for the event; traditional and platform performers, folklorists, librarians, children's book authors and illustrators, folk festival producers, folk school operators, coffee house owners, community organizers and activists, ethnographers, collectors, record producers, and philanthropists all of whom she met on the road and brought back to Jonesborough; as well as at least 1000 audience members whom she all but handpicked and persuaded to come to a Festival in upper east Tennessee.

In the next fifteen years covered by her CSP narrative (1983-1998), Regan-Blake appeared six times as a paid performer, once in the Ghost Story ghetto. After her NAPPS board membership ended in 1984, she would no longer be working a second, year-round, fulltime (unpaid) job. Nor would she be planning the teller lineup each September on anniversary trips with her husband, Phil. She would consult on the festival planning with Laura Simms and Jimmy Neil Smith for a year or two, and she would tour with Freeman and McConnell and co-host the lineup as part of the 1986 Tennessee Homecoming celebration. In the years after that, up to the present, she would return to the festival stage as hired talent whenever she was asked, or volunteer to emcee when she wasn't.

funds the organization had received during this period, the Folktellers were paid \$800. Those are the only personal financial records Regan-Blake had turned up at this writing.

When over the next few years it became clear that Regan-Blake's name would not be spoken as part of the Festival's or the organization's publicly told history, she expressed her distress to Jimmy Neil Smith and others. But then she turned her attention back to making a name for herself, spending almost another decade working with Barbara Freeman and then going solo.

Regan-Blake's Recent Thoughts on Being Excluded from the Record

In revisiting the CSP interviews, I realized that there was a hole in the narrative fabric that pointed to holes in my research, for I had neglected to query either Connie Regan-Blake or Jimmy Neil Smith directly regarding her exclusion from the organization's history. On April 11th, I dispatched emails to both asking them to share their thoughts on this topic.

I wrote Smith:

As I strive to tie up all the loose ends of my study, I realize I have one last question for you. Why, in the festival and organizational histories that have appeared in Festival programs, on the ISC website, even in the LOC website, is Connie's name missing from the account? Why does Jerry Clower who was there for a single concert (and returned as a guest host for a reunion festival) rate a mention instead? This is the woman who worked side by side with you for ten years as an unpaid artistic director and an unsung chair of the board, locating talent, programming the festival and raising funds to support the salaries of the NAPPS (via Mort Schindel) and to care for the Hicks family in their time of great need (via the Ray Hicks fund). Why have her contributions been so thoroughly

erased from the history as it's told by the NAPPS/ISC organization?⁴³⁴

His emailed reply came the next day: "Your questions get more difficult as your research is coming to a close. I will think about this and respond in a few days. It's a good question."⁴³⁵

I informed Regan-Blake of my note to Smith and his answer, explaining that I felt I could not write my conclusion without making this inquiry to him, and one to her. For I realized that though she and I had alluded to her erasure from the NAPPS narrative numerous times over the decades, I hadn't asked her outright if she had ever addressed her exclusion⁴³⁶ directly with Smith? And if so, what was the outcome of that exchange as she recalled it now? She wrote me back on April 12th, suggesting we talk one more time, since she is, after all, an oral composer of narrative. Before we spoke, we exchanged emails again. On Sunday morning, April 13, she wrote to me:

I want to tell you this discussion about [Jimmy Neil] has brought up a lot of emotion for me – deep old ‘stuff’ and there are a lot of tears, even as I am writing this. Even though I have expressed a good bit of this over the years – it is obviously still quite a wound. I am assuming this is a good thing – clearing out or at least ‘airing out’ what has been under the muck for many years. But so far, I

⁴³⁴ Personal email written to Jimmy Neil Smith, April 11, 2014. Used by permission.

⁴³⁵ Personal email from Smith, April 12, 2014. Used by permission.

⁴³⁶ In our dissertation dialogue over the telephone on April 14th, Regan-Blake acknowledged that "erasure" is a powerful word, but that her name had *never* been included in the publicly told revival narrative in the first place. She said, "Even during those first ten years, I was excluded from any public recounting of how this all got started. 'Erasure' implies that I was included at one point. Privately Jimmy Neil always said or implied that I was a big part of this. But publicly he didn't say that."

am not having many specific memories of, ‘oh yes, this happened in this year, and that happened later.’” I am hoping with you and I talking, I might remember more specifics – but can’t promise! I know there was anger and a lot of ‘stuff’ around the conferences. If you know what years and the themes of the ones in St Louis, [New Mexico] I think and maybe [North Carolina], please send that to me and it might be a trigger [for more specific memories].⁴³⁷

I did as she suggested, sending Regan-Blake information about the years and the themes of three historic NAPPS conference events (called Congresses for those three years) in 1987, 1988 and 1989. I also sent my regrets for reopening a wound, and she replied:

Milbre, only take responsibility for shining a light on this (and light is often healing for a wound.) This revisiting may help me potentially let go of another layer. I am asking you to not take on any of my pain just because you are asking the questions. I do not want you apologizing. No matter what comes out of our discussions, the best way you can help ‘make it right’ is to continue your gift of asking the questions and listening to me. And I do consider all of this – your interviews in 1998, our continued discussions, your choosing to do this dissertation – all of it is a gift to me, most parts joyful, and some parts very hard.⁴³⁸

It was during our dissertation dialogue later that day that I got a fuller rendering of how that cutting away of threads unfolded for her:

⁴³⁷ Personal email from Regan-Blake, August 13, 2014. Used by permission.

⁴³⁸ Second personal email from Regan-Blake, August 13, 2014. Used by permission.

I think [asking Jimmy Neil why I was erased is] a *very good* question...and I'm very curious how he's going to end up answering it. My way of being in the world is that it really is better to shine a light on things. It is not at all that I'm expecting some resolution from Jimmy Neil, that he's going to all of a sudden say something magical, that – snap of the finger and there it is! [And I'll say] I'm glad to know that, and then move on. For me this is about me letting go of it...

So there is a lot that I do not remember about this... I remember being shocked when Jimmy Neil came up during my wedding and told me things [in the office] were changing. So that was 1984. [Phil and I] moved into our new home in April of '89. Those four years (probably not right after my wedding) – at some point and I don't have reference of time – I have a real image of [*tearful*] being in that old cottage in Candler,⁴³⁹ and the image is of me crying and thinking, "Why is this happening?" and questioning why [Jimmy Neil] had such a hold on my life. I was not sad all the time. I was blissful being married, and Barbara's and my travel was going well. When I look back on that time, it's not with sadness or this huge black mark, but when I specifically think about Jimmy Neil, I think of crying.

Here's what else I remember specifically at that time and maybe talking to you it will become clear, but my feeling about it was that Jimmy Neil was trying

⁴³⁹ Since I didn't know this, Regan-Blake explained: "[Candler] is where Phil and I lived before we moved to our new home. That's how I'm dating this [memory]. I know we moved to our new place April first, 1989... [Candler] is a little town just west of Asheville. We lived in a tiny little adobe house out there that I had lived in for twelve years" (Telephone call with Regan-Blake April 13, 2014. Used by permission).

to...make it up to me [in various ways], I'm not even sure what the "it" is. I know that I was disappointed that I was not consulted or invited or had anything to do with the '87 Congress in St. Louis... And then I remember Jimmy Neil asking me to present at the Conference in New Mexico...in '88... These are just snapshot kinds of memories. I can remember being on the phone with him and saying that "[The '88] conference is all about ethnicity and telling stories out of your culture; I don't have a lot to say about that right now." I knew Diane Wolkstein was going – that was my memory that they were going to ask her. Even though I wanted to go to New Mexico, I hadn't added that as a state at the time [but] I did not feel that was a good conference for me to go to [as a featured presenter].

I don't even know what input Jimmy Neil had for the Congress or whatever we were calling it. But I remember him telling me, "Well, what about next year? It will be in North Carolina...[with the theme of Storytelling: An Art Among Arts]" and I said, "Great. To me that fits me much better. Let's do that." And then I don't think I ever heard anything else back from him...I'm sure I was talking to him at some points during that time, but I know that he never called and said, "You know, we've decided to go in a different direction or someone else is booking it and I don't have any input"...[But I wasn't invited after all.]

During those years I have these snapshot [memories] – of me getting out of bed [*tearful*] in that house in Candler and feeling overwhelmed about Jimmy Neil. Again [it was] a tiny sliver...of my life but when it came up, it was very painful. And I'm assuming [the pain] was around – not just those Congresses 'cause that didn't mean that much to me until '87. I was upset about that [one] but I

didn't feel like it was really Jimmy Neil that was keeping me from going...⁴⁴⁰

[What pained me] was my relationship with NAPPS...But I can't tell you with specificity that, yes, I called Jimmy Neil and he said this and I said that...[But] whatever that snapshot pain for me of getting out of that bed and thinking about Jimmy Neil, had to do with me being cut out, never being asked: What do you think about this?

And I don't know if I had clarity then that I was not anywhere in the story of NAPPS... In the same breath of saying that, I always *knew* that Jimmy Neil used [a] sound bite [to tell the story of the Festival's beginnings]. And actually the sound bite was not about Jerry Clower; the sound bite was about 45 people sitting on folding chairs and hearing Ray Hicks. Because most of the time Jerry Clower was never mentioned. It was never mentioned there were a thousand people at the first National Festival on a Saturday night. It was always talked about that Sunday afternoon this tiny little crowd huddled around hearing a traditional mountain teller. That was the sound bite. And the first part of the sound bite was: journalism teacher Jimmy Neil driving with students in the backseat and Jerry Clower on the radio, and the idea coming... So I feel certain that a lot of that pain was [my] being cut out of the story, about not being given credit, and not being turned to at

⁴⁴⁰ Regan-Blake explained her feelings about being excluded from the planning of the 1987 NAPPS Conference/Congress:

[About] that Congress...[in] '87 – I thought of that as more Beth [Horner] and the people on the board then [deciding not to involve me]. And I kind of understood. I had had the reins for so long, so many people felt left out if they had not been invited to be featured when I was the artistic director. And I was hurt...that I was not invited to '87. But there was a part of me that kind of understood that (Telephone conversation with Regan-Blake on April 13, 2014. Used by permission).

all as someone who had a lineage, a history, an investment with both the festival and the national organization.

I want to... jump to another event that I also only have snapshot memories of. It was after we'd moved into our home that I live in now and like I said we moved in here April first of 1989, so it was after that... And as I'm going through this stuff for the Library of Congress,⁴⁴¹ there's a chance I will come up with a letter because I imagine it was a letter [to Jimmy Neil]⁴⁴² and not a phone conversation [that we had had.]

Let me tell you what I know for sure. Jimmy Neil came over here [to Asheville] and we had a *long* talk and it was very painful for me...I think that I was saying, "Why have I been cut out [of the NAPPS loop]?" What I remember is him telling me that – I don't remember these particular words, so I'm guesstimating on his words – basically it was that I was no longer "relevant." That the movement had gone in a different direction and I was old hat. And that I was

⁴⁴¹ The American Folklife Collection of the Library of Congress has asked to be the repository of Regan-Blake's papers.

⁴⁴² Regan-Blake said later: "I am guessing that I had written him, or possibly called him, in a lot of anger about what is s going on. I think during that time I had not been invited much [to the Festival]. I actually can't really remember that: if Barbara and I were being featured or not..." I was able to tell her the years she and Barbara were featured in the first decade: '73 (at the Sunday afternoon swap), '74, '75, '76, '77, '79 and '82. And in the second decade, they were featured in '84, '86, '90 and '92. After listening to this, she said: "I don't know that it had anything to do with whether I was being featured or not, it was much more about input on what was going on" (Telephone conversation with Regan-Blake on April 13, 2014. Used by permission).

not learning new stories. This was what he was telling me – that I was not, you know, "relevant" is the main word that comes up to me right now.⁴⁴³

In a brief talk after she read this passage of the study, Regan-Blake inserted this snapshot of memory: "I even remember that he brought to me a little calligraphy saying, 'You are a precious and fallible human being just like everyone else.' I always took that like *he* was a precious and fallible human being – not saying I was. I kept it in the bathroom for years because it gave me some solace knowing he knew he was fallible, but now I see it doesn't mean that."⁴⁴⁴ She concluded her April 13th narrative of this moment remembering, "In a sense I think [Jimmy Neil] was saying: 'I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, that you're not relevant any more. And that the movement has just gone in a different direction'."⁴⁴⁵ The assessment by Smith that Regan-Blake's work was now "irrelevant" to the Festival, the organization and the movement, was used not only to justify excluding her from the history, but also to sideline her in future Festivals. In the fifteen years that have passed since the CSP interviews took place (1999-2014), Regan-Blake has appeared as a Featured teller at the Festival only four more times. Her name has yet to appear in any of the producing organization's "histories" of the event.

Jimmy Neil Smith Weighs In on Her Exclusion

On April 17, 2014, I heard from Smith again. Though much of what he says below has been stated in Regan's narrative, it is worthwhile looking at the (unintentionally sexist) language Smith uses to express himself. Writing without guile

⁴⁴³ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on April 13, 2014. Used by permission.

⁴⁴⁴ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on April 14, 2014. Used by permission.

⁴⁴⁵ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on April 13, 2014. Used by permission.

and addressing my questions with his typical earnestness in the coded language of the dominant discourse, he acknowledges Regan-Blake's singular importance to the Festival, the NAPPS organization and the revival community. He writes:

Here's a bit of history as I know it[:] In the days leading up to the first Festival, Connie had heard about the event. She wrote me a letter that she and her cousin and co-worker Barbara Freeman were planning to attend the Festival. She has a copy of my response to her. Come one, come all! Anyone can tell a story. So, during the Telling Tales with the Masters at the Sunday afternoon segment of the Festival, both [women] told a children's story. From that point forward, Connie has always been actively engaged with the Festival, NAPPS, and the storytelling revival.

She performed as a featured teller at the second festival and has participated in every festival, either as a teller or an emcee, since (and including) the first event. She has been and remains a respected and well-loved performer and emcee. As you know, she has been (and is) a respected member of the storytelling community and one of a small group of "performance storytellers" or "professional storytellers." Further, as you know, she has been a pioneer in building the Festival, our organizations, and the storytelling revival.

In the early days, when the movement was just beginning, it was Connie (with Barbara as the Folktellers) who travelled up and down the Eastern United States (and, eventually, across America and the world), performed wherever anyone was there to listen, and promoted the National Storytelling Festival anywhere she performed or visited. No one else was as aggressively doing this

work at that point. Only Connie (with Barbara). Her promotion, along with some very early media attention, built the Festival, and as the Festival grew, the movement (the revival) grew. Connie was (and still is) an ambassador for storytelling, the Festival, and NAPPS.

As she travelled, Connie met other artists across the country, and she introduced many artists who told stories to NAPPS and the Festival. They soon were performing at the Festival. For example, Marshall Dodge and Ed Stivender. She introduced to NAPPS many of the prominent Festival performers we now know and recognize as well-loved, well-respected storytellers. In addition, Connie has served as artistic director of the Festival. Her “fingerprints” are all over the talent line-ups, especially during the first two decades of the Festival.

There have been other pioneers of the revival. The tellers. The listeners. They all have helped build the revival. But without question, Connie has done more than any single person to build the Festival attendance, the membership of NAPPS, and our network of the featured storytellers in the first and second decade of the movement. Further, Connie has been (and still is) a major voice and prominent leader in the storytelling movement.

When we first organized NAPPS in 1974 and 1975, Connie and Barbara became members of the Board of Directors—along with Doc McConnell, Kathryn Windham, Lee Pennington, Barbara Freeman, Ardi St. Clair, and me. I was chairman of the board for some ten years. And when it became appropriate for new board leadership to emerge, I stepped aside as chairman of the board and, from among the board members, Connie was chosen as the second board

chairperson. She has continued to play a major role in the leadership of NAPPS, NSA, and, now, the National Storytelling Network. After 40 years, her voice is still being heard, and her leadership is still being felt.

Connie has also been our institutional conscious [sic]. She has personally provided comfort and care to Ray Hicks and his family for years, honoring Ray's role as the "patriarch of traditional storytelling" in America and the heart, soul, and voice of the Festival and American storytelling even today, over a decade since his death.

She [with Barbara] essentially kept NAPPS alive in the early days by securing a \$10,000 gift from Mort Schindel and Weston Woods in 1980 when NAPPS's funding from the Comprehensive Employment Training Act came to an end. It was that funding secured by Connie and Barbara that allowed NAPPS to continue to operate, hire an Executive Assistant for the NAPPS board, and build a foundation for the future of the Festival, the organizations we have now, and today's storytelling movement.

But, Milbre, you know all of this. You shared some of these comments in your email below. However, I wanted to spend some time thinking and writing about Connie's role in the Festival, the organizations, and the international storytelling revival. I wanted to remind myself of the depth and breadth of her role. It has, of course, been stellar.⁴⁴⁶

In reminding himself of the depth and breadth of Regan-Blake's role, Smith mentions his first hand knowledge of her artistry only once: when he notes that she and her cousin

⁴⁴⁶ Personal email from Smith, April 17, 2014. Used by permission.

"both told a children's story" while "Telling Tales with the Masters" at the 1973 National Festival. Despite diminishing her status as an unpaid swapper of tales and a female children's entertainer, he notes her active engagement in the Festival, NAPPS and the revival "from that point forward." And regardless of his own dismissal of her work as "old hat" in the conversation with Regan-Blake in 1989, he acknowledges here that she didn't recede into oblivion as an artist, but "remains a respected and well-loved performer and emcee." Unfortunately, the role of emcee – the one she has filled for two-thirds of her years on the Festival stages – continues to be an unpaid community service stint in a Festival with a current budget of \$1,250,000.⁴⁴⁷

When Smith calls her "a pioneer" and ambassador for NAPPS and the Festival "down the Eastern United States (and eventually, across America and the world)," he acknowledges that if the American revival did have a hand in lighting storytelling revival torches abroad, that hand was Regan-Blake's. When Smith says "her 'fingerprints' are all over the talent line-ups, especially during the first two decades of the Festival," he is crediting her with the intentional inclusion of women and racially, ethnically and programmatically diverse performers (including traditional tellers) that marked her years as the unnamed, unpaid Artistic Director. And he is separating her from the intentionally Euro-American male-privileging, more commercially-driven, humorous personal narrative programming that came to be the Festival model in the years after she left the board.

⁴⁴⁷ Then ISC chair William Kennedy revealed the organization's current annual budget of \$1.25 million and the new Executive Director's salary of \$65,000 per year in "ISC leader's Salary Revealed," an article by Lynn J. Richardson in the Jonesborough newspaper the *Herald Tribune* on September 17, 2013. Accessed May 3, 2014, <http://www.heraldandtribune.com/Detail.php?Cat=LOCALNEWS&ID=61041>.

He calls her "our institutional [conscience]" in looking after the Hicks family and honoring Hicks's role as "the heart, soul, and voice of the Festival and American storytelling even today, over a decade since his death," without addressing ISC's own lack of responsiveness to the needs – and the recent deaths – of Rosa Hicks and her son, Ted, who had taken his father's place in representing "authentic" oral narrating at the Festival. He says that Regan-Blake and Freeman "essentially kept NAPPS alive in the early days by securing a \$10,000 gift from Mort Schindel," but whereas he honored Schindel for that contribution at a recent Festival, he has not found a way to publicly honor Regan-Blake or Freeman for their innumerable efforts on the event's behalf.

At that point in his e-missive, Smith repeats my questions. Then he goes on to defend Regan-Blake's exclusion from the Festival's creation myth while clinging to the sound-bite story that the Festival/organization/revival sprung fully formed from his initial impulse to bring Jerry Clower to Jonesborough in 1973:

Good questions. First of all, it seems to me that the only historical story that has been routinely told about the festival has been the event's Creation Story. You know it. The story tells about my first notion of the Festival, which was inspired by listening to a story by Jerry Clower. Connie, as you know, attended and told a story at the first Festival, but she did not play a role in the event's Creation Story. This story has been requested many, many times by members of the news media and others, and I've told the story many, many times. That's the story that has appeared over and over during the past 40 years. This Creation Story has appeared for many years (and continues to appear) on ISC's web site. It's the cornerstone, as I see it, of the narrative we tell. Beyond that, no other story, to my knowledge,

has been told repeatedly. The Creation Story probably overwhelmed any other potential narrative.⁴⁴⁸

Here the hearing-Jerry Clower-on-the-radio anecdote occludes Smith's admitted realization that Ray Hicks's telling "Jack and the Heifer's Hide" was the real moment that the first Festival was born. What he calls "the cornerstone...of the narrative we tell" is, in fact, the only institutional narrative provided by him or NAPPS/ISC in its official public statements. The "Creation Story" as Smith tells it doesn't overwhelm "any other potential narrative," it stands, in all its exclusivity, as the *only* potential narrative in the history of the Festival.

What Smith says next has echoes of "artistic people who felt...that they were being excluded":

I think it's important to note that there has been no intentional slight of Connie by the NAPPS/NSA/ISC leadership, either board or staff. So, what has occurred has been an oversight or a neglect or something that did not come to the top of the mind and did not seem "natural" to do. Why an oversight? There is no question that Connie has played a leading, even unparalleled, role in the growth of the Festival, the organizations, and the storytelling revival. But after the origination of the first Festival, there were others, in addition to Connie, who jumped in to help. You know who they are. Everyone who has served as a member of the board, from Doc McConnell to Gay Ducey to Milbre Burch to Laura Simms to Donald Davis, has contributed time and talent and money to advancing the Festival, the organizations, and storytelling revival.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*

And for artistic directors? Well, the tasks and the responsibilities were enormous. While Connie's contributions were far beyond others' contributions, an ever-growing network of many, many people emerged to make the Festival, NAPPS, and the revival a reality. Consequently, that alone likely undermined any notion of singling out Connie (or anyone) for a special place in the history of the Festival, the organizations, and the revival (even though she deserved it).

As you see in this email, I can (and do) recognize the role that Connie has played in the revival, the organizations, and the Festival. In fact, when I talk about the Festival and the growth of the revival, I often say that we had a "good marriage" years ago. Our first board had seven members. Six of the board members, including Connie, were ambassadors for us and travelled the country and the world bringing storytelling and the Festival to greater cultural awareness, and I, as the administrator, stayed home and licked the stamps. And in truth, that's how it happened. And Connie was at the forefront.⁴⁴⁹

It's fascinating to think that "while Connie's contributions were far beyond others' contributions," Smith cannot bring himself to distinguish her from the other pioneers to whom he also owes allegiance for the Festival's and organization's survival in its first two decades or since. In his mind, she remains part of a "good [group] marriage" between Smith and all seven of the members of the first NAPPS board. In this conflation of Regan-Blake and the other early board members, I read Smith's unconscious inability to give a woman her due as the aesthetic artist and community leader at the "forefront" of a

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*

mixed gender pack of pioneers because "it did not seem 'natural' to do."⁴⁵⁰ It appears as if naming Regan-Blake as a singularly important artist and community organizer would somehow diminish his accomplishments or that of anyone else who has been involved in the organization's history. He seems unable to prioritize her worth in his own lived experience.

At that point in his narrative, Smith directs his attention to (mostly undefined) developments outside the festival-based revival arena since the period covered by the CSP interviews:

And here's a side bar (but an interesting topic)[:] Around that old farm wagon in Courthouse Square in 1973, the Storytelling Revival was born, and it has spread across America and the world. But as I see it, something else has happened. During the past two decades, a New Age of Storytelling, a new narrative order, has emerged—led by new story pioneers. There has been an explosion of opportunities and possibilities for the age-old tradition of storytelling. A New England storyteller wrote this once, and I believe it. The Storytelling Revival is over, and the Story Revolution has begun. And although it was the Storytelling Revival that has given us the Story Revolution, new stories, new leadership, and new opportunities in storytelling are emerging, from the Moth to branding to web radio. Consequently, the Revolution has grown the storytelling movement but has further obscured the role that the pioneers of the Story Revolution have played.

⁴⁵⁰ Again, for the historical erasure of the efforts of strong women in an earlier masculinist backlash, see Cheryl Black, *The Women of Provincetown – 1915-1922* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

But just look at all we have inspired!⁴⁵¹

As a former NAPPS board member I am familiar with Smith's tendency toward grand and fuzzy narrative tropes. But I am unfamiliar with "the New Age of Storytelling" and "the Story Revolution" of which he speaks, for I have encountered neither expression in the revival community outside the ISC boardroom walls. Once again, Smith references but does not name a (New England) storyteller who has said something (though what exactly is unclear) that struck him as worth repeating as it somehow advances the cause to which he is deeply devoted: "maintaining our position here in Jonesborough as the 'Storytelling Capital of the World.'"⁴⁵² There remains some question as to whether or not Jonesborough has a claim to that title outside the boundaries of an intimate but devoted revival community. But even within those limited borders *positioning* Jonesborough as the "Storytelling Capital" is an achievement for which Smith still seems loath to share credit.

By the end of his narrative, Smith accepts responsibility for the neglect of Regan-Blake's contributions from NAPPS histories. He invites me into further conversation, though he also acknowledges that previous conversations with Regan-Blake herself have not produced any concrete results:

I am not trying to make excuses. I may sound like it, but I'm sincerely trying to find the answers. I truly believe the statements I have made above. But that

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁵² Smith made this statement during the ISC bankruptcy proceedings. He is quoted by Lynn J. Richardson in an article "Could International Storytelling Center Have a Buyer?" in the Jonesborough-based *Herald and Tribune* on July 12, 2011. Accessed May 3, 2014, <http://www.heraldandtribune.com/Detail.php?Cat=HOMEPAGE&ID=59432>.

doesn't make it right. I am as guilty as anyone, probably more so, in not doing more to recognize the contributions that Connie has made. But, more than that, should we not do more to recognize all of those many people across the country and the world who have made the Storytelling Revival—and the Story Revolution—a reality. The world is a better place because of them.

Milbre, what can (and should) we do? What can I do? I would welcome the opportunity to recognize Connie's contributions and leadership. Obviously, I don't have the platform I once had. Can you and I continue our conversation about this topic. I encourage you to counter anything I have said if you have other points of view that I should hear. Conversation is critical. Connie and I have had one or two similar conversations over the years, but nothing happened on my end.

Thank you, Milbre, for bringing up this "issue" to me.⁴⁵³

Smith's rhetorical markers have remained consistent for the thirty-some years I have known him. His geniality in acknowledging that a female colleague and researcher has asked him "difficult" but "good questions" and his thanking me for bringing the "issue" (in quotes) of Regan-Blake's ongoing exclusion in the NAPPS narrative to him is deeply rooted in and coded by the dominant discourse in which he was born and bred in the rolling hills of upper east Tennessee. In the face of such a female-denying discourse, it seems a miracle that any woman has performed at the National Storytelling Festival seventeen times in 41 years. Regan-Blake's experience as the second-most featured female teller at "the National" shows just how hard-won that designation was and how little it guaranteed her inclusion in the narrative of the Festival's history. When Berkley

⁴⁵³ Personal email from Smith on April 17, 2014. Used by permission.

Hudson and I drew up the list of tellers that we felt *must* be interviewed for the Cotsen Storytelling Project, hers was at the top of the sheet. We invited her to sit down at last in that metaphorical empty chair and speak into the microphone across the boundless stage of history.

Regan-Blake and Smith's Choice of New Conversation Partners

As Regan-Blake bid goodbye to the board and to the shaping of the festival and the community, she stood witness to the organization's rapid transformation (to say nothing of its negation of her contribution to its history.) Her kinship role with Smith changed as well. As she stepped away from the organization, tensions around expanding the festival talent pool, increasing the membership of NAPPS, diversifying the organization's income streams, seeking corporate sponsorships, developing new board relationships, meeting the needs of a hometown tourist industry, producing books and recordings for sale, solving the logistical challenges and expense of developing and maintaining an archive, and pursuing his own budding desire for a permanent edifice to showcase storytelling in Jonesborough year round weighed heavily on Smith.

In Regan-Blake's absence, he turned to a new conversation partner, Methodist minister, storyteller and board member Donald Davis, for advice and coping strategies. Without its foremother at the helm, family was no longer the trope that drove the NAPPS board. A corporate model – as envisioned by two men with limited experience in that area – took its place. Four years after her departure from the board, monotheistic versions of the Festival's creation story and the history of the NAPPS organization first appeared in the Festival program. The exclusion of Regan-Blake's name from this history

meant that her importance to the organization was lost to new audiences and new members of the revival community.

Around this same time Regan-Blake found a new set of conversation partners herself: what she calls "the Blue Lakers" retreat group. At the group's founding in 1987, the members included Regan-Blake and Freeman, Susan Klein, Jim May, Jon Spelman, Len Cabral, Bill Harley, Jay O'Callahan, Michael Parent, David Holt, Gwenda LedBetter, Ed Stivender, Beth Horner – and me.⁴⁵⁴ Over the years, the relationships within that group would provide connection and sustenance, support for developing work and for imaginative play, and opportunity for affirmations, challenges, growth and reflection. But first the members would have to learn each other's histories, and build a sense of trust.

In 1993 when the retreat group met in Virginia Beach, VA, Regan-Blake initiated a conversation with me, expressing her concerns about the androcentric way that the revival narrative had begun to be told. No doubt it was challenging to see some of the work she had done in weaving the fabric of the festival unwoven and reworked. But as I remember it, chiefly she was grieving that Smith no longer sought her counsel (or when

⁴⁵⁴ Dr. Joyce Ann Hancock, a writer, photographer and English Literature professor at Jefferson Community College in Louisville, Kentucky, hosted the prototype for the Blue Mountain retreat group in 1986. A protégé of folklorist Leonard Roberts, she was, for a time, the research and participants coordinator for The Appalachian Folklife Project at Berea College. She had also worked with NAPPS board member, poet and storyteller Lee Pennington, and had volunteered at his Corn Island Storytelling Festival, meeting a number of revival tellers along the way. In 1986, she held a gathering for a variety of creative artists, storytellers Jim May and Michael Parent among them. Inspired by Hancock's model, May, Jon Spelman and Susan Klein spearheaded the handpicked gathering of storytellers that became "Blue Mountain" in 1987. One year the group hosted Hancock as their guest. She died from injuries in a house fire in 1997. The Joyce Hancock Award for Creative Writing is given in her memory at Jefferson Community College.

he did, he ignored it), and that his name, and his name alone, was at the foreground in Festival PR and revival mythology.

Remembering that conversation at this writing, I know that I failed her as an empathetic listener that day. I was serving on the NAPPS board myself at the time, and my board colleagues and I were busy implementing changes – in an attempt to articulate and standardize board policies, democratize festival protocols and nationalize the organization – that were part of the second wave of tellers' self-imposed mandate. Having entered the national storytelling scene in 1983, I was untutored in the details of all that Regan-Blake had done to get the festival and the NAPPS organization through their first decade and launched into their second. As a new board member, I was too inexperienced to appreciate the feelings she was having. But, eventually, my own six years on the board, coupled with the opportunity that the Cotsen Storytelling Project provided, allowed me to return to Regan-Blake as a more compassionate and discerning listener.

During my six years of board service, I was more gadfly than sibling to Jimmy Neil Smith. After I ended my term, I had the chance to see my own determined efforts being undone by the next board, whose mandate took the organization in another direction than the one toward which my colleagues and I had been heading. Only then did I understand that Smith and the rest of the NAPPS staff were positioned to outwait any roster of board members until the time was right to move the organization back to its Jonesborough-centric beginnings. That's when I understood firsthand the melancholy that Regan-Blake expressed in seeing her efforts erased from the story the organization told itself and anyone else who would listen.

Meanwhile, as a member of an annual retreat group that included both the Folktellers, I became aware of the shifting ground that Barbara Freeman's revelatory reengagement with her religious beliefs brought to our larger group dynamics. For Regan-Blake, that shifting ground presented her with another paradigm shift: the impetus to end her twenty-year-long performing partnership.

Conclusion

The overarching theme in Regan-Blake's narrative stroll through her collection of National Storytelling Festival programs and brochures is her hard-won sense of pride in the event's history, not only during the years when she programmed it, but also for the years that followed up until the date of our 1998 interview. She clearly feels curatorial ownership in the gathering of talented tellers from a variety of performance traditions, in the Festival's attraction of interested audiences from across the nation and across its borders. She is proud of the development of a Festival-and-conference producing organization that doubled as a membership organization responsive to the needs of its members.

When the post-CSP interview questions address her experience of exclusion from not only the history but also the future of the organization she helped to shape and diversify, the overarching theme is the still-unresolved pain of an unexpected betrayal. Discovering that her place in the institutional narrative of the Festival and the NAPPS organization could be so quickly vacated, though distressing, was not a surprise to a feminist living within the patriarchal frame of American culture. But finding that her value as an artist had been deemed null and void, and that her value as a creative

consultant to Smith and his new board had been deemed irrelevant within five years of her leaving the board was as good as receiving a one-two punch from a trusted kinsman.

In the face of these changes in her relationship to the NAPPS organization, the Festival and Jimmy Neil Smith, Regan-Blake's resilience, graciousness and tenaciousness came to the fore. She survived the exclusion. She endured the professional and personal betrayal by a man who had been "like a brother" to her. And she created a place for herself at the Festival *every year*, emceeding when she was not invited as a Featured teller.

And, as the next chapter shows, despite of being told she had no future and no discernible past with NAPPS, she faced forward, located her own direction and found her path into the future. She evolved as an artist within and beyond the Folktellers duo, and came into her own as a lauded solo storyteller, a respected teacher of her craft, and a steadfast and compassionate community leader.

CHAPTER SIX: Pulling Threads from One Tapestry, Beginning Another

Introduction

After twenty-years of touring and teaching together, Regan-Blake and Freeman made a decision to disband their partnership. Diverging needs to focus on their individual callings as artists and seekers led them to begin pulling apart the threads of their joint aesthetic and business venture. This painstaking process took about two years, and left each free to follow more fully her particular passions. The first part of this chapter contains their shared narrative about this careful untangling of threads and their tandem telling of a signature piece which has its own tangled backstory. The second part of the chapter moves through and beyond the CSP interviews to highlight some of the most significant projects that Regan-Blake has pursued in going solo at midcareer.

The Tandem Tapestry

After ten years of touring (1975-1985), Regan-Blake and Freeman conceived a project that would allow them to spend more time at home in Asheville. In 1985, the Folktellers collaborated with storyteller/director John Basinger and his daughter Savannah to develop *Mountain Sweet Talk*, a fully staged two-woman play in two acts, based on original material and stories from the Folktellers' performance repertoire. They staged over 300 performances in its seven-season run from 1986-1992 at the Folk Art Center located east of Asheville, North Carolina on the Blue Ridge Parkway.⁴⁵⁵ The Folktellers released a live double album of the show on cassette in 1988.

⁴⁵⁵During the run of *Mountain Sweet Talk*, Freeman was married to her long-time sweetheart Michael Vaniman who was the technical director for the show. Her name appears as Barbara Vaniman on the 1992 *Mountain Sweet Talk* flyer found in the

Later, between 1990 and 1993, John and Savannah Basinger collaborated with the Folktellers once more to create a one-act holiday show, *Mountain Sweet Talk: Christmas at the Homeplace*. They enlisted Sheila Kay Adams and Dona Cavanagh to play two more characters in the piece and provide music for the show. It was produced at Pack Place in Asheville one year, and at a hotel near the Biltmore House another. The Folktellers released *Christmas at the Homeplace* as a cassette recording in 1992.

Then in 1995, Regan-Blake and Freeman formally ended their twenty-year performing partnership as the Folktellers. During their joint CPS interview in 1998, they told the tale of that disbanding, and then Regan-Blake spoke about her evolution and her practice as a solo performer.

Initiating the dissolution of the Folktellers and intentionally moving toward a previously unimagined solo practice involved Regan-Blake's taking stock of what the Folktellers had accomplished as a duo and what had ceased to be productive for the two women, and then beginning to envision what she wanted to do next on her own. It was a transition full of tender care in tying up the remaining threads of the partnership, expressing gratitude for what had already transpired, and believing in a promise of what was yet to be.

Untangling the Threads of the Folktellers

During their joint CSP interview Regan-Blake and Freeman detailed their coming together as a touring pair and the work they did to stitch together the quilt of the community. At the end of our collaborative conversation, I asked the two women to talk

International Storytelling Center collection of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Later, the couple parted ways, and following an annulment, she returned to using the name Barbara Freeman.

about their decision to disentangle the threads of their partnership and take their careers in two separate directions. Here's what they said:

BARBARA: How many years were we actually Folktellers?

CONNIE: Twenty. '75 until '95. Pretty amazing, huh?

BARBARA: Mm hmm.

CONNIE: ...One of the images that I had of us going solo was that we were both opening doors for each other, that there [were] a lot of other things that we would be able to do. We [had gotten] on very different paths. Barbara's religion and her spiritual life started taking a...much bigger part of the picture of her life – she can speak to that – and [she] was wanting to tell more particular kinds of stories. And I found that that wasn't the direction that I wanted to go in. It was a very difficult decision for me actually...I had never been on stage [alone] except to emcee. In those twenty years, maybe three times I'd been on stage by myself. I had never told stories [at festivals] by myself.

Barbara and I are connected in lots of ways. We're family, first cousins, and we have always been such good friends. And we're partners in this whole new adventure, and traveled all over the world together, and worked so closely together. We were connected on lots of different layers...

BARBARA: [Including] a recording company.

CONNIE: Right (CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 101-102).

As a duo, the Folktellers had released several (long-playing, vinyl), award-winning albums and VHS tapes. According to Regan-Blake, Folk-Legacy's Sandy and Caroline Paton recorded their first two, live albums: a concert of children's stories, "Tales to Grow

On" and one for older audiences, "White Horses and Whippoorwills." But the Patons were collectors, not commercial record producers. They wanted to release the recordings without editing, and the performers did not agree.

After this aesthetic stalemate, Mort Schindel of Weston Woods stepped in and bought the material for "Tale to Grow On" from the Patons. Lex Cochrane, Schindel's sound engineer, edited it for them; Weston Woods then distributed the Folktellers' first album for children in 1983. Next, Regan-Blake and Freeman followed suit, buying the recording of "White Horses and Whippoorwills" back from the Patons, forming their own record label, Mama T Artists,⁴⁵⁶ and releasing it themselves the same year.

The audio-recordings in their joint catalog included: "Tales to Grow On" (1983); "White Horses and Whippoorwills" (1983); "Chillers" (1983), a live double cassette recording of their two-act play, "Mountain Sweet Talk" (1988); "Stories from the Road" (1992), and "Christmas at the Home Place: Stories and Songs" (1992).⁴⁵⁷ In 1994, the Folktellers and WSJK-TV, a PBS station in Knoxville, Tennessee, coproduced two original videos for distribution: "Pennies, Pets and Peanut Butter – Stories for Children told by the Folktellers" and "Storytelling: Tales and Techniques by the Folktellers."⁴⁵⁸ That same year, Regan-Blake's telling of "Charlie's Truce Flag" was featured on *A*

⁴⁵⁶ As befits two women artists, their record label sports the nickname of a female forebear, their maternal grandmother Regina "Rena" Daniels Freeman, known as "Mama T."

⁴⁵⁷ In 2006, Regan-Blake and Freeman re-released the material from the Folktellers' first two cassettes as a CD: "Stories for the Road and To Grow On – The Folktellers' Award-winning Classics;" it was designated an American Library Association Notable Recording.

⁴⁵⁸ In 2007, Freeman and Regan-Blake re-released their VHS tapes as a single DVD entitled, "Storytelling Tales for Children and Techniques for Teachers."

Storytelling Treasury – Tales Told at the 20th Anniversary National Storytelling Festival

(Jonesborough: NAPPS, 1994), an audio anthology selected and arranged by Carol Birch⁴⁵⁹ for NAPPS.⁴⁶⁰

The Folktellers' tandem performances were memorialized elsewhere on video (and in print) as well. Their telling of "Jazzy Three Bears"⁴⁶¹ was excerpted in Steven Kostant's 60-minute documentary *By Word of Mouth...Storytelling in America* shot at the tenth annual National Storytelling Festival in 1982. The film also captured snippets of

⁴⁵⁹ Storyteller, librarian and storytelling studies scholar Carol Birch was the artistic director for Weston Woods' Storytelling Circle catalog and directed recordings independently as well. (She directed my first album *Touch Magic, Pass It On! Jane Yolen Stories* for Weston Woods in 1987, and my second album *Metamorphosis and Dragonfield* on my own label, Kind Crone, in 1988). She has her own catalog of recordings and first told at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. She was welcomed into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 1998.

⁴⁶⁰ In the years since she stopped touring with Barbara Freeman, Regan-Blake has released three more audio albums; both of the new solo albums have won awards: "Chilling Ghost Stories – Haunting Tales for Adults and Teens" – formerly "Spirits Walk" – (1999); "Tales of Appalachia – Stories and Chamber Music: The Kandinsky Trio with storyteller Connie Regan-Blake" (2004) features Regan-Blake's retelling of "Wicked John and the Devil" as "The Cantankerous Blacksmith," plus a nonmusical telling of "Big Jack, Little Jack;" "Dive Into Stories – A Telling Performance" emphasizes true-life stories and traditional tales with humor and heart (2006).

Since recording and playback digital technologies have been in constant flux in the last two decades, many storytellers have pulled back on their CD production. Still sales of audio (and print) products – and now Mp3 and Kindle-type products – continue to provide an important revenue stream for storytellers whose "pull down" from performances and workshops still tends to be modest by today's income-earning standards.

⁴⁶¹ The documentary film *By Word of Mouth* captures several versions of the "Jazzy Three Bears" story being told at the 1982 National Storytelling Festival. I learned one myself from a camp counselor in a park in Atlanta, Georgia in 1978 and still perform it today. Twenty years later in Pasadena, California, African American storyteller Leslie Perry told me he thought it was taken from a jazz recording he'd heard in the forties. In the age of the Internet, I was eventually able to find my way to Ray Ellington's LP recording of "The Three Bears" from 1948. You can find it on iTunes (as I did) or hear it here, accessed April 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFKIHiGschA>.

interviews with the tellers at the festival.⁴⁶² In 1988 the duo's telling of "No News" was included in the *American Storytelling Series* (Volume Five)⁴⁶³ distributed on VHS by H.W. Wilson.⁴⁶⁴

The Duo Continues their Narrative of Separation

In the next section, I include my comments during the conversation, a three-way interaction among longtime women friends. Throughout the CSP interviews, I was an active listener, cuing my interest in the conversation with affirmative responses, and, in this case, acknowledging that I had been a participant in earlier conversations. Regan-Blake begins again:

CONNIE: Once I did realize that it was going to be better for us to go solo, then it took several years to untwine a lot of those [threads]... We had never operated in anger of "OK, we're not going to be partners anymore. Let's just forget this." It [took] a very careful tending to. When I look back on it, I think that's my nature,

⁴⁶² Upon its release, *By Word of Mouth* was distributed by NAPPS, A Gentle Wind, and Appalshop.

⁴⁶³ David Holt's musical retelling of "Barney McCabe," the cante fable that Guy Carawan collected from Janie Hunter which Regan-Blake mentions performing, is on Volume Five of the *American Storytelling Series* as well.

⁴⁶⁴ Learned from Marshall Dodge and used with his blessing, the Folktellers' version of "No News" was included along with two other tales from their shared repertoire – "Old Dry Frye," and "Two White Horses" – in a print anthology, *Homespun – Tales from America's Favorite Storytellers*, edited by Jimmy Neil Smith (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988), 26-44. It appeared in print again in *Best-Loved Stories Told at the National Storytelling Festival* (Little Rock: August House, 1991), 217-218. Their story entitled "Santa Visits the Moes" is found in *Ready to Tell Tales*, edited by David Holt and Bill Mooney (Little Rock: August House, 1994), 184-187. The Folktellers acknowledge "Santa Visits the Moes" as an adaptation of an Appalachian joke more widely known as "The Twist Mouth Family." Another version called "The Snooks Family" is included in *Juba This and Juba That*, edited by Virginia A. Tashjian (Little Brown and Col, 1969).

to attend to details, and...in that unraveling I tried to attend to as many details as I could too. [We] talked through a lot of things. We kept trying to see if it could work. But I really felt Barbara's total focus and path was so different from mine that we needed to not be partners anymore. Anything you'd like to add to that?

BARBARA: Yeah, I think that's well verbalized. I had gone over to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia,⁴⁶⁵ and it just literally changed my whole life...

CONNIE: ...That [change] was...the impetus...at that particular time for dissolving Folktellers and going out on our own. But I think that that was really our path anyway...I feel that strongly for myself, that it was meant to be that I be a solo teller, and I'm assuming that that's for Barbara too...I look at it as a very positive thing...There are certain things that I know that I could never have done in partnership...Even though it was scary and it was hard and it was unimaginable. For several years...I couldn't imagine us not being partners. But as [I] kept moving closer to it – by the Spring of '95 is when we really started doing our own work – by then, it was very clear to me that it was a wonderful gift to both of us to be able to pursue some of these things on our own.

⁴⁶⁵ According to <http://www.medjugorje.org> (accessed online 2 April 2014):

Since 1981, in a small village named Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, The Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing and giving messages to the world. She tells us that God has sent her to our world and, these years she is spending with us are a time of Grace granted by God. In her own words she tells us, *"I have come to tell the world that God exists. He is the fullness of life, and to enjoy this fullness and peace, you must return to God"*. Since the apparitions began in 1981, millions of people of all faiths, from all over the world, have visited Medjugorje and have left spiritually strengthened and renewed.

That was certainly true for Barbara Freeman.

BARBARA: It was. It was freedom...

MILBRE: Mm hmm.

BARBARA: You know? Because we'd find ourselves backstage and Connie saying, "Now, don't mention anything [*laughing*] about Jesus... This is a paid, public performance, and... stuff like that." And I'd say, "Well, please don't tell the horror stories to where people's hearts might be moved in a different way toward thinking about [darkness]." Here was my heart's desire... not that I would get up and give a sermon, you understand, although I probably would have loved to, but I knew better than that. But Connie... was in the mood to set a mood, and I was in a mood to set a mood [*laugh*]...

CONNIE: They were different moods.

BARBARA: ...the moods weren't the same.

CONNIE: [*laugh*]

BARBARA: ...My whole focus was on the things of heaven, all of a sudden. It's hard to be in a secular performance and have your heart set in a different place... It just wasn't working comfortably for either one of us. Although we held each other so dear that... we hated to say anything to [upset the other]... I would be in prayer that a child would ask a question like "What is your favorite story?" which they pretty much always do. And then I could say, "My favorite story is about *The Three Trees*⁴⁶⁶ and [*laugh*] one of 'em ends up being the manger, and all this stuff." I would get in anything I could.

⁴⁶⁶ Angela Elwell Hunt, *The Three Trees – A Traditional Folktale* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1989). This is one version of a Christian legend from Lebanon. The protagonists are three trees: one supplies wood for an animal's feeding trough or

CONNIE: And my prayer was that that question wasn't [*laughing*] asked.

BARBARA: [*laugh!*] [*slaps hands*]

CONNIE: So we were [both] sending [prayers] up.

BARBARA: Yeah, we were praying a lot [*laughing*] during this period of time.

[*laugh*]

CONNIE: ...One time, Barbara's prayers would be answered...

BARBARA: That's right.

CONNIE: [Another] time mine would be answered...

MILBRE: Depending on whose business day it was?

BARBARA: That's right! [*laugh*]

CONNIE: It probably was [*laugh*]...(CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 102-106).

I asked if both women felt that separating their performance careers had provided opportunities to find audiences for new work that they were doing at the time of the interviews (in 1998), of if they had found their ways to different audiences than the ones they had built as the Folktellers. Their perspectives differed on this:

BARBARA: I guess, no, I think we still have pretty much the same audience, don't we?

CONNIE: I think it's broadened; for me, it's definitely broadened.

MILBRE: Uh huh. Uh huh.

CONNIE: Probably, would you say?

BARBARA: Yeah, well, I definitely do a lot more church groups and stuff like that.

manger; one supplies wood for a fishing boat, and one becomes a cross. Thus, each tree participates in a notable chapter in the story of the Christ.

CONNIE: Yeah.

MILBRE: Right, settings where you get to tell the stories you're interested in telling?

BARBARA: Yeah. What I'm actually paid to and asked to do: [tell] wholesome family stories and mention Jesus as many times as you can. That's...

CONNIE: [*laugh*]...That's heaven, right?

BARBARA: That is, that's got [*laughing*] to be heaven...

CONNIE: For you. [*laugh*]

BARBARA: [*laugh*] It is. I do that a lot more. But still [I do] the same old, same olds...

CONNIE: ...Both of us still...

BARBARA: ...festivals and stuff.

CONNIE: ...kept the core of the same performance areas that we were doing... It just got bigger. We [also] started doing other kinds of things (CSP/CRB

Transcript 1, pages 106-108).

Ending on a Storied Note: "No News"

In the year before this archived conversation, the duo had done a "reunion" concert at the 1997 National Storytelling Festival, finding that their tandem performance skills had not left them. Knowing that, at the end of the joint CSP interview Berkley Hudson asked the two to perform a short story on tape. They chose "No News or What Killed the Dog":

CONNIE: This is a story that Marshall Dodge gifted us with.⁴⁶⁷ And we always like to tell it...[and] remind people if they've been on a trip, been away from home for a while, and if they're wondering if anything's happened while they've been away. The story addresses that. And it's called "No News" or...

TOGETHER: "What Killed the Dog."

CONNIE: [as heard on] Edison Records...⁴⁶⁸

BARBARA: ...as gifted to us, like Connie said, by Marshall Dodge.

CONNIE: "A certain Southern lady was returning home after recuperating in the mountains for three months."

BARBARA: "My friend..."

CONNIE: "Georganna..."

BARBARA: "...met me at the railroad station platform. 'Sit down here, girlfriend.

[*laugh*] Has there been any news while I've been away?'"

CONNIE: "No, no news."

⁴⁶⁷ As he told the Folktellers, Marshall Dodge had learned "No News" from a 1908 recording by vaudevillian Nat M. Wills on Edison Records. According to Regan-Blake, Dodge was telling the story as a monologue (as Wills had done) when the Folktellers first heard it. Later, Dodge and his performing partner Robert Bryan adapted it, and recorded a more terse version, more suited to "Down east Humor." Dodge and Bryan's tandem telling (which Regan-Blake had never heard) is on *The Best of Bert and I ...1958-2008 – Celebrating 50 Years of Stories from Down East* released as a special commemorative edition (Yarmouth: Islandport Press, Inc., 2008). The first *Bert and I* album by Dodge and Bryan was originally recorded at Yale and pressed into vinyl by RCA Victor's Custom branch.

⁴⁶⁸ This reference to "Edison Records," then is an attribution to Dodge's source – the Nat M. Wills' recording, which has virtually the same text as the one the Folktellers use. Thus, the Folktellers simultaneously do their duty in crediting their source, while also tipping their hats to Marshall Dodge for pointing them toward that source.

BARBARA: "No news? Surely something must have occurred in my absence. I've been gone for most nearly three months! And I am anxious for any little of news you might have."

CONNIE: "Oh, well, since you mentioned it..."

BARBARA: "I knew it."

CONNIE: "...of course, it don't amount to much, but since you've been away, your dog died."

BARBARA: "My dog died. "

CONNIE: "Yeah, he went over and ate some of the burnt horse flesh and that's what killed the dog."

BARBARA: "Burnt horse flesh?"

CONNIE: "Well, see, after the barn burned down, that burned up all of the cows and horses. When the fire cooled off, the dog went over and ate some of the burnt horse flesh, and that's what killed the dog."

BARBARA: "My barn burned down?! How did my barn burn down?"

CONNIE: "Oh, it was a spark from the house. See it flew over, lit on the roof of the barn, burned down the barn, burned up all the cows and horses; the fire cooled off, the dog went over and ate some of the burnt horse flesh, and that's what killed the dog."

BARBARA: "A ssspark! From the house!?"

CONNIE: "Oh, yes, now, that's completely burned down."

BARBARA: [*trembling voice*] "Why, how did my house burn down?!"

CONNIE: "It was...those candles caught onto the curtains there, shot up the side of the wall, burned down the house, spark on the roof of the barn..."

BARBARA: "Candles!"

CONNIE: "...burned down the barn, burned—"

BARBARA: "Candles! Georganna, I don't have any candles in my house! I don't even allow [candles] – How did candles get in my house?!"

CONNIE: [*snap*] "Oh, they was around the coffin."

BARBARA: [*hushed voice*] "The coffin? Who died?"

CONNIE: "Well, now, since you've been away, your mother-in-law died."

BARBARA: "My mother-in-law? How did she die?!"

CONNIE: "Well, some folks say it was from the shock of hearing that your husband ran off with the choir leader. But other than that, there ain't been no news."

BARBARA: [*in a chastened voice*] "May all your news be good news"

(CSP/CRB Transcript 1, pages 88-90).

On that note, with an invocation of their mentor and friend Marshall Dodge, and a tribute to their twenty years as touring partners, the joint interview with Freeman and Regan-Blake came to an end.

Unpacking the Story behind a Shared Signature Piece

Though I have watched videos of Marshall Dodge, and listened to *Bert and I* recordings, I never saw him perform live on stage, alone or with his performing partner Robert Bryan. Over the years, I have listened with interest to the contrast between the Dodge/Bryan version and the one the Folktellers share, which I have heard in person and

on audio and video recordings. On the *Bert and I* recording, Dodge and Bryan's telling is extremely terse, and since it's a studio recording, they are speaking into a Stygian silence, not unlike the quietude found in a taciturn Down East audience.⁴⁶⁹ As in the Folktellers' adaptation, this cumulative tall tale begins with the insistence of a narrator (in this case, Virgie) that there is no news to report to his friend, who's returning from an absence during which he was under doctor's orders to receive no word from home.

Virgie says there is no news – except that his friend's dog has died. What follows is Virgie's litany of related catastrophes spiraling from the dog's death (from eating some of the burnt horse flesh) through the burning of the friend's barn (and the perishing of all the cows and horses within it), the conflagration of the friend's house, and the death of his mother-in-law over shock from the news that his wife has run away with the stable-boy – but beyond that, "there ain't been no news." As told by Dodge and Bryan, the tale lasts one minute and eight seconds.

I was trying to determine where Dodge and Bryan might have gotten the story, but attribution for the thirty-four tales (including "No News") on *The Best of Bert and I* is iffy. The liner notes state that "Dodge and Bryan...[use] original material, draw

⁴⁶⁹ The minimalist version of "No News" by Dodge and Bryan captures the unflappable and concise nature of the Maine characters that they are both lampooning and celebrating. The lack of audience on their recording also captures the Maine aesthetic of stoic listening to even the most outrageous tall tale. As storyteller Michael Parent, a native of Lewiston, Maine, puts it: "After telling a story that is meant to be funny, you might hear someone say, 'It was all I could do not to bust out laughing.'" To Down Easters, that's a compliment.

inspiration from existing stories and storytellers, and essentially establish the dry Yankee humor template that would be used again and again across New England."⁴⁷⁰

The Folktellers' feminized adaptation of the tandem tale transplants it to the South. They stage the conversation between a "certain Southern lady...returning home after recuperating in the mountains for three months" (narrated by Freeman), and her friend, "Georganna" (narrated by Regan-Blake). Freeman's expressive face and comic timing, Regan-Blake's unflappable, deadpan delivery, and a growing (and oft-repeated) refrain of all that has gone wrong contribute much to the telling. By these means, the length of the story is doubled and tripled (on their audio and video recordings respectively) beyond the timing of the one delivered on *Bert and I*.

Having a woman tell a mother-in-law joke – her death, in this version, is attributed to "the shock of hearing that [the protagonist's] husband ran off with the choir leader" – ups the politically incorrect ante of the story. On the 1988 American Storytelling Series video of the story, Freeman's face and demeanor reveal a thinly veiled distaste for the mother-in-law, playing to a dominant discourse about the power of a mother-in-law to cause trouble in a household. Interestingly, when the duo told the tale during their joint CSP interview in 1998, Freeman abstains from making a disdainful face when discussing the woman's unexpected demise. Even so, the feminized tale remains problematic: for, economically speaking, when the husband ran off with another woman,

⁴⁷⁰ Northeast Historic Film's release, "A Downeast Smile-In," combines three original episodes of a television series featuring Dodge, produced by Maine Educational Television in 1970. None of the episodes features "No News," but the voice-over at the top of each episode addresses (briefly) the origins of the tales within. Without reference to particular stories, Dodge indicates that some were found in books; some he heard from others, and some he made up. In the end-credits, a list of names (including Robert Bryan) appears to identify some of the narrators who inspired him, though none is connected to a particular tale.

he may have taken access to the bank account with him, further ruining the "certain Southern lady."

In both Dodge/Bryan's and Freeman/Regan-Blake's renditions, the owner of a house, a barn, horses, cattle and a dog (and the presumed supporter of a fickle spouse and a faint-hearted mother-in-law) is returning from a treatment of some kind, possibly a "rest cure" due to the stresses these various components of a full life (and bank account) bring with them. Without explaining why, the rich person who loses everything is depicted as something of a dupe, somehow deserving of this preposterous series of unfortunate events. And, strangely, the narrator of these disasters, a "friend" – presumably of the same socio-economic status – seems to take no notice of the effect these accumulating losses may have on his or her companion. As a result, one wonders what the true nature of their relationship is, or where in that relationship, or in previous behaviors by the landowner character, one can locate the karmic motivation for a comeuppance of great proportion.

The answer can be found in another of the tale's variants. Thirty years ago, having heard the Folktellers' "No News," I came across "Old Master and Okra," an African American version of the story set in the pre-Civil War South in Harold Courlander's collection, *Terrapin's Pot of Sense*.⁴⁷¹ Regarding the context of this version of the tale, the online Georgia Encyclopedia reminds us:

⁴⁷¹ Harold Courlander, "Old Master and Okra", *Terrapin's Pot of Sense* (New York: Henry, 1957), 76-79. The year the book was published, the *Kirkus Review* (November 1, 1957) praised the collection in terms that capture the times (and embody the art of the backhanded compliment):

These easy-going fables of the American Negro should satisfy that circle who enjoyed Harold Courlander's earlier collections, culled from people of other lands. Dialect here is approached very judiciously. Since the sentences are simple and

The only people to come to the United States against their will, enslaved Africans nevertheless made major contributions to southern folk culture. Representing a variety of language and tribal groups, they were brought mainly from a crescent of west-central Africa marked by Senegal at its north and Angola at its south. Southern speech incorporates such African words as goober (the folk name for peanut, from the Kimbundu word *nguba*), gumbo (from the Tshiluba word for

short and the thought is expressed clearly, the regional Southern dialect should not obtrude and will probably amuse. Animal stories, tall tales, sly humorous encounters and battles of wit add up to a "pot of sense", in feeling a mixture of Aesop, hominy grits and Uncle Remus (<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/harold-courlander-4/terrapins-pot-of-sense/> accessed online April 3, 2014).

Courlander, a novelist, folklorist and anthropologist, made several trips to the American South, collecting folk music and folklore in the 1940s and 50s. In the fifties, he did fieldwork in Alabama, collecting blues songs, spirituals and stories. A prolific writer, he studied African, Caribbean, African American and Native American cultures; his fieldwork outside the United States took him to Indonesia, Ethiopia, West Africa, Haiti and Cuba. His most famous novel was *The African* (New York: Henry Holt, 1967).

When Alex Haley published *Roots The Saga of an American Family* nine years after *The African*, it contained numerous passages from Courlander's less well-known book. In the spring of 1977 Courlander sued Haley, and the judge noted that there was definitely copying from the older text to the new one. The two writers settled out of court the following year, and Haley issued a statement of regret that materials from *The African* unintentionally found their way into *Roots*. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Haley was honored at the 1986 National Storytelling Festival. Though his collected folktales fueled the repertoire of storytellers from one American coast to the other, Courlander never received recognition from the NAPPS organization.

In 1994 I contracted with Courlander to adapt and record "Sweet Misery," a Haitian story he collected on my audio-recording *The World is the Storyteller's Village* (Pasadena: Kind Crone Productions, 1994). Courlander was 86 years old when we negotiated a five-year, renewable contract for our licensing agreement; he died two years later. But may we all live so optimistically.

During our April 9th dissertation debrief, Regan-Blake mentioned that Courlander's work was also important to her. She tells the title story from Courlander's collection, *The Fire on the Mountain and Other Stories from Ethiopia and Eritrea* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995). Her 2012 NSN conference plenary session references to "fire-keepers" as people who influence our lives by tending to us even at a distance are grounded in that tale.

okra), chigger (the Wolof word for small flea), and juke (also Wolof, meaning disorderly)." (<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/folklife-overview> accessed online 3 April 2014).

The site notes, too, that okra, a heat- and drought-resistant plant that originated in Africa, was probably brought to the America on slave ships transporting human cargo. Naming the trickster/fool in this folktale after such a plant evokes the hardy resilience of a proud and canny people, who had to reframe their lives as captives while living in a hostile, new environment.

In the version of the story that Courlander collected, Old Master's "number-one slave...Okra," is left in charge of things when the slave-owner goes to New Orleans on business. A litany of disasters ensues, paralleling the ones in "No News": Old Master's hunting dog, oxen, horses, pasture, cotton field, wood lot, and home are all lost due to a conflagration set off by Okra's efforts to cook himself some food in the Master's kitchen. In this variant, there is no dead mother-in-law, and no runaway wife or husband. But, Okra discloses at the end, the rest of the enslaved field hands have left the ruins of the plantation, having "all sold out for Michigan" – and freedom.

When the returning plantation owner inquires, "Well, Okra, how'd things go while I away," his caretaker first answers "fine, just fine" – a figure of speech modeled after one of the Master's own expressions in their exchange (77). Once the full truth of the situation has been revealed in several short bursts, Old Master asks: "Why didn't you come right out with it? Why [did] you tell me everything was fine?" to which the seemingly deferential Okra replies: "Captain, I'm sorry if I didn't tell it right...Just wanted to break it to you easy."

When the balance of power is upended between two *unequal* characters, and the plantation owner's fortunes are toppled by the conscious incompetence of his enslaved caretaker,⁴⁷² the trickster theme at the heart of this tale is more visibly manifested. Themes and motifs of this sort occur concurrently in various locales without any contact between sources. But since Dodge and Bryan made their first recording the year after Courlander's book was published, I wondered if they could have seen his Southern version and adapted it to their purposes as Down East humorists. Thus, the Folktellers may, in fact, have brought this version of the venerable tale back home. As I was to learn, my theory was in the neighborhood of the truth.

During a telephone call on April 9th, Regan-Blake told me that she had only heard Dodge tell the story of "No News," as a monologue; to this day she has never heard the version he and Bryan recorded together. That's when she mentioned that Dodge had learned it from a 1908 recording⁴⁷³ of vaudevillian Nat M. Wills on Edison Records.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Another example of coding, as noted by Radner and Lanser.

⁴⁷³ The archived 1908 recording "No News or What Killed the Dog" by Nat M. Wills (on Edison Records) can be heard on the Library of Congress website at: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/nrpb/registry/nrpb-masterlist.html>, accessed April 11, 2014. The notes read:

This recording captured a gifted monologist at his best and became one of the most popular performances on early records. The "No News" monologue, with its roots in oral tradition, was one of vaudeville's most famous and often-copied routines. The monologue unfolds as a piecemeal report by a servant to his master who recently returned from a trip, assuring him that there is nothing new to report from home, except that his dog has died. Nat M. Wills displays masterful comic timing as he slowly reveals, in an escalating hierarchy of domestic disasters, the events that led up to the dog's demise. *Selected for the 2008 registry.*

⁴⁷⁴ In 1877, before he turned his attention to the electric light, Thomas Edison invented the phonograph for recording and playing back sound. Ten years later, Edison lab turned its attention back to perfecting the phonograph and the wax cylinders used for recording. Its work pioneered the modern record industry, which has continued to evolve over the last century. Edison Records went out of business in 1929.

Regan-Blake illuminated another mystery I had been trying to solve because my research indicated that Edison Records went out of business in 1929, long before Dodge and Bryan were pressing their first custom vinyl record in the late fifties.

Having now heard the Wills' recording, I recognize it as the text on which the Folktellers base their performance. Besides making it a tandem story, the women have changed one other important aspect of the monologue: Wills recounts the conversation between a cultured Euro-American businessman and his dialect-speaking African American servant. Regan-Blake went on to say that in those early days, Dodge also performed the monologue as Will did, Southern Black dialect and all. Once a friendship had developed between the two of them, Regan-Blake told Dodge that as a Southerner she was offended by his use of the accent, as well as the relationship depicted in the monologue. That's why she and Freeman made it a conversation between two friends instead (resulting in the dramaturgical problem mentioned above).

Regan-Blake said, too, that her encounter with Dodge's telling of the monologue "No News" had been a defining moment for her regarding the use of any accent that was not her native tongue. In fact, she tells her workshop students: "no matter how good you think your Cajun is, if you wouldn't use it in Louisiana, don't use it in New York."⁴⁷⁵ During our April conversation, Regan-Blake told me that she had never heard Dodge tell his tandem version with Robert Bryan. She did not know that the men tell it as a conversation between two laconic friends (which also omits the master/servant relationship) until I told her so. She learned belatedly that by accepting Dodge's gift of the story, she had offered him something in return: a strategy for sharing the story

⁴⁷⁵ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on April 9, 2014. Used by permission.

without perpetuating its origins in racialized dialect humor. Thus the story behind the story of "No News" became a dramaturgical call and response between researcher and subject, taking the two of us across the borders of gender, culture and memory.⁴⁷⁶

A New Cloth Interwoven with Threads of Thankfulness

In a later CSP interview, Regan-Blake called another of her mentors to mind. To honor the generosity of spirit and unstoppable wellspring of mountain tales that Ray Hicks offered Regan-Blake in her early years with Freeman, his importance as a mentor throughout her education as a teller and collector of stories, and her continued reliance on him as a resource when she became a solo performer, she invoked Hicks this way:⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ In her notes to me on an earlier draft of this chapter, Joan N. Radner writes: I believe this is a narrative with a far wider diaspora than you suggest here. When I was in elementary school, French class often included poems and songs we got to memorize and perform. I remember snatches of a French folksong, a dialogue between a servant and "Madame la Marquise" (note the servant-master dynamics, same here as in the Courlander), in which the servant's repeated lines play down the seriousness of the increasing linked disasters ("Un incident, une betise, la mort de votre jument grise...") and end always in the refrain (equivalent of Okra's "fine") "Mais, chere Madame, Madame la Marquise, tout va tres bien, tout va tres bien!" It's virtually the same plot. I can document the French version back a good 60 years and it was old then.

Radner's comments on my manuscript included these links to a text and a performance of the folksong she remembered:

<http://gauterdo.com/ref/tt/tout.va.tres.bien.html>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UJlxqsVLtU>.

⁴⁷⁷ In 2002, Regan-Blake published "From Another Time: The Legacy of Ray Hicks" in *Storytelling Magazine*. She updated the article online following Hicks's death in April of 2003:

Even after his death, Ray Hicks is still recognized as a master storyteller and mentor. His reputation reaches around the globe. Here in the United States, he is known as a "National Treasure." In 1983, he received the prestigious Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Ray and Rosa were brought to Washington, DC for the ceremonies. It was quite a trip. Ray rode his first escalator and got lost in the fancy hotel. He remembered with a wink, "that revolving door, took me two days to get out" ("From Another Time" revised on <http://www.rayhicks.com/another-time.htm> Accessed April 3, 2014.)

[Robert Isbell wrote] *The Last Chivaree*, a book...about Ray.⁴⁷⁸ He did copious [research]. Several times that I would go up to visit Ray and Rosa, Robert would be there and was introduced to me as someone that was writing some stuff about Ray. Several years later...I read that book. I've known Ray since 1973. And I've spent a lot of time with him and Rosa up at their home; he's been here at my home and at the Asheville Storytelling Festival and also at NAPPS every year. I always insist on emceeing Ray's sessions at [NAPPS]. So I've spent a lot of time with him. But reading that book, I learned so much that I didn't know.

I had heard stories about how hard of a time it was, living in the mountains back then. But I had no concept of not having shoes and it was wintertime and you had to walk if you wanted to go to school. Not having enough ...money, not having enough food, and in the wintertime, almost freezing from not having enough wood.⁴⁷⁹ That's why if you go to Ray's house now, you see wood stacked up all the way around. He has a loop-around porch, and all the way around there's wood. Sometimes people think it's kind of silly to see all of that wood in the middle of summer. But once you know...Ray was only 10 years old [at the time] – but the whole family almost froze to death...you understand why he wants to not be without wood. In reading that book and over the years of knowing Ray

⁴⁷⁸ Robert Isbell, *The Last Chivaree – The Hicks Family of Beech Mountain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴⁷⁹ Ray Hicks's lived experience parallels that of his folktale avatar Jack in the mountain Märchen "Jack and the North West Wind" in the collection edited by Richard Chase, *The Jack Tales* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 47-57. That's why Ray had such authority in telling those stories; he *was* Jack.

and Rosa, I think one of the things that I'm so struck with is their incredible generosity.

I mean Ray is what, in some ways, we would call a superstar in the storytelling world – certainly the patriarch of southern Appalachian traditional storytelling...Still, Ray tells the story, as you're sitting right across from him, the same as if he's up on stage and at Jonesborough, Tennessee, telling in a tent in front of 1500 people. He is so much himself, and to me, he embodies the idea of being present in the moment...For me, on my own path right now, that's really what my life is about, is staying in the moment – staying present, moment to moment...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 24-27).

An Unanticipated Collaboration with the Kandinsky Trio

Unraveling the Folktellers' tandem touring life was no simple matter, but the careful way in which she did it left Regan-Blake without regrets. Here's how she put it:

I [had] started that long process of unraveling all the ways that [Barbara and I] were connected...It was quite a daunting task ...But I took great care in that unraveling so that threads wouldn't be snapped, but rather gently taken apart so that everything was intact and whole...in its own way...I had already told Barbara that I felt we needed to not be doing this Folkteller thing anymore...[but] we had bookings for over a year out in front of us, and I was very committed to doing all of those...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 28).

As she began to contemplate a solo career, Ray Hicks's example, his own willingness to try something new, and his timeless repertoire of tales would nudge Regan-Blake in a direction that she had not expected to go. And "Wicked John and the

Devil" – the story Hicks told to her and her cousin in the late afternoon following the first National Storytelling Festival – would become an integral part of an unanticipated opportunity. She recalls:

I had put that [idea of my going solo] out there in the world...[and] within a month, [I] got a phone call from a chamber music trio called the Kandinsky Trio.⁴⁸⁰ They were based...at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. They and their agent had had this wonderful idea...to get a composer to write original music to a traditional story...[that] would be told on stage with the trio playing. And I was chosen [to tell it]. It [would be]...a little over two years in the process of putting it together, so it was perfect timing. By the time we were ready to roll on it, I had already been on my own for several months.

It was very much a collaborative project between the five of us: the composer, myself, and the trio [who play]...piano, cello, and violin...[They are] world-class musicians, people that have devoted their lives to their music...The composer⁴⁸¹ – [Mike Reid] graduated from...Penn State [at] State College and

⁴⁸⁰ The Kandinsky Trio, comprised of Elizabeth Bachelder (piano), Benedict Goodfriend, (violin), and Alan Weinstein (cello), has established itself as one of America's foremost chamber ensembles. Their performances have been featured on National Public Radio's *Performance Today*, and aired on other radio and television programs.

⁴⁸¹ Mike Reid has composed more than 30 top ten country and pop hits, and was named ASCAP's Songwriter of the Year. He wrote Ronnie Milsap's hit single "Stranger in my House," which won a 1983 Grammy for Best Country Song. In 1992, he composed the score for "Quilts," a modern dance choreographed by Andrew Krichels and Donna Rizzo for Tennessee Dance Theatre. The three shared the Tennessee Governor's Award for the Arts for "Quilts." At this writing, he has composed a second piece for the Kandinsky Trio. For more see: <http://mike-reid.com/Bio.html> accessed online 2 April 2014.

was a football hero...[and an] NFL rookie-of-the-year. He played professional football...for the Cincinnati team... At the height of his playing...he decided to stop... because he had always loved the piano and he wanted to be sure that his hands weren't injured. He started writing music and...moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and went on to write music for Bonnie Raitt, the Judds, Willie Nelson. He's won...Grammys...[Later he] started composing classical music. He was...chosen to do the composition...and I was chosen to do the storytelling... [We] started having phone conversations and sending tapes back and forth, talking about possibilities, with the trio involved...too. (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 28-29).

The Collaborative Process: Trial and Error

Regan-Blake recounts how the trio, the composer and the storyteller prepared to meet one another – and their audiences – exactly where they were by choosing an accessible tale as the bridge between two art forms:

We finally... came...around to doing a version of "Wicked John and the Devil." "[The] Cantankerous Blacksmith" is what they call it [in the program]... The trio...didn't know the storytelling world at all. They just knew they liked stories. I said, "In the storytelling world, [telling 'Wicked John' is] like...playing 'Orange Blossom Special' in the bluegrass world." The cellist had actually come to classical music from rock music. He said, "Oh, you mean that would be like a rock band getting up and playing ['Louie Louie']?"...I said, "Yeah..."

He said, though, and I really agreed with him, that that's just what we were looking for. Because...we were wanting...to have a story that is very accessible

[to] a lot of people, so that chamber music lovers and listeners coming to this performance would be able to take that story right in. For the story listeners that would be coming, the chamber music would be so different for them...to have [a] familiar [story] would be perfect.

I put a version of it on tape and sent it to Mike, [but] I made him promise...that he wasn't going to hold me to that version, that the story itself could grow too. Mike started writing [musical] sketches...[and] faxing those to the trio. Then we started meeting together...I had met Mike in Nashville and done some storytelling with him, and had talked with the trio on the phone. I had met them at a performance here in Asheville too. We were all meeting, but not together yet. Then Mike went to Virginia to meet up with the trio [to show them] some sketches...that he had done.

When the trio saw it and heard it – of course, they can look at a page and know what it sounds like – they realized it wasn't very good. Mike went back home, and it was left to...the cellist, to call him and tell him. Here they were, having to call [*chuckle*] this man who is incredibly talented, and tell him this wasn't good enough. Because they were going to have to be playing it...[and] it was just bad enough that the trio had to say something. If it had been just a little bit better, they wouldn't have said anything; they would have performed it for that year. We had nine performances [scheduled]; that would have been it.

But because it was bad enough [they said something] and because Mike had enough sense of himself...he was able then to break through...and...[compose] a remarkable piece. It's a classic, and I think it's [going to] be around

for many years to...come. We're in our fourth season now. We have done over 130 performances of it, all over the United States. And...people love it. It's doing just what the intent was: it's building the audience of both [art forms]: opening up chamber music to more people, opening up storytelling to more people. And it is because [the trio acknowledged Mike's] piece wasn't good enough that all of that was able to happen (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 29-31).

Interweaving Two Expressive Languages: Music and Story

In 1998 Regan-Blake talks further about the process:

The five of us got together...this is months and months and months before we ever premiered it, and worked on wrapping that story around the music, finding places that the music could come in and fill in parts of the story. Almost like building a log cabin [and] dovetailing all of the ends of the logs, everything just fit perfect.

It was a real challenge...because I didn't read music. The trio were amazed [*chuckle*] to find someone that didn't read any music. But I've always had a sense of the rhythm and timing and the pacing within a story – almost *the song* of a story. So we found ways for me – images – where I would know what was happening in the music. 'Cause there were certain places that...it's on a particular note I'm saying a word. Other places where it's more free form ...and it's very much storytelling.

That was important to me at the beginning, that it not be narration, just being put there for interest. [Instead] I'm very connected to the audience and really am telling the story. And the music is so powerful. It's not background

music. Sometimes when people first hear about it, they say, "Oh, like in a movie? ...A sound score?" It's not that. There are places where they are literally telling you the story only with the music; other times when it's only the words, and then lots of times where it's that dovetail [effect]. It's a very powerful piece. We've recorded it now, and it should be coming out...⁴⁸²

It opened up a whole new world for me, being able to go on stage with three other people and yet by myself. With someone else reading all the maps and [me] not having to decide when we went where [to perform]; I just went wherever they said...With them arranging all of the bookings and all of that; it was a real gift to me. I felt, and still do feel, it was as if that was a huge basket of blessings coming back to me for taking my time with unraveling everything else with Barbara and I. [The work with the trio] was a full year of bookings and people to meet and places to go to tell my stories that never even knew of Barbara and I on stage together. That was a real gift...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 31-32).

Ray Hicks as Regan-Blake's Dramaturg for "Wicked John"

⁴⁸² *Tales of Appalachia: Stories and Chamber Music* by the Kandinsky Trio with Connie Regan-Blake was released by the Flat Five Press and Recording Co., Inc. based in Salem, Virginia in 2004. Concerned that the original cover illustration – a fanciful rendering of the trio playing on a hillside by Beth Shively – did not immediately "read" as a storytelling album, Regan-Blake arranged to print a second cover. The image she uses to promote the recording features a photograph of the Great Smoky Mountains with inset photos of the trio and herself in rehearsal, as well as a photo of her alone.

The album contains "The Cantankerous Blacksmith" by Mike Reid, plus two more instrumental pieces performed by the trio, and a narrative-only recording of Regan-Blake telling "Big Jack, Little Jack." Regan-Blake recorded that story at the Jack Tales Festival in North Carolina, a festival founded by storyteller Dianne Hackworth, to help raise money when Ray Hicks was diagnosed with terminal cancer. This was one of many community efforts spun off of Regan-Blake's establishment of the Ray Hicks Fund under the umbrella of the International Storytelling Center.

Neither growing up in suburban Birmingham and Jacksonville nor living in Asheville positioned Regan-Blake to have firsthand knowledge of blacksmithing and its integral importance in rural communities in the days before automobiles. For that she consulted Ray Hicks who knew both the story and the gritty details of blacksmithing that would inform her telling. She continues her narrative about "The Cantankerous Blacksmith":

We ended up, the first year, having over 35 performances booked... When people saw those nine names [of the commissioning agents for the piece], they agreed to add this new work too. One of ...[the nine]...was Appalachian State University...at Boone, North Carolina. [That was] the closest place I was going to be getting to Ray and Rosa's home. I had written them early on, as soon as I saw my schedule and...said – I didn't want to beg, but I did – how much it would mean to me [for them to come see it]. Because Ray is the one that gave me the sense of Wicked John...

After we settled on that story, I went up to Ray's several times to talk to him about how he felt about [the character of the blacksmith]...A lot of people tell that "Wicked John" story as Wicked John being evil, being a bad person or a mean person.

Ray said that's not the way it was: Wicked John was a blacksmith, and he was working over hot coals and fire all day. Ray said...a lot of blacksmiths only have one eye 'cause the fire would come out and pop into their eyes and put out an eye. They were scarred all over. They were working over incredible heat, in the summertime too when it was hot outside. And a lot of times, in the middle of the

night, somebody would come...[with] a wagon [wheel] that was busted...[that] needed repairing.

The blacksmith was...important in the community 'cause people could grow their potatoes; they could make their clothes. But once [people] started using nails to build their cabins and once they had wheeled tires and had a bit of a plow to pull behind a cow or a horse or a mule, they needed that blacksmith to be able to weld those things together. A blacksmith, in some ways, was the hub of a community. Ray gave me a lot of insights [for the story].

And to think...that that was the first story that I heard Ray tell off of a stage when I met him at the very first National Storytelling Festival. And then to be able to tell it to him! I kept my fingers crossed [about Ray and Rosa coming] 'cause I know 35 miles is a long way for [them to travel]. I had to work out the possibilities of someone picking [them] up. Ray and Rosa don't have a phone, so you never know, on the day of, what's going to happen (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 33-34).

Ray and Rosa Hicks at the Chamber Music Concert

Of the concert at Appalachian State, Regan-Blake recalls:

Here we [were the day of the show]. When we do this performance, it's very formal. I am a guest artist of the trio. And our intent...while we're on stage is that we are a quartet. The voice is my instrument and...the other three instruments, that's what we play on stage. Usually the format is that the trio goes out, does a first piece...take their bows, come back off-stage and get me. Then we go on and we do this formal kind of bowing. I had to learn how to enter the stage and exit

the stage and [do] the bowing. We all wear a type of tux. I wear this great outfit with shoulder pads [and] a...few sparkles but still a tux feel to it.

I had asked [the trio] when they came back after their first piece, "Is Ray out there? Is Ray out there?" 'Cause I had described him. They said, "I don't think so. I didn't see anybody." Then we took a moment. They got a drink of water and then the four of us walked back out on stage...I looked down and Ray had just come in with Rosa, a couple of his cousins, and Dean Taylor who is my buddy and [the] Hicks' buddy, who had gone to pick them up and bring them. They're sitting in the third row of this theater.

A lot of people...not everyone 'cause you don't have to dress up – but a lot of people come to chamber music performances...dressed to the nines, and we certainly were. Big...ten-foot, grand piano on stage. And Ray is sitting there, [*chuckle*] listening to this classical music and listening back to my telling of "Wicked John." [*She pauses, as a tear wells up*] It was a moment in my life that will always be with me. And his face, wide-open, once again, just that same generosity. Not any fiber of his body saying, "Now, is this the way to tell them old mountain stories? Also not any fiber of his body saying, "Well, this is foreign. I don't think I like this." I could tell he was listening with every part, mostly his face though. That's what I could see the most. He was rocking back, hitting his hand a few times, and laughing out loud.

That's a story that people really laugh out loud during. And they, the whole group, did a lot of laughing that night. Rosa was enjoying it. And after we were finished, I went out into the lobby and saw Ray and Rosa and the other folks

that had come with them. And Ray told me how important it was that I keep telling stories. [chuckle] It's very emotional, isn't it? [sniffle]...He said, "You know, I'm not going to be around that much longer. And when I'm gone, I want you to be sure that they remember *me*, and they remember *my stories*." So I think that's going to happen... [sniffle] (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 34-35).

A Solo Storyteller's Process of Story Crafting

As we talked more about her emerging career as a solo artist, we turned to the third question in the Cotsen Storytelling Project, interrogating the verbal artist's process of creating material from personal experience and/or the imagination, or adapting a story from another source, printed or oral. During the joint interview with Regan-Blake and Freeman, the duo spoke about adapting picture books or folk tales for tandem telling, or collaborating with others to create their two-woman play, *Mountain Sweet Talk*. Here I asked Regan-Blake to say more about what was unique to her solo practice. What processes did she use to ready a story for performance when she was no longer working with a performing partner, a collaborative play-writing quartet, or a musical trio, but was working alone on a personal story as she had begun to do in recent times, or working on traditional material? She responds:

I've found that one of the most important ways that I work on stories is to talk 'em, to say 'em. Whenever I go to write something down or only do it inside my head, it's as if it doesn't really live. It's as if my own breath gives it breath, [gives] the story itself breath and form. Sometimes I don't even know that it's going to be there [until I speak it].

I remember with one story [I worked up] in the last couple of years.⁴⁸³

There was a young Black girl; she was only ten years old when she came knocking on our door in Birmingham, Alabama: Mildred Hawkins. She worked for my mom, mostly taking care of us three kids from the time I was 18 months old until I was [eight] years old and we moved away. She came back into our lives after thirty-nine years of not hearing from her or knowing where she was. She hunted my mom down, and then I got to talk with her.

That was such a powerful time for me...she and I talked on the phone for hours...I was going [to be going]...to the place where she lived, in Indianapolis. I was going to be doing the festival there. So I started telling everybody that I came in contact with – friends and other storytelling buddies and my family – about Mildred. And...different images and different stories kept coming up.

Then I went to a gathering called the Blue Lakers,⁴⁸⁴ thirteen storytellers that get together every year [at a retreat]. And I remember the very first dinner [that year], thirteen of us sitting around, all [having] so much to say and catching each other up...on our lives and our stories. I was sitting next to Michael Parent and I started telling him the story about Mildred. And it came out almost [as a] performance, right there...As soon as I finished – Michael and I were both crying,

⁴⁸³ Since these transcripts come from interviews recorded in 1998, the phrase "in the last couple of years" refers to the years just before those interviews.

⁴⁸⁴ "Blue Lakers" is Regan-Blake's nickname for what I call "the Blue Mountain Group." As mentioned in chapter two, both of these nicknames derive from the Blue Mountain Center in the community of Blue Mountain Lake outside Albany, New York where our retreat group met for its first two years. For more about the retreat center, which welcomes writers, artists and activists, visit the website at <http://www.bluemountaincenter.org> Accessed online 20 March 2014.

filled with a lot of emotion – I instantly got up and grabbed a piece of paper and went out on the porch and wrote down everything that I had just told Michael...

For me, it's because I have worked on traditional stories for so many years and know that framework – I've got my foundation – that this really came out almost as a story...that was ready for the stage. And by being able to...get it down in writing then, that helped me remember and make...some of those images [concrete]... It's grown some then; it always does from the telling. But it was at that point ready [to be told]. It was the very next week [that] I was going to Indianapolis. Mildred was going to be in the audience and I was going to be able to tell that story for the first time from behind a microphone, and have her hear it.

I [had] tried that story when I was traveling around...with the trio. And I chose to tell it in third person because it was so close to me and so dear to me... Then I thought, "I can...try [it] in first person." The trio hadn't heard me tell it. They didn't know what it was about. So I said, "Let me tell you the story," one of the times that we were traveling between one performance and the next. And I told it in first person and they loved it, but I realized, and they did too, that it was too intense [in] first person...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 37-39).

At my request, Regan-Blake provided me with a text of "The Mildred Story." Like her, I grew up in the segregated South of the pre-Civil Rights era and was interested to see how this subject finally surfaced in her performance material.

Issues of Race, Class and Power Enter Regan-Blake's Repertoire

With "The Mildred Story" Regan-Blake performs an intentional paean to Mildred Hawkins, the plucky little girl who came to the Regan family's Birmingham household in

the summer of 1948 seeking work. Emblematic of the still-lopsided social relations of the segregated South, Mildred's last name – unused by, but not unknown to the Regans – appears nowhere within the text of this praise song of a story. Hawkins worked for several years as a "mother's helper" for the story's "Mrs." and the "Mr." from the time their littlest daughter was a toddler – and reluctant talker – until the family moved to Jacksonville, Florida in 1955.

The story opens with the storyteller singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," coloring the melody with her own Appalachian twang and giving it a very different sound than when it's sung at an African American Baptist Church. We learn later in the story that Mildred Hawkins also sang the song as a member of a traveling gospel choir. This coded escape song dating from the time of slavery –would have been considered an apolitical "Negro Spiritual" in the unenlightened Jim Crow South of the story's setting.⁴⁸⁵ Until the big reveal late in the story that Regan-Blake was herself Mildred Hawkins's youngest charge, the narration is spoken in third person, in the tone of a homespun allegory:

It was in the summer of 1948 in Birmingham, Alabama in an all-White neighborhood. There was [a]...family with three children under seven years old. The youngest – she was eighteen months. The mother – the Mrs. – she had her hands full. One day there came a knock at the door and when the Mrs. opened it, she was surprised to see a young Black girl standing there. She...announced that

⁴⁸⁵ Written in 1862 by Choctaw Freedman Wallace (sometimes Wallis) Willis in the Indian territory of Oklahoma, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" contains coded references to Underground Railroad strategies used by enslaved persons to escape their bondage. It was not until the post-Civil Rights era that the coded content of escape songs like this one came to be recognized outside the African American community.

her name was Mildred, that she was "twelve years old" and looking for work. She went on to say she came from a big family; her daddy had passed away and she really needed some work...

The Mrs. looked at that little slip of a girl and said, "Well, Honey, what in the world can you do?" Mildred said she could wash dishes and mop the floor and scrub the bathroom. And just then that youngest child started fussing a bit (raising Cain)...and the Mrs. said: "Well, I have three little ones - if you'll just watch them, I'll do those other chores."

And so Mildred was invited to come into the home that summer. She came over often, sometimes staying all night. She helped around the house and the kitchen, but mostly she played with the children... When school started up, she'd ride the bus over to that White neighborhood on Friday evening and stay till early Sunday morning. The Mr. and Mrs. always made sure they took Mildred to her home in time for her church...

As was the case in middle-case homes throughout the segregated South, the hired help became a racialized member of the Regans' extended family. From the text of the narrative, it is clear that Mildred Hawkins was well loved by the children, and even doted upon by the parents – the Mrs. sewed her new clothes and the Mr. paid her a dollar for every "A" she earned on her high school report card. But still she came and went by the back entrance of the house. The narrative also reveals that Hawkins had her own designated fork and a place to eat in the kitchen, but no place at the family dinner table because, as Mrs. Regan explains to her curious last-born child, "that's the way things are."

As written, the story has a triple coda. The first is a visit by Hawkins to the Regans' house in Jacksonville four years after their move to Florida. By then she's in her twenties and traveling with a Birmingham gospel group. She sings a memorable rendition of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" at Regan-Blake's twelfth birthday party, then heads to the kitchen to help serve the food. As Regan-Blake tells it: "The Mrs. said, 'Oh, Mildred – you're our guest' and Mildred said 'No, Ma'am, I'm family.'" In this context, it is both a statement of affection and resistance.

The second coda comes when Hawkins makes contact with "the Mrs." again after a space of nearly forty years. Then, according to the story, Regan-Blake – once a wordless toddler – called Hawkins, and the two spent hours on the phone together, though in the present text, we don't know what they talked about.

The third coda comes when Regan-Blake visits Hawkins in Indianapolis and meets her family, and then Hawkins comes to hear the teller perform their shared story at a festival. Regan-Blake recounts that afterward "we both rode in the front seat of the car, walked in the front door of the restaurant, and finally we got a chance to sit down at the dinner table and eat together."

This piece is the only one I have heard Regan-Blake perform that addresses the complicated relationships between African American and Euro-American families in the pre-Civil Rights era South where she spent all of her formative years. The narrative traces one such complicated relationship sculpted by segregation and economic need, then polished by an abiding but unspoken forty-years of affection and buffed by social change. The story ends with a healing moment when the two women can sit at a table and share food at last on equal footing. Yet, when Hawkins intones an elder's blessing to her former

charge – “I was so proud of you! Who would have thought my quiet little Connie would be up there on that stage!” – it captures the complex, unequal and poignant relationship between African American women and Euro-American children that has existed since the days of slavery.

When she sent the text of the story to me in an email dated March 21, 2014, Regan-Blake wrote:

Thank you for reminding me of Mildred’s story – I hadn’t thought of it in years. I just re-read it and it brought all that right back to the surface. I have tried over the years to contact her – but haven’t in the last 2-3 years. I will do that this weekend! ...I’d like your opinion...about whether this could be a telling story. I love revisiting Mildred in that story - but I remember feeling it was too ‘sweet’...

Regan-Blake's instincts are right: the story needs a more piquant flavor and less saccharine. On September 19, 1963, eight years after the Regan family left Birmingham (and their mother's helper) behind, members of the Ku Klux Klan bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four African American girls only a little older than Hawkins was when she first arrived at the Regans' door.⁴⁸⁶ This reader/listener wants to know: What was the Regan family's response to this news? And what was Hawkins' experience of this terroristic act? Regan-Blake has not yet teased out the hidden power of this story, layered it with more details, and braided in Mildred Hawkins' point of view

⁴⁸⁶ Among the dead were Denise McNair (11) along with Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley and Carole Robertson (all 14). Addie Mae's younger sister Sarah, who had been with the four on their trip to the bathroom in the church basement when the bomb went off, lost an eye in the explosion; dozens were injured. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. eulogized the girls. It would be decades before the perpetrators of the bombing were brought to justice. For more see: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/big-break-16th-st-baptist-church-bombing-case-article-1.1455483> Accessed 2 April 2014.

together with her own. What is/was Hawkins' perspective on being a child sent out to work rather than to play, about being a hired-on member of a family who is banned from the dining table, about being the keeper of children whose White privilege gave them a higher level of respect than Hawkins' parents and grandparents may have been able to achieve even in adulthood. And if Hawkins' thoughts cannot be known today, what questions does the narrator want us to ponder along with her in the face of that "not knowing"?

The untold tale within the tale is Regan-Blake's awakening to inequality and White privilege, and how that awakening has continued to shape her considerable discernment in interactions with those whose identity markers are unlike her own. The bones of the story are there, with the tiniest bit of flesh based on Regan-Blake's admittedly too-few tellings. But there is sinew and blood and muscle still missing. And the outer layer, the epidermis of the story, has more than one skin color. It is a story-in-progress, awaiting its final shaping by the mature artist Regan-Blake has become.

Another Breakthrough Piece for the Artist: "Hope is Back on Me"

In the years since the CSP ended, I had another chance to see Regan-Blake's earliest efforts to get a new solo performance work up on its feet in September of 2009 when we met in Dexter, Maine. The new story was another pioneering effort, unlike anything she had done before. Rather than simply relying on live narrative performance, she used tape recordings and a slide show to illustrate the autoethnographic story she was telling about her trip to Uganda for Bead for Life, a non-profit development organization

founded by her friend Torkin Wakefield.⁴⁸⁷ In this work Regan-Blake crosses another unexpected border – from the performance of auto/biography into the land of performance ethnography.

Once the piece had premiered, Jill Johnson reviewed a performance of it for the academic journal *Storytelling, Self, Society*.⁴⁸⁸ Because she offers another lens for looking at Regan-Blake as a solo performer, I believe the review is worth referencing at some length. Johnson writes: "Regan-Blake explored 17 days of transformative experience in a piece that was part-travel essay, part-personal experience story, part-folktale, and part-ethnography" (72).⁴⁸⁹ She continues: "Primarily known for her mastery of the folktale, Regan-Blake takes a new direction with this piece. Rather than solely inviting her listeners on a journey of the imagination, she also provides a riveting tale of an actual, physical journey to an unfamiliar place and describes the people she meets along the way" (73).⁴⁹⁰

Indeed, in "Hope is Back on Me," we meet three of the women who have worked at Bead for Life before opening their own microbusinesses in Uganda. Johnson describes them:

⁴⁸⁷ As Johnson explains in her review: "Torkin Wakefield...[co-] founded Bead for Life, a development program in which impoverished women make handcrafted jewelry from recycled paper. In addition to training, savings accounts, and business funding for the women, Bead for Life also has projects in health, affordable housing, and business development" (73). For more about the organization, see: <http://www.beadforlife.org/en/frontpage/us> accessed online 1 April 2014.

⁴⁸⁸ Jill Johnson, "The Journey Within: Connie Regan-Blake's 'Hope is Back on Me.'" *Storytelling, Self, Society* 7.1 (2011): 72-76. Johnson's review was the first article I assigned as performance review editor of SSS from 2009-2012.

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid*, 72.

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid*, 73.

Namakasa Rose, an HIV-positive mother of four small children... Akot Lillian, a survivor of the massacres perpetuated by the...Lord's Resistance Army ...[And] Aduni Alice...[who was] forced to watch her husband hacked to death with a machete... After discovering that she and her second child had AIDS, she too found Bead for Life, which gave her a new start. She told Regan-Blake that since her experience with the organization, "Hope is back on me" (73).⁴⁹¹

In performance, Regan-Blake doesn't just tell about the three women: through slides we see their faces and through tape recordings, we hear their voices. Admittedly, the aesthetic decision to bring technology into a live performance leaves Regan-Blake vulnerable to technological glitches, and indeed she has faced the persnickety projector and the incompatible computer, but when everything works, the payoff is immense.

Despite these potential snafus, Johnson observes:

The recorded voices of these resilient women, skillfully woven into the performance, were among the most moving parts of the piece... The emotional power of these recordings is stunning. In some cases, Regan-Blake is aware of possible pronunciation difficulties, so after giving us access to those wondrous voices, she then paraphrases several conversations and seamlessly weaves their comments ("Bead for Life brushed the dust from my heart") into subsequent moments of the performance (74).⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ *ibid*, 73.

⁴⁹² *ibid*, 74.

In her review of E. Patrick Johnson's performance ethnography, *Pouring Tea*,⁴⁹³ Cheryl Black writes:

The performance of ethnographic research...[is] a rhetorically compelling way of "deeply sensing the other."⁴⁹⁴ [It] is storytelling, which incorporates many of the aesthetic pleasures of traditional, theatrical performance but with the distinctively political and ethical aim of subverting notions of expertise, interpretation, and unilateral authority in privileged narratives. Aware of the moral and political implications of performance, [Dwight] Conquergood developed a dialogic practice that resisted a collapsing of identities, instead keeping the dialogue open and alive between ethnographer and [subject] (48).⁴⁹⁵

By finding her way down Conquergood's path through her own practice, and bringing Namakasa Rose, Akot Lillian and Aduni Alice to the stage with her, Regan-Blake proves to be a pioneer once more. In this dialogic work, she begins to fulfill what Black calls "performance ethnography's objectives of a rhetorically compelling critical practice that facilitates personal and social transformation" (50). Johnson notes:

In the final moments of her performance, Regan-Blake speaks directly to the personal transformation that this journey had created for her. Rarely does a teller step out of the framework she has created for her story in this way, to look back

⁴⁹³ Cheryl Black, "Thrice-Told Tales: *Pouring Tea* as Performance Ethnography" in *Storytelling, Self, Society* 8.1 (January-April 2013): 48-51. I also commissioned this piece as performance review editor for the journal from 2009-2012.

⁴⁹⁴ Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance, *Literature in Performance* 5.2 (1985): 1-3 (48, qtd. in Black).

⁴⁹⁵ Cheryl Black, "Thrice-Told Tales," 48.

and reflect. Much of the power of those closing moments came from the carefully crafted clues—explicit and implicit—to the transcendence of this experience throughout the piece. Her informants' words ("hope is back on me") became symbols of her own transformation. As she told me, "This is really a story of four women: Rose, Lillian, Alice—and me" (75).⁴⁹⁶

The reviewer writes: "This was only the fifth performance of 'Hope Is Back on Me.' It is, as Regan-Blake said, 'still a very new piece,' and she is not certain of its future. 'I feel it's definitely in a transformational state,' she said. 'I think it will keep growing, but I am not sure exactly what form it will take'" (76).⁴⁹⁷ As it continues to emerge, "Hope is Back on Me" embodies the kind of layered dramaturgical work, capturing a multitude of perspectives and highlighting a diversity of human experience that would strengthen the Mildred Hawkins story. As with that piece, this is the kind of work that enriches the listener as much as the teller.

Meanwhile, the experience of visiting Uganda, collecting these women's stories, and returning to the U.S. to share them provided Regan-Blake with the chance to use her storytelling in service to healing and humanitarian action. She remains a volunteer "Community Partner" for Bead for Life, working through its North American office in Boulder, CO, attending community events, giving presentations about the organization to expand the Bead Circle of supporters, and committing to raising \$3000 a year by selling the jewelry at retreats, festivals and other gatherings. At this writing, she has raised a little over \$70,000 for the organization.

⁴⁹⁶ Jill Johnson, "The Journey Within," 75.

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid*, 76.

Developing a New Story On Stage when the Audience Calls it Forth

Of her solo performance process, Regan-Blake explained in 1998:

A lot of times, it's on stage that [a story] really comes together. Other times, it's off stage. One story – and again, this is after doing this really full-time and professionally since '71, so I don't necessarily recommend that other people try this in their own homes and theaters. I've gotten a new boldness since I left the partnership – [and I remember once] I was telling down in Columbia, South Carolina. [I] had [already] done several different performances in schools and libraries, and then I was doing a culminating evening performance. And I [had] read the snippet of a story in a...collection of traditional stories, one that [was] not worked up [for performance]...

This is one of the first times that I've actually done this – [I] went on the stage without having it together as a story. I just felt so good about being in Columbia, felt so good about everybody I told stories to. A lot of [children from the school and library shows]...were going to come with their parents to this performance... One of the things that has become the most important for me is staying so present in the performance that no matter what happens, I can really pull it off. Pull it off sounds like it's devious, but I can stay with the story and with the audience.

I told this story and got two thirds of the way through it and realized that I had left out a huge part of it, but was able, in the moment, to weave it right back in. It was just like magic... happening up there. And that's given me the encouragement...to do that some, where I get up on stage and have only thought

about the story or thought about images. Now, I would never do a whole evening of that, so I'm doing some of my solid stories [too]... And it's only with audiences that I feel very comfortable with (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 39-40).

Putting Stories Back into the Dream World, and Learning Them by Heart

In the CSP narrative, Regan-Blake also talks about the importance of liminal states for evolving story work, as well as the importance of "imaging" stories, and the difference between memorizing and what she calls learning a story by heart:

A lot of times I work on stories when I'm in bed, lying propped up, and just kind of looking out to my beautiful deck and all the flowers. I live almost in a tree house; there are lots of windows all the way around and trees reflected in almost every direction we look in. So I love to go [into my bedroom] and start working on a story and then have that drowsy kind of feeling to where you almost...sleep. Then you wake back up and it's like, "Oh, yeah. That girl, she was in the forest and she'd seen that dove." And then go back to sleep and come back: "Oh, that dove, that key in its mouth"... It's as if I'm putting the stories back into my dream world...putting them on the inside of me so that it's not something that's out *there*...on a...written page. Or it's out there somehow, but yet it's *within* me...

That's the best way to learn stories for me...rather than – if it's a literary text – memorize, memorize, memorize...It's like taking in the whole story – having it become a part, almost like a family story within me...Even...the literary stories that are told, word for word. I mean you would not want to go in and change Maurice Sendak's words or Ezra Jack Keats or...Richard Kennedy. Although some of those writers have certainly given me permission...to make

some changes, you don't want to go in and just rewrite it. You want to be true to...the wonderful prose and poetry that's in those stories...I think of it as taking it all in, and somehow it comes down through my heart and out my mouth...I verbalize it by saying that I learn it *by heart*, rather than memorizing it word for word.

I'm also seeing images...I'm not seeing words on the page. I haven't actually learned any...literary stories in a long time. But...[when I] go back to Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, I'm not seeing the words: "And that night, Max wore his wolf suit." What I'm seeing is Max coming down the steps and he's in his wolf suit and it's dark outside...I'm the teller of what I've seen...I'm coming back to let you know about it and telling you about it (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 44-45).

The Ongoing Need for Dramaturgical Conversation Partners

Regan-Blake admits being emboldened since she left the Folkteller partnership to take new kinds of risks in front of empathetic audiences while also relying on her liminal consciousness to help shape a tale. Additionally, she found an important new story-crafting partner, seeking him out from the cohort she had gathered within the revival community. And, until very recently, he was also part of the Blue Mountain Lake retreat group. In the 1998 CSP interview, she describes the logistics and etiquette of that working relationship:

I have [had] a wonderful friendship and working relationship with Jay O'Callahan. He lives up in Massachusetts, and since I live here in North Carolina, we can't get together every week in person. What we do is use...the...telephone.

We have formalized a way of working together that has really worked for us...
...What...[we] do...actually developed out of Jay and Doug Lipman's work that they do together in person.⁴⁹⁸ Jay and I have honed it a bit for our own personalities.

Every time we talk, we set up the next time that we're talking, so we've always got an appointment or a date due. We swap back and forth on who calls whom. I always alert my husband I'm going to be talking to Jay so he knows the phone's going to be tied up for anywhere from a half an hour to an hour and a half. Then...[on the phone, Jay and I will] take care of a few pleasantries at first, maybe go ahead and set up the next time, first off.

We each have our timers...Say...we're each taking 25 minutes. Jay always goes first, at least 95% of the time. He always asks if I want to, but I always let him go first. Then he'll set his timer for 20 minutes, and he starts working on whatever [story] it is that he's working on...We make it very clear...what we're needing from the other person...

[I may work] on a story idea that I'm not even sure [about]...[like] a personal experience story about this trip that I took up to Canada [recently]...Because I've found, in talking it out, that's where I'd start getting my framework [in place], or it starts becoming clear to me...Laura Simms talks about reducing [a story] to three sentences: in the beginning, this happened; in the

⁴⁹⁸ Doug Lipman is the author of *The Storytelling Coach – How to Listen, Praise and Bring out People's Best* (Little Rock: August House, 2006). He was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983 and again at the twentieth anniversary festival in 1992. He was also active on the national storytelling organization board during the period when it split into two entities.

middle, this happened; and in the end, that happened. That helps with that framework of where you're going to go...rather than rambling... Often I tape record whatever it is – my part of the session – because in saying it, I just get this clarity [about the story]. Because I am an oral person. And thinking about it in my head, some things come, but...the whole shebang usually doesn't come until I start talking it.

Other times, it might be that it's a story that I've been working on, and I'm going to tell that night...Maybe [it's] a new story...one that I've got down, and then...I'm really wanting [to know] what works and maybe what didn't work quite as well; what isn't quite as clear. One of the ground rules that Jay and I have is that we always say what we like [about the story we hear].

And as we're listening...each of us [has] a notebook [and when]...these notebooks [are] filled, then we're going to swap. He's got a Connie notebook and a Jay notebook, and I have the same... So the whole time he's talking, I'm writing [things] down. I'm looking for things that really caught my ear or...I heard the passion or the fire in his voice, or that the image brought a tear or a laugh – I'm writing all that down...

It's totally up to whoever's time it is, whether they want any other feedback.⁴⁹⁹ We always stop...after we've said all of the things that we loved

⁴⁹⁹ This artist-initiated feedback protocol is similar to the process described in *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process* (Takoma Park, MD: Dance Exchange, Inc., 2003) developed with her company at the Dance Exchange. A MacArthur Fellow and choreographer, Lerman is married to Blue Mountain Group member Jon Spelman who introduced the group to the Critical Response Process during the years of the retreat. For more see: <http://www.lizlerman.com/crpLL.html> accessed online 20 March 2014.

about it, and all the things that moved us. At that point...if it's my time I'm using, it's up to me to say, "Jay, did you have any thoughts about what might make it work better?" And he'll say, "...When you mentioned about that snuff box, I wasn't quite sure what that was. You might actually explain what that is, and describe a little more how the inlays are [set in it]" ...The process of working on the stories that way has been incredible for me.

It's been so helpful in me working on...what my next step is...where [storytelling is] going to take me next...When Barbara and I went solo, we brought all those friends, all those stories we'd been telling, and took 'em on our solo path and started adding new stories...I'm going to be taking all those places I've been telling stories, all the people that have influenced me – I want to take all of them with me. But I'm going in a different direction and I'm not sure what that is yet. Jay's been very helpful [in] verbalizing some of that, putting it out there in the air so that it can actually start taking form and shape...(CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 41-44).

The Integrity of a Story's Bones

In the CSP interview, Regan-Blake tries to capture the balance between tradition and innovation that each new teller must learn to strike, especially in adapting an oral story for performance:

I mentioned earlier about the bones [of a traditional story]... [It's] important, that we not feel like we can just go in – because they are traditional stories – and change them any which way we want. That we have due respect. At the same time, whoever wrote down those particular words made certain decisions about

the [way they laid the] bones. So I always encourage people, and I do this myself, to get...many different versions. See what it is that's the same in all of them. And then you're sure about the bones...

There are going to be things [like]...a hip bone that was dropped along the way...In the telling...and this is only after you've been telling stories for a long time, and often telling that particular story for a long time, if you realize there's a little connector bone that had been left out, then I think we can put that [back] in...I just recently started telling some of the Grimms' tales. I'm really drawn to those...And I'm finding more and more how quickly the stories come to me...There's ease there now. And coupled with this excitement and my own self-encouragement, to get up and try some of these stories fresh off the block...it feels like a whole new place [to be with stories]... (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, page 47).

The Co-Creative Aspect of the Storytelling Event

Without the "fourth wall" conceit often used in theatre, the storyteller speaks directly to her listeners, moving images from her head into theirs, prompting them to see something similar to – though not necessarily exactly the same as – what she sees. Here's what Regan-Blake says about the co-creative act of sharing a story with her audience in the CSP narrative:

My listeners...are painting [the pictures] along with me. It's like they've got a whole palette of watercolors... If I start talking about a tree, they start drawing a tree right there. If I mention it's got apples on it, they just go back [and add

them]. Even if they [imagined] an oak, all they have to do is get that red paint or a little yellow and start putting in those apples.

And...if I get to the end and realize...actually I did this on "Barney McCabe" one time... That's [the] story that [Guy Carawan] collected from Janie Hunter...These two children leave a glass of milk before they go out adventuring. They put it on the table and they say, "Momma, if that milk turns red like blood, would you let my dogs loose?" And Momma, she promises that she would. Well, I got...almost to the end of that story and realized I hadn't said anything about that milk! And [the milk turning red is the motivation] for all of the dogs [*she sings out*: "Barney McCabe, Doodley Doo and Sue-Boy..."] to come running and help save them....

I got to that point where there's a witch [*chanting and gesturing as if chopping with an axe*] "chip on the old block, chip on the new block"...cutting down this big tree. And those two children are right up in the top of it, and their dogs are back home, tied up... In that moment, I just said, "And there they are, the two children. That tree, it's starting to move. And it's important that you know before Jack left that day, he had taken a glass of milk, set it on the table there, and said, "Momma, if that milk...turns red like blood, would you turn my dogs loose?" And in that moment, back home, that's exactly what happened. That milk turned red like blood and Momma, she went out and turned those dogs loose...[And] your listeners just pick up that paint brush, go over there, put a little milk on the table, and then they get the red paint out and paint it red like blood.

By staying present, we can do that in the story (CSP/CRB Transcript 3, pages 45-46).

A Dramaturgical Discovery after the CSP Interviews

Revisiting Regan-Blake's CSP narratives has helped me connect the dots between her lived experience long ago and the repertoire she continues to build as a solo artist. A few years ago, when the Blue Mountain retreat met in Lake Lure, North Carolina, I first heard Regan-Blake working on a new story born of her plans to visit Australia. It was a light-hearted snippet of a story meant to cleanse the palate in performance between longer, more serious tales. In the beginning of the text, she speaks of her love of maps and how the Internet has increased her mapping proclivities, then explains:

Earlier this year I was invited to do storytelling in Australia – my 33rd country to visit. I would be doing a storytelling workshop in Sydney. I have a friend who lives outside Sydney. I was curious if the workshop was anywhere near where my friend lived – so I thought I'd take a look on Google maps. I put in the address for the workshop – 1124 Tryon Ave, New South Wales, Sydney, Australia – and Google located that. Then another box automatically came up right above it – with my home address in Asheville, North Carolina. So I thought “Hmmm. I wonder how Google would take me to Sydney?!? I pressed: “Get Directions.” And the computer churned and burned and smoked – and 17 pages later, I had intricate directions from Asheville, North Carolina to Sydney, Australia. Google estimated it would take me 56 days and 14 hours!

The performed story goes on to relate the routes that Google Maps recommended she take to get from Asheville to Sydney – by foot and by kayak. Thus, she takes her listeners

playfully around the world by foot-power and the strength of her own (imagined) paddling.

In re-reading the transcripts of the CSP interviews for this study, I located the long dormant seed from which this verbal adventure has germinated: Regan-Blake's unfulfilled desire to travel overland to Australia, first imagined forty years ago. When I mentioned making this connection during a fact-checking phone call on March 5, 2014, she said: "I never thought about that! Wow, I'm going to add that to the story!" I take some pleasure in knowing that my engagement with her oral history and performance repertoire has served a dramaturgical purpose.

The Motifs of Dressing Up and Moving into the Third Age

The gendered theme of dressing-up recurs throughout Regan-Blake's CSP narratives: the navy blue dress she made with daisies sewn on it for the M.O.R.E. program; the flannel shirts, jeans and grosgrain boots she wore in front of Augusta Baker; the sartorial lessons she took from Laura Simms, and in this chapter the outfit with shoulder pads and sparkles "with a tux feel" that she wears for the Kandinsky Trio performances. Appearance is a consideration for most performers, and in the kinship community of the storytelling revival, choosing performance clothes and accessories is often a group effort among the distaff.

But as a feminist I have often cringed over news reporting that refers to a female public figure's appearance – often a negative comment about her body, based on the dominant culture's deep-seated biases about gender, race/ethnicity, age, or body weight, usually intended to cut her down to a smaller size in the public eye – when a journalist rarely discusses a man's appearance in the same way. Women are acculturated to value

themselves as sexualized objects before the male gaze, and thus to loathe themselves once youth has passed them by. I was in my twenties when I first heard the aphorism: "Men age like wine; women like milk." That's one misogynistic message (supported by the pharmaceutical lobby) to carry into the already bittersweet latter part of life.

But Regan-Blake has resisted such messages, and is perfecting the art of aging. Perhaps she's taking her cues from her longtime rap group, or the matriarch of the Blue Mountain group – Gwenda LedBetter – who is still creating full-length solo works in her eighties, or the healing arts communities of which she has been part. After all, in recent years, New Age proponents have had much to say about reframing and, in fact, celebrating "the third age of women," that is, their post-reproductive years.⁵⁰⁰

Having known Regan-Blake for over thirty years, I've seen her claim herself in her fifties and sixties – losing weight, sculpting her body and building her strength through an almost meditative practice in the Cross-Fit program, and cutting her hair short so that she could let it grow out in its natural gray color. I've witnessed her living into the beauty of her maturity, often swathed in deep jewel tone colors that catch the eyes of passers-by. As a woman in her sixties myself, I recognize that by claiming ourselves, we are doing soul work, *and* pushing back against a dominant discourse that erases older women.

Within a youth-obsessed look-ist culture in America (as reflected in the popular media), once women have outlived their expiration date as sexual objects (and reproductive organisms), they become invisible. In fact, Tina Fey says in her memoir

⁵⁰⁰ See "Moving to the Third Age" by Milbre Burch in the "Women of Wisdom" issue of the *Ecozoic Reader*, Thomas Berry's publication for the Center for Ecozoic Studies, (Vol. 5, No. 1, 2007), 14.

Bossypants, “the definition of 'crazy' in show business is a woman who keeps talking even after no one wants to fuck her anymore” (136).

Among oral narrators, however, there is an understanding that the older you get, the more wisdom you have to impart. And that wisdom is part of the mature storyteller's beauty. Regan-Blake knows what it's like to be erased, and it has fueled her intention to keep talking, keep standing on stage, keep claiming her right to be seen and heard and remembered, and keep dressing with panache into the third age.

Regan-Blake as Storytelling Workshop Leader

In recent years Regan-Blake has blossomed as a mentor and teacher, offering one-day workshops, weekend retreats and longer intensives that combine her interests in spiritual development, traditional tales, memoir-writing and cultural awareness. These events attract novices as well as emerging and established tellers. In addition to her solo offerings, she has collaborated with music therapist Courtney Smith on a weekend retreat devoted to story, myth and journey, and taught an extended workshop on "Home-cooked Stories" for the Key West Literary Seminar in Florida. Amy Shuman, now Director of Disabilities Studies at Ohio State University, hosted Regan-Blake's workshop on illness, disability and well being. The storyteller has led workshops in settings as varied as New York Public Library, Dubai Women's College, Bank Street College of Education and the Hollyhock Retreat Centre in Canada.

At present Regan-Blake regularly teaches one-day workshops on "Finding the Storyteller in You" and weekend intensives on "Taking Your Story to the Stage" at her home in Asheville, North Carolina. This summer will also mark the ninth anniversary of her Asheville-based 7-day Story Windows Retreat, offering "a whole-life approach to

being a teller" through seven days of" practice and performance, feedback and discovery."⁵⁰¹ Earlier this year she taught an intensive called "Taking Root: Stage Presence and Deep Listening" for the Northlands Storytelling Network based in NSN's North Central Region. This summer she will teach a five-hour master class at the NSN conference in Mesa, Arizona. Whether at home or on the road, she has dedicated much of her creative energy to coaching and encouraging other storytellers wherever they are on their journeys.

A Foremother Tends to Her Elders

In the years since the CSP interviews were collected, Regan-Blake's ongoing role in the revival community can be witnessed in behind-the-scenes endeavors as well. One example is the Ray Hicks Fund, set up by Regan-Blake after the traditional teller was diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer in 2001. The Fund's first priority was to pay for an addition to the cabin where Ray, Rosa and their son Ted lived. That addition is the only part of the cabin with kerosene heat and running water. For her first nearly sixty years of living in that cabin, Rosa brought water inside from a springhouse. During that same span of decades she heated with – and cooked on – wood stoves.

In an act that was both smart and magnanimous, Regan-Blake established the Fund under the non-profit umbrella of the International Storytelling Center, since thousands of potential donors arrive in Jonesborough every year the first full weekend of October. In that setting, their enthusiasm for the Festival and some of their disposable

⁵⁰¹ These quotes are from the weeklong workshop description on Regan-Blake's website. For more, see http://www.storywindow.com/print_pages/workshop_desc_aug14.html accessed 5 May 2014.

income can be funneled into purchases in the Resource Tent, and certain of those purchases benefited the Hickses.

Regan-Blake had already led one fund-raising campaign for Ray Hicks in 1977 when he was recovering from a broken back, but during our March 31st fact-checking "dissertation dialogue" phone call, I asked her to tell me about more recent campaigns on behalf of his family. She had this to say about community fundraising events for the Hicks family:

CONNIE: I [volunteered] as a teller for the Jack Tales Festival [in Blowing Rock, Blowing Rock, North Carolina]⁵⁰² and the monies for that came into the Ray Hicks Fund, but...Dianne Hackworth...set that [festival] up...The Jack Tale Festival was just one of many [community-based efforts]. We did fundraisers here in Asheville [too]. [And] we sold those dahlias ...

MILBRE: And were the dahlias from Rosa's garden?

CONNIE: Yes, so I went up and got 'em, and...my buddy Nancy Shapiro-Pikelny had come here to Asheville...[prior to the National Storytelling Festival] and we bagged up about 150 dahlias and took 'em to the festival for a suggested donation of \$25.00. And then more volunteers helped us. I have...that wonderful photograph of Rosa standing on the front porch between Ray and Ted...She's holding a bouquet of dahlias, and Ray is talking to Ted... I had... [copies of that photo made] plus I Xeroxed 150 pages of directions...[on] how to plant dahlias.

⁵⁰² Regan-Blake recorded her telling of "Big Jack, Little Jack" (on her *Tales from Appalachia* album) at the Jack Tales Festival. I volunteered as a performer at that festival myself in 2006.

We had all of those in a little plastic sleeve, attached to a white bag that held the dahlia. So everyone that donated went home with that photograph and directions how to plant their dahlia.

MILBRE: And who took the photo?

CONNIE: I did. It's on my website...I love...the photo: Ray and Ted – I had just asked them what kind of wood was in a "whatnot"⁵⁰³ that they had made – and Ray had leaned over and Ted had leaned over, discussing what kind of wood it was...And Rosa is standing there [between them], almost dreaming of her dahlias and her sense of beauty, holding this bouquet of dahlias.⁵⁰⁴

Regan-Blake mentioned that she had sent out many letters and emails, giving updates on Ray during his final illness; many of those mentioned donating to the Fund. In that March phone call, she explains her arrangement with the ISC, Appalshop and Carolina and Sandy Paton, all stakeholders in the sale of Ray Hicks's resources:

Ever since Ray passed away, so for eleven years, the Festival has let us have Ray's items there along with...the dahlias. And all of that money goes straight in the Fund; the festival, ISC, never took a percentage of that. Ahead of time I would get with Sandy, the [ISC] accountant, and order [Ray's recordings] from...Sandy and Caroline [Paton]. I worked out as least payment that I could get [in purchasing the recordings for resale]; letting everyone – Appalshop and everyone else [who produced the recordings] – know that these monies were going directly

⁵⁰³ This use of "whatnot" refers to a small, minimally carved piece of interestingly colored or shaped natural wood.

⁵⁰⁴ Telephone call with Regan-Blake on March 31, 2014.

into the Fund. For all these years that has been a huge part of the fundraising. And then sending emails – sending directly once I was doing a newsletter, but before then, just sending letters to anyone I knew who had any connection with the Hicks family...about three times a year mentioning donations...The Asheville Public Library [and] other places had fundraisers...People sent in checks [from] other storytelling organizations and such...We've raised over \$100,000 dollars over the years.⁵⁰⁵

The Fund also paid for the paving of the Hickses' gravel driveway so that the house was more accessible to Ted when his failing health restricted him to a wheelchair. In addition, the monies have gone toward paying property taxes for the land on which the cabin sits, for Rosa's and Ted's medical care till their deaths – within two weeks of each other early this year – and the costs of their funerals and burials. And it allowed Rosa Hicks to set aside annuities for her handful of great-grandchildren.

On Regan-Blake's website, she has added a tribute to the memories of Rosa, Ray and Ted Hicks.⁵⁰⁶ Throughout the CSP interviews and other conversations across the

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ On the Ray Hicks tribute page (<http://www.storywindow.com/tribute.htm> accessed 14 April 2014) is a link to a remembrance of Rosa and their son Ted. There the reader will find a picture of Rosa's smiling face, backed by Ray's enormous wood supply stacked on their wraparound porch. Beneath the image, Regan-Blake writes:

Over the years, many from across the world made a pilgrimage to the Hicks homeplace on Beech Mountain to hear Ray tell on the front porch or be welcomed into the front room, warmed by stories and the pot-bellied wood stove. As Ray wove the magic of Jack's adventures, Rosa was always close by, listening with us, tending to Ray or slipping out to the gardens to mind her dahlias. With all the chores she had to do, she always made time for her flowers. Rose Harmon Hicks knew that beauty is as necessary as cornbread.

See more at:

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs121/1103862535405/archive/1116429585150.html>

decades, Regan-Blake often spoke of other storytellers as family. When it came to Ray, Rosa and Ted Hicks, her use of the word "family" was more than a metaphor. She "tended" to them just as she would have tended to her blood relations. That's what a foremother does.

A Foremother Also Tends to Her Brood

In the years since the CSP interviews, Regan-Blake has also distinguished herself as a clear, compassionate and familiar voice advocating for the revival community in times of transition or turmoil. When the NAPPS/NSA organization split into two entities in 1998, the Town of Jonesborough "sided" with ISC since that's where Jimmy Neil Smith's loyalties (and employment) remained. NSN moved to unadorned offices while the ISC remained in the opulently refurbished Chester Inn, raising capital (chiefly through loans) to build its own Center.

Regan-Blake worked to maintain cordial relationships with staff and board members on either side of the divide. She lent her voice to storytelling community interventions with the International Storytelling Center, often advocating on behalf of its now-orphaned membership association. To those interventions she has brought institutional memory and a sense of fairness, integrity and compassion to the table for conversations on teller treatment at the Festival and strategies for recovery from the ISC's recent bankruptcy and its concurrent PR problems with the revival community.

Conclusion

Starting with the making of *Mountain Sweet Talk* and continuing into her joint conversation with Freeman about the untangling of their Folkteller threads, there is an

accessed 14 April 2014.

ongoing theme of "becoming" in this part of Regan-Blake's narrative. Having been part of a touring duo, she then embarked on a collaborative playwriting project to allow her to work closer to her home and husband in Asheville. Released from the entanglements of board work or National Storytelling Festival logistics, and from an increasingly untenable touring partnership, Regan-Blake has spent the last twenty years, becoming a solo touring and teaching artist, living into her potential as a woman in full bloom and strengthening her ties to the revival community. She embraced new opportunities like work with Mike Reid and the Kandinsky Trio. She accepted Ray Hicks' exhortation not to let him or his stories be forgotten and also tended to his family's needs in the years before and after his death. She began to investigate her upbringing in the segregated South through story, and traveled to Uganda where she herself had a chance to be the "Other." By finding new conversation partners in the Blue Lakers and particularly Jay O'Callahan she deepened her understanding of her work as an oral composer and her path as a socially responsible artist. Through our conversations she made discoveries about the stories behind some (old and some new) material in her repertoire. Through her workshops she exemplifies the power of deep listening as the cornerstone of good storytelling. She embodies openness, diplomacy and a passionate commitment to the ethics of care in her interventions between ISC and NSN. By partnering with Torkin Wakefield to listen and tell the stories of the women she met through Bead for Life, and continuing to champion the group's work through performances and fair trade fundraising, she has learned to move freely across new borders – from storyteller to ethnographer to cultural worker – and back again.

Regan-Blake has demonstrated that despite the loss of a close working relationship with Jimmy Neil Smith, the exclusion of her place in the NAPPS/NSA/ISC institutional narrative, the marginalization of her woman-centered work in Festival programming, or the leave-taking from her professional identity as one of the Folktellers, she has become who she was always meant to be: a powerful artistic presence, a respected teacher and leader and an enduring voice for fairness and parity in the American storytelling revival.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Displaying a Restored Tapestry

Introduction

Della Pollock speaks of the restoration of memory whether in "the everyday act of telling...or the staged iteration of stories" (1),⁵⁰⁷ writing:

The interview involves its participants in a heightened encounter with each other and with the past, even as each participant and the past seem to be called toward a future...made in talk, in the mutual embedding of one's vision of the world in the other's...invoking a social compact: a tacit agreement that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and social knowledge in such a way that directly or indirectly, it will make a material difference (3).⁵⁰⁸

As seen in this study, feminist oral history is, at heart, the production of a co-constructed narrative. In the 1998 CSP interviews and all our conversations since, Regan-Blake spoke of her experiences and I listened. I revisited her words through recordings, transcripts and other materials, looking for the recurrent themes and distinctive tropes in her discourse.

Valerie J. Janesick writes,

With the transcripts in hand, the researcher may read and reread them as the process of analysis and interpretation begins. Researchers look for major themes, key words, and indices of behavior and belief and make an initial list of major and

⁵⁰⁷ Della Pollock, *Remembering – Oral History Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2005, 1.

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid*, 3.

minor categories. Every attempt is made to look for critical incidents, points of tension and conflict, and contradictions to help in interpreting the data (70).⁵⁰⁹

The themes in Regan-Blake's narratives referenced home, family and feminism as values guiding her actions and vision and tending to relationships as her way of being in the world. Her rhetorical strategies and narrative tropes captured a determined, if subversive, pushback against the interpenetrating voice of a dominant discourse that devalued Regan-Blake as a woman, an artist and a leader. Her work – as a storyteller with the M.O.R.E. program of the Chattanooga library, as a N.O.W. representative, as the first artistic director of the National Storytelling Festival, as vice-chair and chair of the NAPPS board of directors, as a feminist artist and the master quilter of the storytelling revival community – embodied her dedication to intentional inclusivity of women, of children, of peoples of all races, classes and ethnicities despite the exclusionary strategies of the dominant discourse. As teacher, teller, conversation partner, organizer, historian and activist she has utilized storytelling as a tool for artistic expression, spiritual growth, community memory and progressive social change for nearly fifty years.

Citing Reinhartz (1992), Janesick foregrounds the social justice agenda embodied in feminist oral history, stressing its importance in "helping the reader understand how biographical work such as oral history takes women out of obscurity, repairs the historical record, and provides an opportunity for the woman reader and writer to identify with the lived experience of the person participating in the interview" (70-71).⁵¹⁰ My hope is that readers of every demographic stripe will identify with Regan-Blake's

⁵⁰⁹ Valerie J. Janesick, *Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher – Choreographing the Story* (New York: the Guilford Press, 2010), 70.

⁵¹⁰ *ibid*, 70-71.

recovered story, for the inclusivity she strove for has not been accomplished within the storytelling revival. The investment of every member of the community will be needed for that inclusivity to be achieved.

This study was intended to document Regan-Blake's past and present impact on the festival-based American storytelling movement despite her exclusion from its official history and her marginalization on its most prominent platform, the stage of the National Storytelling Festival. It was also intended to introduce the Cotsen Storytelling Project as a resource for future research on the contemporary iteration of an ancient and often overlooked art form. In writing about verbal artists, I have championed storytelling as an immensely powerful performing art whose neglect in the wider field of theatre and performance studies makes our culture all the poorer.

Throughout this study I have counted on dialogues with Regan-Blake, the writing of other storytelling practitioners and scholars, and finally my committee members to help me see what I may have missed, for, as Madison writes, "with all the good intentions, excellent craftsmanship, and even with the reliability and eloquence of a particular story, representing [another] is always going to be a complicated and contentious undertaking" (4). In fact, the dialogical aspect of the study has been integral to the illumination of Regan-Blake's narratives and to my process as a feminist researcher. I am grateful to her for accompanying me on this investigative journey.

Amy Shuman cautions that everyday storytelling "is pushed to its limits both by the use of a particular story beyond the context of the experience it represents and by the use of a personal story to present a collective experience" (3). Yet the data I have gathered on the hiring practices at the National Storytelling Festival, along with the

impact of the "interpenetrating voice" of the dominant discourse on Regan-Blake's narratives provide a call to action and a cautionary tale for those who are interested in broadening the inclusion of women (and other marginalized folk) in storytelling festival settings.

Even as I work to find funding to transcribe the Cotsen Storytelling Project in its entirety, I invite future scholars to mine its treasure trove housed in the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. I trust that others will also find the data I have collected useful in future studies of the festival-based American storytelling revival. May my ongoing research and the work of other scholars help to make the storytelling revival narrative ever more detailed and the practices of the revival community ever more intentional and inclusive.

Disparities Onstage and in the Revival Community

At this writing, little scholarship has been published that focuses on storytelling platform performers, but studies of men and women in everyday storytelling contexts suggest that they employ gender-specific strategies and personas, preferring different story content and different contexts for telling, and forging different kinds of relationships with their listeners and fellow tellers. As a result of American culture's entitlement of male norms and the privileging of male folklorists and their interests, women's everyday storytelling strategies were often overlooked until the last thirty years of the twentieth century. Since that time, feminist folklorists have striven mightily to bring women's everyday storytelling strategies and preferences into view.

In my literature review, I mention several feminist studies in this area, including Linda Dégh's (1999) examination of women's preferred story genres at home or in

community settings. She found that female narrators privileged the märchen or wondertale; "girl-raising tales" meant to humorously instruct ideal feminine behavior and, more recently, personal stories (583). Langellier and Petersen's review of research on female narratives suggests that women's personal stories foreground the commonplace, tales chosen "for their emotional interest rather than action" (160). In addition, it was found, female narrators tend to share the floor and take turns rather than compete for the limelight, maintaining a horizontal status rather than a hierarchy within the group interaction. These strategies translate into a very different storytelling event than one that privileges the aggrandizing stance of male everyday narrators eager to top the last story told with something more unique and memorable. And that difference translates to the stage.

Simply said: men's and women's lives differ and thus their narratives differ. To understand and appreciate narratives from a gendered experience that is not one's own, we must learn how to listen across difference. Elizabeth Ellis puts it this way:

The hero's journey is like a tsunami, an enormous and perhaps once in a lifetime event. The woman's journey is like the tides, cyclic, capable of change, and extending far below the surface. Often women's stories are more difficult to hear; salty and sensuous, earthy and profound, the stories are sometimes disturbing and may make some listeners uncomfortable.⁵¹¹

In the early seventies when the festival-based storytelling revival began to coalesce, it had at its fore an avowed feminist, Connie Regan-Blake. When she left the NAPPS board

⁵¹¹ Elizabeth Ellis, "Joseph Campbell's Mama's Journey," *Storytelling Magazine* 24.1 (Jan/Feb 2012), 33.

in 1984 and Laura Simms resigned in 1986, two of the most powerful female voices in the American storytelling revival were silenced by the dominant discourse that guided the national storytelling organization and its Festival programming into the next chapter of the revival's life.

Other strong women would join the NAPPS board before the organizational split in 1998, MaryGay Ducey, Clare Cuddy, Beth Horner, Nan Kammann-Judd and myself among them. But we were tourists in Mecca; our visas were temporary and our tenure was brief. In an effort to focus the board on policy rather than event production, we placed the Festival programming in the hands of the staff. Jimmy Neil Smith hired Susan O'Connor, another strong woman, as Director of Programming. But O'Connor worked *for* Smith, not *with* him so the dominant discourse – and the need to fill seats to keep the organization and its growing staff afloat – guided her efforts at every step. When the 1998 split took place, Smith's new ISC board had little room for storytellers; most of the positions were held by longtime civic leaders and representatives of corporations with fleeting interest in the Festival as an outreach arm of their advertising departments. As envisioned through a new masculinist lens, the Festival page was consciously turned.

With the exception of Ray Hicks, or his son Ted, the jersey number for traditional tellers – grounded in strictly oral cultures – was retired. But the image of the elder Hicks, his arms outspread to welcome his listeners into his story, retains pride of place in the lobby of the ISC's Mary B. Martin Storytelling Hall outside the Krispy Kreme Storytelling Theater. After Ray Hicks's death in 2003, Ted Hicks and then Kathryn Tucker Windham advanced to the slot in the Festival program held for a venerable oral composer whose programming hours are purposefully fewer than those of the Festival

favorites. Ted Hicks's fragile health made his tenure on that stage all too brief. As a college educated professional journalist Kathryn Windham bridged the oral cultures of her forebears and the print-privileging culture that came after. Since her death in 2011, the beloved-elder-as-oral-composer slot has gone unfilled.

In the last twenty years, the National Storytelling Festival has become the bastion of a small cadre of Festival favorites, returning year after year to spin new yarns in the form of the comical hero's journey, humorous, fictionalized personal narratives that privilege the experiences of Euro-American, middle class, middle aged, heteronormative men. The data I've gathered from Festival records shows that the favored tellers tend to live in the South or on the Eastern seaboard. Their repertoires are filled with the exploits of mischievous, usually prepubescent boys in American small towns and suburbs.⁵¹²

What goes unexamined by the ISC board and the Festival staff is that by privileging the presence of Humorous White Guys onstage, masculinist story preferences, performances styles and interaction with the audience become a standard by which all others are judged. Women and others left out of the privileged demographic cannot measure up to that narrative standard, unless they tell tales of a childhood spent as rascally White-boys-in-drag. At this writing, women and tellers of various races, classes

⁵¹² At this writing, I am aware of only two openly LGBTQ-friendly performances ever presented at the Festival; one of them was my performance of transgender folktales at the 2013 Festival. So far, the personal stories – humorous or otherwise -- about growing up gay in a homophobic society have not yet made it to the Jonesborough stage.

NSN offered a Gay, Lesbian and Straight panel of presenters in 2001 at the conference in Providence, Rhode Island. LGBTQ material is sometimes featured in the conference's Fringe performances, and one of its discussion groups is described as OUT LOUD celebrating Diversity and Challenging Homophobia. For more see: <http://www.storynet.org/membership/> accessed 13 April 2014.

and ethnicities are hired to provide the Festival with a diverse backdrop against which the Festival favorites stand out.⁵¹³

When men at "the National" outnumber women year after year — even in incremental numbers — it adds up cumulatively, and affects all who are other than Euro-American humorists from the Eastern Seaboard. In the 41 year life span of the National Storytelling Festival, of the 316 presenters all told — including American and international tellers, musicians, and authors — 110 were female. In that same period, of the 267 American-born tellers presented there, 191 were European American, 48 were African American; 16 were indigenous; five were Hispanic American, and six Asian American.

When the National Storytelling Festival features certain tellers and story genres again and again, it brands those tellers and their material as what the audience should expect from a storytelling festival, and does nothing to widen the palate of its

⁵¹³ Some women who combine charisma and significant skill as performers with exotic appeal even cross over into Festival favorite status. Cuban-born, Decatur, GA-raised storyteller, Carmen Deedy is a cross over Festival favorite; she was first featured in 1995 and welcomed to the Circle of Excellence in 2008. 2013 NEA Heritage Fellow Sheila Kay Adams, a banjo virtuoso and seventh generation balladeer turned novelist is another. She was first billed at the Festival in 1997, though she appeared there earlier in support of her great aunt, Dellie Norton. Both Deedy and Adams have performed in the coveted Midnight Cabaret slot.

Though born in "Amish country," storyteller, humorist and musician, Kim Weitkamp lives in Virginia. She made a meteoric rise to Festival favorite on the National Storytelling Festival stage, first appearing as a Featured teller in 2010, and returning as a Midnight Cabaret performer in 2013. She tours regularly with Andy Offut Irwin and Bil Lepp, two male Festival favorites.

I would also place the late Kathryn Tucker Windham (who appeared at the festival 26 times) in this crossover category once she escaped the Ghost Story Ghetto. Her personal stories of growing up in early twentieth century Alabama under the watchful eye of the family cook, Thurza (whose last name I never heard spoken onstage), evoked both the exotic and the nostalgic for her present-day listeners.

All of these female crossover artists are (or were) based in the Southern region.

listeners. Without a chance to savor other styles and genres, audiences hunger for what they've been fed. And given its prominence in the storytelling marketplace, "the National" spins off festival events with similar hiring practices and audiences with similar tastes.⁵¹⁴

Up to this point, the glass ceiling at the National Storytelling Festival has been perceived as a woman's problem, with the distaff cast as "artistic people who felt that ...they were being excluded." As long as the concern about gender and other disparities in the National Storytelling Festival's hiring practices were based on anecdotal evidence, the staff and board of ISC have not been held accountable for it. Though many of the men featured at the Festival (even some among the Festival favorites) feel an aesthetic and ethical kinship with their sisters in the profession,⁵¹⁵ there is no storytellers' union, and thus no economic incentives to urge men to help to shatter that glass ceiling.

⁵¹⁴ Last fall I was invited to emcee for an upcoming festival that has been a particular favorite of mine over the years – because of its purposely small and beautiful setting, and its often surprising lineup. When I received the contract, I read that three Euro-American men were the featured tellers while two tellers of color (one man and one woman) were filling the "regional slot." When I called to say that I could not in good conscience emcee a festival that had no featured women tellers, I was told that there was one whose name had been left off the teller lineup in my contract. The festival's founder no longer programs the festival; a committee made up of several women and one man does that, but the founder's influence is still felt. Since he is an old friend, I called to chat with him about this and he said: "The tellers I prefer are men. There aren't that many good women tellers. There aren't that many good tellers left at all." By the end of the conversation, he told me that he had a granddaughter now, and that he hoped opportunities would open up for women during her lifetime. I told him: "Three generations of women before her have been working for her equality."

⁵¹⁵ Willy Claflin, Bill Harley, and Joseph Sobol are among the most progressive thinkers among Regan-Blake's brothers in the American storytelling revival. Regan-Blake, MaryGay Ducey, Beth Horner, Dovie Thomason, Claflin and Harley have been extremely proactive in bringing storytellers' concerns to the staff and board of ISC in recent years. They have written letters and met with the board in person to represent the need for concrete changes in the organization's treatment of tellers. In my opinion input

I am hopeful that this study hand in hand with the data I've collected can provide a basis for transforming future ethical and economic practices within the Festival culture. There is more to be learned and more to be done to bring a more intentional approach to parity in hiring and welcoming tellers who've been marginalized due to unexamined biases against gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, age, ethnicity, language group, religious affiliation, political persuasion, regional location, or performance tradition within the revival. If knowledge is power, then new knowledge can energize change leaders. It's time for all of us to join in the effort to move into a more inclusive future.⁵¹⁶

New Knowledge as Impetus for Change

I am confident that the publishing of this study disseminates new knowledge about Connie Regan-Blake's seminal position in the history of the festival-based American storytelling revival. The CSP interviews and our conversations since provide a textual "re-performance" of her pioneering efforts in spite of and in reaction to her exclusion from the community's institutional narrative. As Pollock writes, I am concerned "with the 'response-ability' of the person who hears [these] oral histories and the

from that meeting led to the board's discernment in hiring Kiran Singh Sirah as the new ISC Executive Director following Smith's retirement.

After a firestorm of public recriminations by ISC representatives, aimed at NSN members and staff, Sobol wrote an extremely articulate op-ed piece for the local newspaper putting forth a more balanced view of the contributions of storytellers to the Festival throughout its lifetime. A storytelling practitioner, storytelling studies scholar and former NSN board member who lives in Jonesborough, Sobol also wrote directly to Jimmy Neil Smith in 2011 to urge him to consider more reconciliatory views.

⁵¹⁶ At the 2013 NSN Conference in Richmond, Virginia, Willie Claflin hosted a town meeting to brainstorm what a truly national American Storytelling Festival might look like. The session was packed with people and ideas. As usual, freelance storytellers are busy building their next venue.

corresponding strength of that [listener's] agency as someone who acts on hearing if only by telling again" (5). Regan-Blake's story is passed on here not to replace a hegemonic narrative told by the storytelling community, but to inform, expand, deepen and diversify both narrative and practice within the revival. Tracy C. Davis concurs: "Making the invisible visible in female and male experience is the route of insight into all culture – not because it addresses an imbalance, but because it is more all-encompassing" (68).

Elizabeth Ellis, too, reminds us:

I look forward to a time when the sharing of stories of women's journey is as common as the telling of the hero's journey, when it is taught in classes and discussed in workshops. I don't do so out of any need to see a wrong righted or justice served, but rather out of a deep longing for balance in all our lives. One of the definitions of balance is stability produced by an even distribution of weight. After all, isn't stability something we could use more of in this floundering world of ours (34)?⁵¹⁷

Conclusion

In this study, I have documented suppressed, erased, or ignored information about the festival-based American storytelling revival – and Connie Regan-Blake's significance within it – found in her 1998 Cotsen Storytelling Project interviews, in my later oral history interviews with her and in other sources. Here I call upon storyteller and community scholar Elizabeth Ellis to help me frame my findings. She writes:

⁵¹⁷ Ellis, "Joseph Campbell's Mama's Story," 34.

Two things are usually different when women make the hero's journey than when it is undertaken by men. First, when women make the hero's journey they do not generally do so for adventure or glory or fame or riches. It is almost always made because of a personal relationship that has been threatened. Second, once the journey has been completed, women return to their communal process for input and decision-making (33).⁵¹⁸

Regan-Blake's endeavors within the storytelling revival were undertaken not only to challenge and fulfill herself, but also to identify an extended family of storytellers whose underappreciated verbal art form, she knew instinctively, had the power to touch, teach, entertain and empower. Her efforts on behalf of the Festival itself and the national storytelling organization were intended to shape each of those entities into nurturing containers within which storytellers could thrive and practice their art in co-creative collaboration with their audiences. As the previous chapters have shown, the CSP interviews, the 2012 oral histories and my fact-checking and debriefing conversations with Regan-Blake in our various "dissertation dialogues" have uncovered an enormously detailed picture of the improvisatory nature of the early National Storytelling Festival. My research has shined a light on the evolving cast of characters onstage and at the table of the early NAPPS boards and examined the interdependence of the Festival and the organization with both the town of Jonesborough and the growing revival community. Regan-Blake's importance as the unnamed artistic director of the Festival for its first twelve or thirteen years, her travels with Freeman as the organization's most ambitious ambassadors (and most effective talent scouts), and her aesthetic and organizational value

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

as a conversation partner with the Festival founder and other board members have all been documented herein. Since 1987, I have been one of Regan-Blake's communal conversation partners, listening to her recount her experience along this heroine's journey, but never more so than in the give and take of crafting this study, and in the conversations we've shared about its findings.

My study examined, too, how Regan-Blake's marginalization by a patriarchal dominant discourse was embodied in her lived experiences and embedded in her CSP narratives and other documents. Wondering if devaluation as a woman and an artist had confined or driven her work was reflected in these documents, I saw that the dominant discourse regularly penetrated Regan-Blake's life story: when as a girl she heard a family story that shamed an uncle by comparing him to a pregnant woman, or when she was told by her mother that their African American babysitter could not eat at the table with the family. She encountered it as a N.O.W. speaker advocating for women's equality to the male audience at the Sertoma Sunrise Club, as a touring artist mistaken for a food truck operator, and as a "girl" who "needed" a bed to sleep in her first night in Jonesborough. Surely the most devastating instance of hearing the dominant discourse was when it emanated from the mouths of trusted male colleagues like Jimmy Neil Smith and Donald Davis.

In a thinly veiled reference to Regan-Blake and Laura Simms (her immediate successor as artistic director for the Festival) in the aftermath of the 1985 Festival, newly named NAPPS board chair Donald Davis reduced the two women's commitment to diversity, authenticity and inclusivity to the petulant whining of high-strung "artistic" types (read: teenage girls), whose feelings were destined to be hurt by two father figures

now running the show. With the NAPPS matriarchy safely sidelined, Smith and Davis rolled up their sleeves and set to work, attempting to make the Festival and the organization financially solvent. But without proper oversight, even a "hardheaded business" approach can steer an organization to financial ruin.⁵¹⁹

Five years after she left the board, Regan-Blake was told by Smith that in the eyes of the current board (headed by Davis⁵²⁰ and populated with a number of second-generation tellers like Beth Horner and Milbre Burch) she was no longer "relevant," intimating that the Festival, the organization and the storytelling revival movement were headed in a direction she could not follow. In expressing this sentiment, Smith showed a remarkable lack of faith in the woman he had known for sixteen years, saying, essentially, that he didn't believe she had the creativity, determination or wherewithal to evolve as an artist. It's hard not to read this, in part, as a backlash against Regan-Blake's fifteen years of feminist leadership. Playing the role of a faithful friend and helpmeet, Smith told Regan-Blake that despite her decade and a half as a community leader, she had lost the position she once had. "Irrelevance" was the "spark from the house [that] flew over to the barn, burned down the barn, burned up all the cows and horses, and the

⁵¹⁹ Even White-male-privileging programs could not keep the Festival boat afloat given all the holes in its financial hull. After he left the NAPPS board, Davis remained an important conversation partner with Smith, and the premiere teller at the Festival. But despite the men's best intentions, ISC went bankrupt at the end of 2010.

⁵²⁰ Much the same way that Susan Glaspell discovered Eugene O'Neill and then was herself forgotten as a playwright, while O'Neill's star rose memorably far above the Provincetown Playhouse, Regan-Blake brought Donald Davis to Jonesborough and then saw him steer the Festival in a direction that left folktales, traditional oral narrators and her in the dust.

dog went over, and ate some of the burnt horse flesh. And that's what killed the dog."⁵²¹

The stage was set for wiping out the community's memory of over a decade's worth of brilliant, concerted and pioneering effort and pushing Regan-Blake to the sidelines (with the rest of her sisters) with regard to Festival appearances. Her place in the history of the National Storytelling Festival, the NAPPS organization and the American storytelling movement was hidden in the ashes of the past. "But other than that, there ain't been no news."⁵²²

As painful as it was, exclusion from her proper place in the revival's history did not ultimately constrain Regan-Blake. In fact, it opened a window to a time of inner discernment, and drove her forward in her own life's work. Ellis reminds us:

Waiting is an important part of the woman's story. Women wait for many things: for her cycles and the seasons to turn, for the birth of a child, for the hunters to come home, for men to return from war, for the child she raised to return home from his own hero's journey. Men may see waiting as a passive state. However, it is an active part of the woman's journey. Waiting gives the woman time to go within to develop the strength and skills needed to prepare herself for what will be at the end of the waiting. For the journey always brings change in some form: adjustment, struggle, tragedy, or loss. She must be prepared to give birth to the new order of life as she continues to preserve the community (33).⁵²³

⁵²¹ The reader may recall that this line is from the increasingly disastrous refrain in "No News" as told by Nat M. Wills and the Folktellers.

⁵²² *ibid.*

⁵²³ *ibid.*

Despite being severed from the thread of NAPPS history and removed from the organization's future envisioning, Regan-Blake toured for ten more years as half of the Folktellers' duo and maintained many connections with a wider community of fellow travelers, including the Blue Mountain Lakers retreat group. And when she left her twenty-year partnership with Barbara Freeman in 1995, Regan-Blake birthed a new order of life as a solo artist, a sought-after storytelling teacher and coach, and a respected community activist and leader. In this latter role, she has worked to preserve the revival's memory, restore its history and tend its elders.

Finally, I investigated the relevance of Regan-Blake's efforts – and her marginalization – within the American storytelling revival today. Some of my findings appear at the end of Chapter Six in the recounting of Regan-Blake's post-Folkteller career as a solo artist and her ongoing prominence as an activist within the revival community. Beyond that, the reader must remember that since the 1998 split, there have existed two separate storytelling organizational entities: NAPPS/NSA-now-ISC produces the National Storytelling Festival, while its orphaned membership organization, the National Storytelling Network (NSN), produces the conference, publishes *Storytelling Magazine*, awards various development grants to storytellers and hosts the Oracle Awards. To bring this study into the present, it seems useful to take the pulse of Regan-Blake's current relationship with these two groups.

Three clicks into the ISC website⁵²⁴ take the reader via a 21st century pathway to a page entitled "The History of ISC." There text is laid out beneath what at first appears to

⁵²⁴ <http://www.storytellingcenter.net/experience/about-isc/our-story/the-history-of-isc/> Updated in 2014. Internet accessed 11 April 2014.

be an un-credited photograph taken from above and behind an unnamed entertainer.⁵²⁵ Standing before a bank of microphones on a stage in a high school gym, the performer (recognizable even from behind) is Jerry Clower, "the Mississippi Storyteller of Coon Hunting Story Fame," at his concert on Saturday night, October 13, 1973 at the David Crockett High School near Jonesborough. In the photo, there are people seated in bleachers on the performer's left side, and others seated in folding chairs facing him; there is also a large open area between the stage and the audience, apparently to give the Avery County Cloggers some room to dance. Above the bleachers on the left is the railing of a balcony where Connie Regan-Blake watched the last few minutes of Clower's show four decades ago. But she herself cannot be seen.

The copy beneath the photo reads:

The world's storytelling renaissance began in Jonesborough, a tiny town in the mountains of Tennessee almost 40 years ago. On a warm October day in 1973, the town of Jonesborough played host to the National Storytelling Festival. The Festival was small, but something happened that October weekend that has changed forever our culture, this traditional art form, and this Tennessee town. Now in its 40th year, the National Storytelling Festival was created by Jimmy Neil Smith, a former journalism teacher and mayor of Jonesborough. His inspiration, quite simply, was a well-told tale heard over a car radio—a story told by Grand Ole Opry star Jerry Clower about hunting in Mississippi. Why not a storytelling festival? Smith wondered. The first National Storytelling Festival, the first of its kind anywhere in the world, ignited a renaissance of storytelling that is,

⁵²⁵ If you hover your cursor over the photo along the right hand side, it produces a tag identifying the photographer as Jim Cooper and the performer as Jerry Clower.

even today, far-reaching. People across America and the world are rediscovering the simplicity and basic truth of a well-told story...⁵²⁶

The irony of this institutional narrative, juxtaposed with a photograph that does not depict a "small Festival" on "a warm October day," is that it obscures so much of the "basic truth" about the ISC's organizational beginnings. A packed house may have gathered to gawk at a Nashville name brand entertainer, but the Festival was born the next day, when a mountain farmer named Ray Hicks told "Jack and the Heifer's Hide," and two twenty-six-year-olds, a man named Jimmy Neil Smith and a woman named Connie Regan, heard him. Yet Regan-Blake remains excluded from the organization's historical narrative.

Whether or not "the world's storytelling renaissance" can be traced to October 1973 events in Jonesborough has yet to be corroborated. Something *did* happen that Sunday, thanks to the flexibility, artfulness and generosity of an unassuming mountain man, the aesthetic instincts of a Jonesborough hometown boy,⁵²⁷ and the impulse of two "Chattanooga librarians" to champion Hicks⁵²⁸ and the fledgling festival. The impact of

⁵²⁶ See <http://www.storytellingcenter.net/experience/about-isc/our-story/the-history-of-isc/> accessed 6 May 2014.

⁵²⁷ Smith wrote in an email on April 13, 2014: "Ray [Hicks] was the first festival teller and he served as a model for the future tellers. Not Jerry Clower [the night before] or the after-dinner jokesters [who told on Sunday afternoon]."

⁵²⁸ Ray and Rosa Hicks championed the Folktellers too. In our dissertation dialogue on March 31, Regan-Blake shared this anecdote:
[After the swapping session at the first festival in 1973] I...remember going straight to Ray and Rosa... And Rosa – several times in more recent years – would say that when she met me, she thought I was the prettiest thing she had ever seen ...and that she fell in love with me, and Ray fell for Barbara... And I

"that October weekend" on the culture at large has never been meaningfully measured, though 10,000 people out of 300 million Americans do attend the National Storytelling Festival in a year when the weather and the economy cooperate. Perhaps the Festival's impact on "the traditional art form" could be calculated by the number of folklorists and scholars who have gone on record "for or against" revival storytelling events, divided by the dwindling number of traditional oral narrators featured there since 1982. However, that math is beyond this study. There is no doubt that the Festival changed a town called Jonesborough. And those changes have eventually led to the exclusion of countless important details in the telling of the American storytelling revival's creation myth, as well as the town's dismissal of the contribution of storytellers to the country's premiere storytelling event – two trends worth reversing.

To that end, Regan-Blake has continued to engage the board and staff of ISC. She has worked with them on the administration of the Ray Hicks Fund. As an advocate for NSN, she met with ISC staff and board, as they struggled to restructure the organization after its 2010 bankruptcy and endeavored to hire a new Executive Director. With her eyes turned toward a more inclusive future for the revival community as well as a recognition

remember the first time she said it, my feelings were almost hurt – "Oh no!" It was like "Ray didn't fall for me!?" But...maybe the second time she said it, I realized how dear it was that she would say it, and she would look at me like she still thought I was the prettiest thing around [*chuckling*]...She didn't say it a whole bunch but I grew to just *love it* whenever she did. 'Cause you know she had a *way* when she spoke about something – it was like her face and her body was transported back to that time... And to me when she would say *this*...it was like she was transported back to 1973 [and] she transported me back there... It was a real gift that she had (Telephone call with Regan-Blake on March 31, 2014). The two women's affectionate friendship lasted for over four decades, until Rosa Hicks died on January 31 of this year.

of the role traditional tellers have played (and could play again at future Festivals), Regan-Blake has been in active conversation with the new ISC Executive Director, Kiran Singh Sirah. At the group's invitation, he spent a day at the Blue Lakers retreat in Lake Lure, North Carolina last fall. Regan-Blake was also in close touch with Jimmy Neil Smith, Sirah, and ISC board members following the deaths of Rosa and Ted Hicks early this year. In all these efforts she has functioned as community liaison, revival historian and institutional conscience, though she has been the one to reach out in each instance.

By contrast, the National Storytelling Network's 2014 conference lineup features the name of Connie Regan-Blake. She'll present a five-hour version of "Taking Your Story to the Stage" on Thursday, July 24th at the conference in Mesa, Arizona. The bio next to her picture on the Conference web page reads:

Connie Regan-Blake is one of America's most celebrated storytellers. She has captivated the hearts and imaginations of people around the globe with her powerful performances and workshops. Entertaining audiences in 47 states and 16 countries, she brings the wisdom, humor and drama of stories to main stage concert halls, libraries and into the corporate world. Connie has been featured on seven award-winning recordings – five audio and two video produced by PBS. She has been a guest on NPR's *All Things Considered*, *ABC Good Morning America* and CNN. Connie has been honored with NSN ORACLE awards for Circle of Excellence, Distinguished National Service and Lifetime Achievement

(NSN Conference website).⁵²⁹

The above description of Regan-Blake is excerpted from a longer biography on her own website. The longer version includes this information: "As a founding board member of the National Storytelling Association (formerly NAPPS), and a frequent host and featured performer at the National Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, Connie helped ignite and shape the American storytelling revival." When a shorter bio is called for, she explained to me in a conversation on May 2nd, the confusion caused by the national storytelling organization's serial names (NAPPS/NSA/ISC) sometimes makes it easier simply not to mention it. Her statement suggests that Regan-Blake has incorporated a hard-won sense of detachment concerning that aspect of her career history.

More significant than her teaching of a master class at the conference this summer was Regan-Blake's participation in a history-making, poly-vocal plenary session at the NSN Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2012. The motivation for the plenary session was the community's need to hear its own story in a multiplicity of voices, and to address its recent wounds at the hands of the ISC staff and board and the Town of Jonesborough's legal representatives during the ISC's bankruptcy proceedings the year before. Below is a summary of the context out of which the final narrative springs.

Eight years after opening its bricks and mortar Center, the ISC was staggering under a debt load from construction cost overruns and building upkeep. It had also been humbled by declining Festival audiences and revenues associated with a national

⁵²⁹ For more see: <http://www.storynet.org/conference/master-classes.html> accessed 14 April 2014.

recession. With \$4 million in debts and only about \$56,000 cash on hand, ISC declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy on December 31, 2010. Jimmy Neil Smith stepped down as Executive Director on January 1, 2011. That year as ISC strove to reorganize itself with the help of a federal bankruptcy judge, its representatives moved to reject its longstanding contractual agreements to share 18% of the Festival's annual gross receipts with NSN. ISC took this action unilaterally without an attempt to renegotiate the contract terms with the membership organization. Explaining this move, Smith told a reporter for the *Knoxville News Sentinel* that NSN had received nearly \$1.9 million in the last decade and that "ISC can no longer remain financially sustainable if the contract remains in place."⁵³⁰

Though the NSN board initially objected, its leadership realized that the membership organization could not afford to engage in a protracted legal fight. Having given up any rights to the programming and production of the Festival as part of the separation agreement in 1998, it now gave up its claim to any of the proceeds going forward. NSN staff went back to their spare offices and the board tightened the membership organization's belt for the coming lean times.

In the midst of these changes, intemperate words were spoken to the press by ISC representatives, casting aspersions on the membership organization (read: the community of working storytellers who had founded the organization, and nurtured the Festival). One unattributed statement in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* erased the membership organization's lineage when it characterized NSN as "a service organization for

⁵³⁰ Smith is quoted in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* in an article by Ken Little, "Storytelling Facility in Jonesborough has filed for bankruptcy," 6 January 2011. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/jan/06/storytelling-facility-jonesborough-file-bankruptcy/> accessed 5 May 2014.

storytellers that the International Storytelling Center affiliated with in the late-1990s."⁵³¹

Though ISC had purposefully rid itself of the membership organization and afterward held NSN at arm's length, it filed court documents noting that NSN "has failed in its mission to enhance ISC through membership and related services."⁵³²

Until the bankruptcy judge accepted ISC's proposed restructuring, the future of the 2011 Festival was uncertain. Civic leaders developed unfounded fears that NSN would try to force a hostile takeover of the event. That's when the attorney for the Town of Jonesborough asserted publicly that "NSN split with ISC in order to better serve its members, not the businesses and residents of Jonesborough. If the organization moved out of Jonesborough tomorrow, the move would have no impact upon Jonesborough. NSN has done nothing to help put on the festival, and the Town cannot train its personnel how to do it."⁵³³ He continued: "In the event NSN controls the trademark of the festival name, the Town would most likely elect to exercise its option to revoke the permit and operate a festival itself, instead of attempting to work with NSN... The quality of the festival is too important, and the Town wants to see it remain as a top-notch event."⁵³⁴ In the town's new narrative about the Festival's history, the role that storytellers played in

⁵³¹ *ibid.*

⁵³² This quote is from an article in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* by freelance journalist Ken Little, "Storytellers turn a page in CH. 11 bid," 19 February 2011. http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/feb/19/storytellers-turn-a-page-in-ch-11-bid/?partner=yahoo_feeds 5 May 2014.

⁵³³ Karen Sells, "Storytelling in Court April 26 to deal with NSN, town sides with ISC," *Herald and Tribune*, 19 April 2011. <http://www.heraldandtribune.com/Detail.php?Cat=HOMEPAGE&ID=59275> accessed 5 May 2014.

⁵³⁴ *ibid.*

founding NAPPS/NSA/ISC and feeding the Festival with their mother's milk and heart's blood had been completely forgotten. "But other than that, there ain't been no news."

Shockwaves over the erasure of the entire company of artists who had pioneered and championed the festival for forty years reached to the outer edges of the revival community. Revival historian Joseph Sobol, himself a Jonesborough resident, wrote an Op-Ed piece published in the *Johnson City Press* on May 8, 2011,⁵³⁵ reminding Washington County residents that

For the first twenty years of its existence, the storytelling festival was produced by a hard-working partnership of storytellers from around the country who made up the board of NAPPS... [The] bonds of affection, collaboration, and mutual respect among town leaders, citizens, and the storytellers who flocked here to showcase their art, have constituted the beating heart of the event, that made it not simply a local affair but genuinely a "National Storytelling Festival."⁵³⁶

Sobol spoke for the community when he wrote

The residue of loyalty and affection on the part of storytellers around the country toward the town and the festival is deep but not bottomless, and has ben drained by the ongoing campaign of hostilities carried on by ISC in court and in the press... It will be tough...for that good will to survive the sense of injury engendered by the unilateral actions of the Center, and by the insults added by

⁵³⁵ Joseph Sobol, "The ISC's Gamble," *Johnson City Press*, 8 May 2011. The Op-Ed piece is archived on Eric Wolf's website, The Art of Storytelling Show. <http://www.artofstorytellingshow.com/2011/05/08/the-iscs-gamble/> accessed 5 May 2014.

⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

Town attorney's claim that Jonesborough alone is fit to run the festival in contrast to the artists who designed it and directed it for two decades.⁵³⁷

Throughout 2011-2012, storytellers came to each other's aid in trying to cope with a sense of betrayal by their Founding Father and the civic leaders of Jonesborough. Sobol's voice was joined by other revival community leaders. Regan-Blake participated with others in several interventions between NSN and ISC, and within NSN, to ameliorate the emotional fallout. The plenary session was one such healing effort, for as Karen Blixen wrote: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (qtd. by Anne Bogart).⁵³⁸

At the 2012 NSN conference plenary, no one speaker claimed sole credit for nurturing the National Storytelling Festival, shaping the national storytelling organization or expanding and diversifying the revival community. Instead, several community leaders took turns telling their part of a communal story for the first time at a national storytelling organization event. Six others joined Regan-Blake on the stage, each one bringing a different narrative thread to weave the revival's history into a more expansive fabric than had ever been spoken aloud. At the same time, conference attendees were encouraged to add their narrative threads to a timeline mounted on the wall of the conference hall, making the event a dialogical one.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Anne Bogart, *What's the Story – Essays about Art, Theater and Storytelling* (London: Routledge, 2014), 4.

⁵³⁹ Regan-Blake sent me a recording of the plenary session in its entirety since I was traveling outside the country when it took place. I had it transcribed and returned it to her to share with her fellow speakers.

By offering excerpts of Regan-Blake's 2012 plenary speech interspersed with my analysis, I will draw this study to a close. Regan-Blake's present-day significance to the revival community can be found in her own words. With this speech she supplies the storytelling revival's history interwoven with her embodied wisdom about how the community might turn from its wounding and move into its future.

Regan-Blake opened the plenary session in Cincinnati, and was greeted by applause from an audience whose welcome she breathed in with a sigh of gratitude. When the applause died down, the first word she spoke was not a surprising one:

Ah...Family. Thank you very much. I'm very excited about this today. You're [going to] be hearing me giving an overview...and you're also [going to] be hearing these amazing storytellers and leaders in the storytelling world and the storytelling revival. I want all of them to come up right now...Laura Simms, Jim May,⁵⁴⁰ Beth Horner,⁵⁴¹ Charlotte Blake Alston,⁵⁴² Joseph Sobol, and Willy

⁵⁴⁰ An Emmy-Award-winning storyteller, author of *The Farm on Nippersink Creek – Stories from a Midwestern Childhood* (Little Rock: August House, 2006) and founder of the Illinois Storytelling Festival, Jim May was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1987. Studs Terkel called him "a master storyteller." He was inducted into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2000. For more see: <http://www.jimmaystoryteller.com> accessed 1 May 2014.

⁵⁴¹ Storyteller Beth Horner was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1993 after serving for six years on the NAPPS board. She has more perspective on the organization's history today than she did when she helped to plan the 1987 Congress in St. Louis without consulting the organization's foremother. Regan-Blake offers a gracious introduction: "Beth Horner is a powerful voice in the storytelling world. She was on the board as we were moving out from Jonesborough, seeing events happen in other places. She was helping with those reins and those unruly horses. She's a great storyteller. And I am honored that she's here today" (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 18). Of the role she played on the board in the mid-eighties, Horner said:

I come from the second generation of what we're calling the storytelling revival. We were the teenagers coming onto the scene. And it was our job to rebel and be mad at these people who had lovingly put together this wonderful festival and this

Claflin.⁵⁴³ Let's clap for them too [*applause*]... (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 1).

In keeping with her sense of kinship with other tellers and revival leaders, Regan-Blake acknowledged that her colleagues that day were fellow "fire-keepers," living vessels containing the community's story. In doing so she asserts her understanding that naming the contributions of others does nothing to erode the importance of one's own efforts.

She continues:

Our stories are all about perspective. It's perfect that we're gathered here...

Humans have always told and listened to stories... Right at this moment, we're in

wonderful organization. We wanted to stretch our wings and do new things... We were young and we were passionate! And the passion wasn't really thought out! ...[We said:] "Oh, we want to play! Good, can we come? Can we play? No, we want to play! No, really. [*yelling*] Hey, we want to play! You better let us play! If you don't let us play, we're getting really pissed off here!"... We started to open up geographically in the United States. It was a little different. And we teenagers, oh, we were so excited... But it got hard. And then we became the generation people [were] revolting against... [And we thought:] we really like those people who are our parents. Can we go sit in their laps for a while now? (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 18-22).

She was welcomed into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2007. For more see: <http://bethhorner.com> accessed 1 May 2014.

⁵⁴² An educator, singer, instrumentalist, librettist and leader in the National Association of Black Storytellers, Charlotte Blake Alston was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1994. She has appeared at the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian Institution, the Carnegie Hall Family Concert Series and the Women of the World Festival in Cape Town, South Africa. She was inducted into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2006. For more see: <http://www.charlotteblakealston.com> Accessed 1 May 2014.

⁵⁴³ An award-winning recording artist and co-author (with his puppet pal Maynard Moose) of several children's books including *The Uglified Ducky* (Little Rock: August House, 2011), *Rapunzel and the Seven Dwarfs* (Little Rock: August House, 2011) and *Bully Goat Grim* (Little Rock: August House, 2012), Willy Claflin first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 2001. He was welcomed into the NSN Circle of Excellence in 2010.

this lineage that goes back thousands of years. But this morning's session, we're [going to] focus in on forty to fifty years of this storytelling. You'll be getting different perspectives from the people up here. And as I've thought and...imaged this, I keep thinking of other things that maybe won't be mentioned: The Moth and StoryCorps and international storytelling, and lots of things that won't be [said today]. There's a timeline back there.⁵⁴⁴ And that's a place for any of you to... put up any of the events that you know about, that you know when they started, put the name of any of your – what I think of as – fire-keepers [mentors or tellers who've inspired you]. (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 2-3).

Regan-Blake's forty-four year career as a storyteller and her presence as a longtime community leader embodied the long view of the revival's history on the plenary stage. From that perspective, she reaches out to include elements of an emergent, worldwide storytelling revival that aren't encompassed in the telling of the NAPPs story. She has no need to claim that her efforts inspired the Moth, StoryCorps, international storytelling or any of the other practices and practitioners on the minds and in the hearts of the conference attendees. Yet she makes room for them at a communal table of verbal arts.

Regan-Blake goes on:

This is [going to] be...a look at this [American] storytelling revival. It's a story that has brilliant transformative moments, as well as messy soap opera dramas. [some laughter] And we're [going to] touch on...all of that. Some of you are brand new to storytelling and you don't know these triumphs and pitfalls...of the

⁵⁴⁴ This is a reference to a scroll of paper at the back of the room, marked out as a timeline, where conference attendees were invited to inscribe events and people of significance within the national organization and/or in their own storytelling communities and journeys.

last half-century. Others are maybe in a place of great anger, sadness, hurt with some of the things that have been going on and unfolding. Others just want to forget about it, and others want to create a new story...

It doesn't matter where you are on that spectrum...[including] lots of places that I didn't mention, but I'm hoping that you'll have an open heart for what we have to say today. A lot of you have lived this experience yourself...you've lived the story. So you'll have your versions. And we're hoping that this will be a spark for this weekend, and for when you go back home, to keep telling the story (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 3-4).

Here Regan-Blake acknowledged that she was speaking to a gathering that includes conference first-timers, longtime members of NAPPS/NSA/NSN and everyone in between. Veteran storytellers who, like her, devoted years of service to the NAPPS board or served on its Advisory boards or Nominating committees or who had performed at the Festival or as a Teller in Residence were among the most injured parties in the room. She seeks to welcome them, comfort them and empower them to tell their story in the days to come. She tends to each of the listeners wherever they are in their revival journey. She tells them what she herself is still learning: that by telling the communal story with all its highs and lows, a new fabric of words is being reknit where the old fabric had been snapped away or torn asunder. In another act of feminist ethics of care, she names the community's grief knowing that its members are made stronger for acknowledging emotion, rather than denying it.

Urging her listeners to recognize the power of speaking one's story, she says:

It's always seemed strange to me that an organization devoted to storytelling really hasn't ever spoken their own story...Joseph Sobol wrote an amazing book that can be a great resource if you want to go deeper – *The Storytellers' Journey*. But this story has not been *spoken* as a community, and that's one of the reasons that Willy [Claflin] had this idea to do something like this this morning.

We're [going to] be honoring our fire keepers too – those people that shine a light on the path for us – maybe family, maybe other storytellers, maybe living, maybe already passed away. But you'll be hearing each of us naming some of those people, and you can be thinking about your own. You know, Leonardo da Vinci said that when you put your hand down into a stream of flowing water, you're touching just the last of what's going on and just the first of what's coming. I think it is that way with story as well (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 4).

Above, Regan-Blake credits Sobol's history without privileging the printed page over the spoken word. In her experience, both modes of communication have value. And she gives Claflin his due in urging the telling of the revival's story in this poly-vocal public session because she knows firsthand that revival making is a communal act.

Later in her speech, Regan-Blake invokes the name of the Festival founder, reminding the listeners that Jimmy Neil Smith's foundational acts deserve to be applauded regardless of his shortcomings as a financial steward. She speaks of him with respect, diplomacy and a clear-eyed grace, naming his seminal role in the revival:

I know that there are many strong opinions about Jimmy Neil Smith. He's the founder of the National Storytelling Festival. But he's like a brother to me. And like any family, we have strong disagreements on a lot of stuff. But I still love him. And I want this morning to start off with – now, I'm [going to] get to some other things, but – I'm [going to] start off honoring him and giving him thanks. [applause] He was the one that had a vision and a desire, that original idea, forty years ago in 1973, to have a storytelling event. And he boldly called it the first National Storytelling Festival.

His real focus... – and I think he would say this – was really trying to bring new life to his beloved town of Jonesborough. And he's maintained that all the way through these forty years. And to me, given that that Saturday night event with Jerry Clower was such a huge financial success, a success in lots of different ways that were measured at that time, [pause] I applaud him for having the, in my view, wisdom and foresight to...know that the real magic happened when Ray Hicks took the stage.⁵⁴⁵ So the next year, instead of a big-time star selling lots of tickets, he had Kathryn Windham, Marshall Ward from up in the mountains. I was there telling as a children's storyteller. And Doc McConnell emceed us.

Now, early on, Jimmy Neil also realized that we needed an organization, a non-profit to promote storytelling. In 1974, the very next year, we formed a board

⁵⁴⁵ Later in her 2012 NSN plenary speech, Regan-Blake tells this story that captures the collision of two cultures: "At one point, late night [TV] host Johnny Carson wanted Ray Hicks on his show. Now, the Hickses did not have a telephone, so they had to send an emissary to Beech Mountain. Ray told him, [with Ray's accent] 'Well, if Johnny wants to come here to this country, I'll tell him about Jayc-K'" [audience laughter] (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 6-7).

of directors. And voila, [we had] NAPPS, N-A-P-P-S, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling... Now, NAPPS was the mother organization of what was to become this, the National Storytelling Network, and the International Storytelling Center. It gets confusing, at least to me, with all these names and acronyms. And so today I'm [going to] call all of them NAPPS until we get to a certain different point. [*some laughter and applause*] And to me the lineage of this organization is NAPPS. It goes right back to 1974. That's our history as we're telling our story (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 6-8).

Regan-Blake's own exclusion from the community she had helped to birth happened decades before the storytelling community was metaphorically erased from the Festival's history as well. When, despite that deep wounding, she is able to speak of Smith's innovative ideas and ambitious dreams and his first and foremost devotion to Jonesborough with compassion and clarity, she models for community members that they can also find healing beyond their current immersion in feelings of betrayal and grief.

In the next section, Regan-Blake informs those who were not there from 1973-1984 what they may not realize – that in developing a Festival, an organization and a community, there was much to be done and but a handful of *volunteers* to do it. She cites a list of important firsts handled through collaborative effort with Smith at the helm as the unpaid administrator and newsletter editor:

A lot happened in those first ten years. Some people think it was all about the festival, but it wasn't. That board was formed. Jimmy Neil started putting out the *Yarn Spinner*, a newsletter that was to become eventually the *National*

Storytelling Magazine. We held our first conference [in] 1978; Diane Wolkstein had that vision. People came from all over the United States, some [from] around the world came to listen and learn about stories, to connect with each other, ask each other questions: "What is this storytelling?" We had NAPPS-sponsored guilds, storytelling circles in different communities. We had a month-long institute, weekend workshops [that] people traveled [to]. So a lot was going on in those first ten or fifteen years. And all of us were volunteers, *including Jimmy Neil*. He was basically running everything there in Jonesborough... (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 8-9).

Having given credit where it was due, she briefly told the audience of her travels with Barbara Freeman and her efforts to identify and bring tellers back to Jonesborough, The reader has heard this tale, so I have moved forward in the 2012 plenary speech.

Below Regan-Blake holds herself accountable for limiting access to the Festival stage to tellers she had seen herself, and notes the NAPPS organization's attempts to respond to an ever-widening community while keeping the home fires burning in Jonesborough:

I was the artistic director for a lot of those years in the beginning, when I was on the board of directors. And unfortunately a lot of people felt left out. "Why wasn't I invited to the festival? How come there's nobody from my region that's up there performing?" And I really have to take responsibility for that. I had this hard-fast rule that I wanted to have been at a performance and seen and heard and experienced the tellers before they were on the stage in Jonesborough... And so it

turned out to be very limiting for a lot of people [who wanted to be there and weren't]. But still, the festival kept growing.

And as the years passed, there were real rumblings that NAPPS was too centered in the South. Now, some of the tellers were...starting to come from other places. The board members were representing different geographical regions. But the primary heart of NAPPS was right there in Jonesborough... Even though there was lots happening in other places, there was this sense: "That's the heartbeat" (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 13-14).

Next Regan-Blake reminds her listeners what only time and distance made clear:

As I look back on it, I think Jimmy Neil was really clear from the beginning that he wanted to revitalize Jonesborough and that storytelling was [going to] be a vehicle, a saving grace. He wanted Jonesborough to be the capital of the storytelling world. But there was also this bubbling up and recognition that this movement was much bigger than Jonesborough. Different visions. And that foreshadowed the conflict that was to come.

In the late 80s, NAPPS had its first full-time staff...Jimmy Neil became the director in 1984... That first full-time staff, it meant that what happened on that weekend in October had to generate enough income to sustain the whole year. And I think that's when some decisions started being made from a financial viewpoint (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 14-16).

With the distance and detachment she has gained, Regan-Blake is able to make meaning of what happened particularly for those of us who came to be involved in the first or

second decade of the Festival. For we thought we'd discovered a truly democratic art form, an inclusive community and a performance platform where women and men were equally welcome. That financial stresses might change the tenor of the Festival from a family homecoming to a commercial event was a revelation for many a pioneering storyteller. Getting an historical overview helps make sense of our shared narrative.

Next, Regan-Blake considers a series of NAPPS Congresses that took the NAPPS organization on the road for the first time and tasked the emerging community to stretch its branches and examine its roots:

And another major shift was happening then. In 1987, the very first NAPPS-sponsored event happened outside of east Tennessee. It was the first National Storytelling Congress in St. Louis, Missouri. And that [event] was [part of] the lineage as well for here. And at that conference, there [were] a lot of things discussed, but one of the big things was traditional stories. "Who owns them? Who can tell them? Can you tell outside your own tradition? Can I learn one from somebody else, word for word? Or can I get it out of a book..."

Now, it used to be...that almost everyone [at the festival] told traditional stories. You never heard a personal story on stage the first fifteen years of...[the National] Festival. But I think...concern about [appropriation of] traditional stories had people going, "Well, I don't know who I am exactly and which stories I'm allowed to tell..." And the folklorists were kind of saying some of that too. You know, "Who's [authentically] traditional? And who can tell the stories?" So I think people started turning towards their own personal stories, following Donald

Davis and his brilliance on stage with that format... (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, page 16).

Though she was party to the earliest board discussions about the Congresses, Regan-Blake neither programmed nor presented at them. Yet here she tries to connect the dots for her 2012 audience about the far-reaching impact the events had on the community. She acknowledges that asking an emerging community of amateur and professional storytellers to examine their performance practices, create a code of ethics, acknowledge story sources, seek permissions for copyrighted material, take into account cultural sensitivities, and develop artistic rigor was a big order. For many, the simplest way to fill that order was to leave literary stories and folk tales from cultures other than one's own behind and tell (real or imagined) personal stories. That trend changed the course of the Festival and Donald Davis led the way. In an act of great diplomacy, Regan-Blake speaks of his brilliance despite the fact that his diamond-hardness as board chair helped to sever her from the future of the organization.

In the plenary session, Regan-Blake has come to the "messy soap opera drama" she mentioned in the beginning. She tells it plainly without demonizing the players, a rhetorical strategy that neither ISC representatives nor the Jonesborough town attorney could manage in their own telling of this story:

Jimmy Neil has always been a big dreamer. And in the 1990s, part of his vision was a building, a monument to storytelling. He wanted a museum, a gift shop. He wanted people to have a different reason to come to Jonesborough all year long and not just in October. Most people on the NAPPS board at that time had a different vision. They supported the Festival wholeheartedly, but they were ready

for this organization to be true to its name: "National." Storytelling producers and organizers...all of us...were creating storytelling events all over the country. And the NAPPS board was not interested in putting money, time, and energy into a building in Jonesborough.

A division formed, boiled to a head, and in 1998, there was a split... This was a very difficult time. There were formal, legal negotiations. NSN was part owner of the festival and was given a percent of the festival profits. There were misunderstandings in the broader community [and in Jonesborough]. Many never knew what happened. Again, we weren't telling our story or it wasn't getting to people. People who had attended the festival and supported storytelling for decades weren't in on the details and didn't understand, "Well, why should NSN get some money from [the Festival]? They're not running it."

But here is what got lost in the shuffle: NAPPS and its members have been the emcees, volunteers, ambassadors of storytelling, not to mention all of the members who were storytellers who had been featured at the festival for reduced fees, [and doing] all that volunteer work: checking tickets, running out to the airport to pick up people, making sure a new person felt welcomed. They'd been integral. Then going back home, telling everyone to come to Jonesborough. We all did this. We were integral to that Festival. That's why we got a percentage... [But NSN did not share in the programming and production of the festival] 50/50, since it just seemed to people that were hired at the time with ISC, it would be too

difficult [to answer to two organizations]⁵⁴⁶ ... It would be too difficult to run the festival with input coming all over.

So the running of it, the producing of it was handed to ISC. But that was a missed opportunity too. It meant there [were] no storytellers getting direct input to the artistic vision of that festival. But that's what happened in 1998. A lot of other things happened as well. And the festival continued growing [though NSN] was relegated to the sidelines, and there were resentments on both sides that continued through this last decade. [NSN] continued receiving that percentage but had no input (2012 NSN Plenary Transcript, pages 17-19).

Despite the NSN-demonizing discourse that had circulated within the Jonesborough city limits for years, Regan-Blake claims aesthetic ownership of the Festival for NSN, recognizing the membership organization's birthright on behalf of the tellers who nurtured both the Festival and NAPPS from the beginning. She also names NSN's mistake in letting go of the Festival's reins to keep its program director happy. By giving up its voice in the Festival's programming and production, NSN became increasingly marginalized by ISC's unwillingness to collaborate and ever more vulnerable to a manufactured sense of ill will within the town of Jonesborough.

She goes on:

⁵⁴⁶ When NAPPS/NSA was restructuring after the split, Susan O'Connor, the Festival's Director of Programs, asked that she answer to only one board in programming the lineup. NSN agreed to cede all programming and production decisions to ISC. In the long run this was a mistake as it removed artist input from the process.

But so was ISC's agreement to pay NSN 18% of the gross profits of the Festival. That meant the Festival was now the chief (in terms of NSN) or only (in terms of ISC) income stream for two organizations. This fiscal house of cards could not hold.

And as many of you know, the [new ISC] building proved to be a financial drain. There was an economic downturn. And at the end of 2010, ISC declared bankruptcy. More hard feelings, resentments, distrust, anger, anger at the court documents, anger at the newspaper articles, anger at the percentage being legally taken away. Anger. And just this last week, almost coinciding with this conference, ISC is out of Chapter Eleven. Which I am glad for. 'Cause I want to see that Festival and the teller-in-residence [program in Jonesborough] continue, hopefully with some different vision, a broader vision. Hopefully more inclusive...I...think of us...as elders, co-equals in that family where one of the siblings had not been a good steward of the finances. But no doubt, this is a huge turning point.

Johnny Moses, many of you all know him – [a] First Nation [teller] from Canada – raised in a very rural area on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He said that in his tribe, mistakes are seen as a window that the soul can climb out of, so that it can get bigger. I think all of us have made mistakes. And I'm sure our elders, our fire-keepers, are watching us climb out of that window. And my hope...is that somehow there can be forgiveness. When that anger is there, only anger...gets fed... And it doesn't really hurt anyone else. I know you've all heard that. That's the Oprah moment for this talk. I'm hoping there can be forgiveness, not necessarily, "Oh, everything's OK," but forgiveness of some kind. And that we really can move on, but remember our lineage (2012 NSN Plenary Session Transcript, pages 19-20).

Despite the bad faith and betrayal that ISC supporters directed at the storytelling community, Regan-Blake celebrates the organization's coming out of Chapter 11, knowing that the continued operation of ISC and the Festival leaves open a door for reconciliation and a collaboration that could lead to a more inclusive future for all. And she urges her listeners to see the potential in a narrative that leads from mistakes made (on both sides) to a shared opportunity to grow.

In her 2012 plenary speech, Regan-Blake wove her story back into the narrative fabric of the revival's history. In that narrative, she addressed her own failings and those of Jimmy Neil Smith, ISC, the Town of Jonesborough and even NSN with grace and aplomb, offering the community a gentle reminder of how best to go forward. She has learned from experience to keep telling the story of your own belonging even in the face of a counter-narrative. And she reminded her listeners that we all travel lighter with less baggage.

Engaging "the technologies of the human mainframe – memory, imagination, emotion, intellect, language, gesture, movement, expression (of face and of body) and, most crucially, relationship in the living moment" (Sobol, et al. 3)⁵⁴⁷ in this presentation, she embodied her answer to the final CSP question – why is storytelling important? Regan-Blake said in 1998 and intimated again in 2012, that "storytelling is what links all human beings... It is the very crux of how we are in the world... It's not even a thread that runs through [us]. It is...the essence...of having a soul and a mind and a heart and a body" (CSP/CRB Interview 2, page 48). Like Regan-Blake, the 2012 conference

⁵⁴⁷ Joseph Sobol, John Gentile, and Sunwolf, "Once Upon a Time: An Introduction to the Inaugural Issue," *Storytelling, Self, Society – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* 1.1 (Fall 2004), 1-7.

community was made wiser, more vulnerable and thus stronger, by telling, hearing and claiming its own story. May the rest of us be like her, carrying our hard won wisdom, vulnerability and strength into a more intentionally inclusive and compassionate future.

APPENDIX A

History of Hiring at the National Storytelling Festival (1973-2012)

Figure 1. GENDER representation at the National Storytelling Festival in its first decade (1973-1982) based on the credited Featured tellers listed in the Festival programs. In this decade, there was no differentiation in performance slots (Featured tellers vs. Ghost Story, etc.)

Starting in 1974 and until 1984, storyteller and early NAPPS board member Connie Regan-Blake programmed the teller line-up.⁵⁴⁸ During this decade, 69 women were featured compared to 89 men. In all but two years (1978 and 1981) in this decade, male tellers outnumber female tellers. In 1982, the tenth anniversary of the festival was

⁵⁴⁸ In her CSP narrative, Regan-Blake acknowledges that 1983 was the first year that board member Laura Simms had significant input into the line-up. Since Simms came on the board in late 1979 or early 1980, and Regan-Blake left the board at the end of 1984, the women had a few years to collaborate before the reins were given fully over to Simms.

celebrated by inviting back all the previous featured tellers who were still living.⁵⁴⁹ That year, 22 women and 26 men returned to tell.

⁵⁴⁹ According to Sobol, "Connie Regan-Blake had the inspiration to invite back every storyteller who had performed there over its first decade. More than sixty tellers came. It was a dramatic enactment of the movement's communitarian ideals and also a kind of public annunciation of 'critical mass'" (190).

Figure 2. GENDER representation at the National Storytelling Festival in its second decade (1983-1992) based on the credited Featured tellers listed in the Festival programs. Although the Ghost Story Concert became a separate ticket event during this decade, I have not included Ghost Story Tellers in these numbers.

During these years, 95 women were featured compared to 123 men. Taken year by year, in all but three years (1983, 1984 and 1986) in this decade, male tellers outnumber female tellers. As before, 1992 was an anniversary event (the twentieth) during which all previous tellers were invited to return. That year 38 women and 45 men were featured. Between 1983-1985,⁵⁵⁰ storyteller, community scholar and human rights activist Laura Simms was the artistic director of the festival, but she resigned the position and eventually left the board after audience members, Jonesborough residents and board members complained vociferously about the edgy, internationally inclusive, esoteric line-up for the 1985 festival. In 1986 in the wake of Simms's resignation, the new NAPPS

⁵⁵⁰ See Sobol, 197.

board chair, storyteller and author Donald Davis, took the helm⁵⁵¹ with a "hardheaded business point of view toward the artistic issues involved" (*Storytellers' Journey*, 199). By the end of the eighties or the early nineties, a new NAPPS staff member, Susan O'Connor, had been hired first part-time and then full time, and took over the festival programming. The board no longer played a programming role in the festival after this.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ For more on the impact of this change of command on programming, see Sobol, 199-200.

⁵⁵² For more on this transition, see Sobol, 214-216.

Figure 3. GENDER representation at the National Storytelling Festival in its third decade (1993-2002) based on the credited Featured tellers listed in the Festival programs. In 1993, the Midnight Cabaret became a separate ticket event at the Festival. These numbers do not include either Ghost Story tellers or Midnight Cabaret tellers.

ISC staff member Susan O'Connor was director of festival programming during this period. Overall during these years, 99 women were featured compared to 119 men. Year by year, for a third time in this decade, male tellers outnumber female tellers in all but two years (1997 and 1998). Prior to the 2002 anniversary event (the thirtieth), audiences were sent a ballot and asked to vote for favorites; the featured teller roster was, presumably, based on those responses.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ Once NAPPs split into two organizations (NSN and ISC) in 1998, the festival producing board rarely included working storytellers, though the ISC executive director stayed in close touch with former NAPPs board chair, storyteller Donald Davis.

It is possible that the ballot procedure was inelegantly put into place for the thirtieth anniversary partly because the roster of former featured tellers was now too unwieldy to realistically host them all for an anniversary weekend. But it seems more

Festival staff did not engage the storytellers beforehand on the use of the ballot system, and this created considerable friction between staff and performers, and within the storytelling performance community. Despite some tellers' anecdotal threats to do so, no one showed up wearing a tee shirt proclaiming the wearer to be either a winner or loser of the balloting process. That year 13 women and 18 men were featured.

likely that the decision was made to insure that Festival favorites would be there to draw in audiences during a lingering economic recession.

Figure 4. GENDER representation at the National Storytelling Festival in its fourth decade (2003-2012) based the credited Featured and New Voice tellers listed in the Festival programs. These numbers do not include either Ghost Story tellers or Midnight Cabaret tellers.

ISC staff member Susan O'Connor was the director of festival programming during this time. Overall in this decade, 99 women were featured, as opposed to 136 men. In every other year during this decade, male tellers outnumber female tellers. In 2011, the ISC initiated a "New Voice" category of featured teller for "emerging" artists. Both groups are represented in the totals on this graph. For the 2012 anniversary event (the fortieth), no audience ballot was used to select tellers, but Festival favorites, branded by previous appearances, dominated. Twelve women and 14 men were featured in 2012.

Figure 5. The RACE/ETHNICITY of the American (female and male) of all the presenters – Featured Tellers, New Voice Tellers, Ghost Story Tellers, Midnight Cabaret Tellers, Medicine Show Performers and other special guests (authors, musicians, etc.) – at the National Storytelling Festival (1973-2013) based on research done by this writer.

As in the Festival's very first years, White men have continued to dominate the featured teller roster. In the course of the Festival's history, 109 Euro American men and 73 Euro American women have been featured for a total of 183 of the 316 performance slots. In addition, 21 African American men and 27 African American women have been featured in the same span of years. If you add Cuban-born and Georgia-raised teller Carmen Deedy to the equation, three Hispanic American women and four Hispanic American men have been featured (for a total of seven) between 1973 and 2013. An equal number of Asian American men and women have been featured during this period, for a total of

six. The total number of Native North Americans featured at the festival since its beginning is sixteen, seven women and nine men.

Figure 6. REGIONS of the United States represented by (Female and Male) Tellers at the National Storytelling Festival from 1973-2013 based on data collected done by this researcher.

In response to five years of hectoring from the hinterlands, the national storytelling membership organization divided the country into created seven regions in 1991. At that point the board of directors expanded to accommodate one new member from each region. From 1973-2013, 87 tellers from the Southeast (34 women and 53 men), 53 from the Northeast (23 women and 30 men), 32 from the MidAtlantic region (17 women and 15 men) have been featured, making the South and the Eastern Seaboard the dominant area from which tellers have been chosen. The North Central region has been represented by 25 (15 women and 10 men), the South Central region has been represented by 21 (9 women and 12 men), and the Western region has represented by ten tellers (2 women and

eight men). 38 Pacific region tellers have been featured at the festival (an equal number of men and women). The number of international tellers living domestically or abroad is not included in the graphs shown here.

Here's how the National Storytelling Network (NSN) regions are defined on the NSN website:

Pacific - Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii

Western - Idaho, Utah, Montana, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming

North Central - North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio

South Central - Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana

MidAtlantic - Metro NYC, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, West Virginia, Virginia, District of Columbia

Northeast - Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Upstate New York

Southeast - Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁴ From <http://www.storynet.org/about/index.html> Accessed online 7 September 2013.

Figure 7. GENDER representation among Ghost Story Tellers at the National Storytelling Festival in the first decade of the separate ticket Ghost Story Concert event (1989-1998).

During the first decade of the Ghost Story Concert separate ticket event, women had a slight edge over men in being hired for these slots: all told 14 women and 10 men filled the slots from 1989-1998. The onstage performance time is limited to twenty minutes a night on both Friday and Saturday night at the National Storytelling Festival. Based on information shared by ISC Director of Programs Susan O'Connor in 2012, pay for this appearance is lower (\$800) than a Featured teller slot (\$2000). The two or three specially designated Ghost Story Concert slots are filled by former Featured tellers who are joined each night by a handful of Featured tellers from that year's roster.

Figure 8. GENDER representation among Ghost Story Tellers at the National Storytelling Festival in the second decade of the separate ticket Ghost Story Concert event performers (1999-2008).

During the second decade of the Ghost Story Concert separate ticket event, 12 women and 13 men filled the performer slots. From 1999-2008, gender parity was nearly achieved in this area.

Figure 9. GENDER representation among Ghost Story Tellers at the National Storytelling Festival in the last five years of the separate ticket Ghost Story Concert event performers (2009-20013).

During the last five years of the Ghost Story Concert separate ticket event, 6 women and 4 men filled the performer slots, so again the distaff had a slight edge over their brothers in being featured in this event.

Figure 10. GENDER representation among Midnight Cabaret tellers at the National Storytelling Festival in the first decade of the separate ticket Midnight Cabaret event (1993-2002).

The Midnight Cabaret is a prime 90-minute performance slot on Friday or Saturday night at the National Storytelling Festival. Based on information shared by ISC Director of Programs Susan O'Connor in 2012, pay for the Midnight Cabaret performance slot was \$1200. In the first decade of the Midnight Cabaret separate ticket event, women filled ten of the performer slots while men filled eleven. This was one area of Festival programming in which gender parity seemed to be a goal.

Figure 11. GENDER representation among Midnight Cabaret tellers at the National Storytelling Festival in the next eleven years of the separate ticket Midnight Cabaret event performers (2003-2013).

In the second decade (plus one year) of the Midnight Cabaret separate ticket event, women filled eight of the performer slots, while men filled fifteen. An emerging sense of parity recedes quickly when men are featured nearly twice as often as the distaff tellers in this programming slot.

APPENDIX B

ILLUSTRATED TIMELINE OF THE NARRATIVE

Illustration 1.

Regan-Blake's maternal great-grandmother, Rosie O'Donnell is pictured at right. Hand-painted family photograph in the possession of Regan-Blake (CRB). Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 2.

Growing up as a first generation American, Rosie O'Donnell met and married "Posie" Daniel (pictured at right), and they raised their family in Tennessee. Family photograph in the possession of Regan-Blake. Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 3.

Rosie and Posie Daniel's daughter Regina Daniel (called Rena and later Mama T by her progeny) married Samuel Elos "Pop" Freeman, and bore him three sons and a daughter. That daughter, Mary Agnes Freeman, grew up in Nashville. Rena (or Mama T, Regan-Blake's grandmother) and Mary Agnes (Regan-Blake's mother) are pictured at right. Family photo in the possession of Regan-Blake. Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 4.

Mary Agnes Freeman (1912-2003) married John Regan (1911-1990) in 1940. They raised three children, the youngest of whom was Connie Regan-Blake (b. 1947). The youngest of seven brothers, John Regan is seen pictured at right as a recalcitrant four-year-old with his grandmother, Om, and his older brother Tim. Family photograph in the possession of Regan-Blake. Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 5.

Storytellers Connie Regan-Blake (then Connie Regan) and Barbara Freeman (then Barbara Wright) met Ray and Rosa Hicks of Beech Mountain, North Carolina when they attended the first annual National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Rosa (left) and Ray Hicks are pictured at right from a later Festival. Photo credit: Tom Raymond. Used by permission, courtesy of Tom Raymond.

<http://www.rayhicks.com/about.htm> accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 6.

Regan-Blake (left) is pictured at right with Rosa Hicks (center) and Ray Hicks (far right) on Beech Mountain. D'Put, the Folktellers' legendary Datsun pickup truck can be seen in this picture. Photo credit: Barbara Freeman. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Figure 7.

The Hicks's cabin on Beech Mountain is pictured at right. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 8.

The historic Christopher Taylor House was pictured on the cover of the program for the second National Storytelling Festival in 1974. Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission, courtesy of the Jonesborough Department of Tourism.

<http://www.historicjonesborough.com/strolling-tours-historic-jonesborough-tn.php?mo=08&yr=2012>
Accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 9.

Pictured at right are Elizabeth (Eliza) Seeman (on the left), the writer of "Two White Horses" with Connie Regan-Blake (on the right) at their meeting at the second annual National Storytelling Festival in 1974. Photo credit: Barbara Freeman. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 10.

Pictured at right is Regan-Blake's first paycheck from the National Storytelling Festival for her appearance in 1974. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

Illustration 11.

John (left) and Mary Agnes Regan (center) are pictured at right with Barbara Freeman at the fourth annual National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee in 1976. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 12.

The 1976 Board of Directors of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) is pictured at right. Photo credit: Jimmy Neil Smith. Used by permission of Jimmy Neil Smith.

From left: Kathryn Windham, Doc McConnell, Connie Regan, Barbara Freeman and David Holt.
http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 13.

Connie Regan-Blake and Barbara Freeman are pictured at right with Jimmy Neil Smith, the founder of the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Photo credit: Bob Hutchison. Used by permission of Bob Hutchison.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 14.

Marshall Dodge is pictured at right. He was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1977. He died in January of 1982. Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission, courtesy of Islandport Press, Inc.

http://islandportpress.typepad.com/dispatches_islandport/2009/12/the-great-marshall-dodge-and-his-downeast-smilein.html accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 15.

Pictured at right during 1978 National Storytelling Festival are Richard Chase (center) author of *The Jack Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Col, 1943), Hattie Hicks Presnell (left) and her brother, Stanley Hicks (both double first cousins of Ray Hicks). Kathryn Windham is at the mic telling a story behind them. Photo Credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 16.

Connie Regan-Blake (on left) and Barbara Freeman (on right) are pictured at right on the cover of the *School Library Journal* in 1978. Barbara Home Stewart wrote the accompanying article about them. Photo credit: Michael "Badhair" Williams. Used by permission of *School Library Journal*.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 17.

Barbara Freeman (left) and Connie Regan-Blake are pictured at right performing *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (New York: HarperCollins, 2012) in 1978 *School Library Journal*. Photo credit: Unknown. Used by permission of *School Library Journal*.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 18.

Pictured at right is modern troubadour Gamble Rogers first appeared at the National Storytelling Festival in 1978. Photo credit: George Baker, the *Chattanooga Times*. Used by permission of the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 19.

Pictured at right is folklorist Frank Warner with his husky on Long Island. Warner and his wife, Anne, collected the ballad of "Tom Dula" in 1938. Warner died in 1978. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 20.

Throughout its history, the NAPPS organization grew in the direction of its board members' strengths. In 1978 NAPPS held its first National Conference on Storytelling on the campus of the historic Washington College Academy outside of Jonesborough. It was spearheaded by NAPPS board member Diane Wolkstein (left) shown celebrating with Regan-Blake in the picture at right. Photo credit: Unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 21.

The 1980 cover of *New Age* magazine featuring the Folk Tellers is seen at right. In the photo shown, Freeman is at left and Regan-Blake at right. Rex Weyler wrote the accompanying article "On the Road with the Folk Tellers." Photo Credit: Rex Weyler. Used by permission, courtesy of the Rex Weyler and the publisher, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 22.

Ken Feit is pictured at right. He was to have been featured at the National Storytelling Festival in October, 1981, but died after a car crash in August of that year. Photo credit: Unknown. Used by permission of Joseph F. Martin, author of *Foolish Wisdom – Stories, Activities and Reflections from Ken Feit* (San Jose: Resource Publications, 1990).

<http://physicalcomedy.blogspot.com/2012/10/re-membering-ken-feit.html> accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 23.

Pictured at right is a 1982 gathering of featured tellers at the 10th annual National Storytelling Festival. Photo credit: Scott Dedman. Used by permission, courtesy of Scott Dedman.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 24.

Folklorist Kenny Goldstein (left) with Chippewa-Cree storyteller Ron Evans, probably at the 10th annual National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 25.

Library luminary Augusta Baker was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in 1983. For an image of Baker, please see link at right.

http://www.sc.edu/cmcis/news/fall11/augustabaker_chair.html

Illustration 26.

The first double album and cassette that NAPPS put out in 1983 was entitled *Storytelling: The National Festival*. Regan-Blake worked on the recording with Lex Cochrane, a sound engineer at Weston Woods Studios and Barbara Freeman. Album cover design: Dana Irwin. Image found on E-Bay.

http://www.ebay.com/itm/Storytelling-The-National-Festival-2-LP-Record-Set-NAPPS-3-/251428527116?pt=Music_on_Vinyl&hash=item3a8a4edc0c

Illustration 27.

In 1984, Connie Regan married Phil Blake. They are pictured at right. Photo credit: Unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 28.

In 1988 the NAPPS office moved into the long-neglected, now newly refurbished Chester Inn, located on Main Street next door to the Christopher Taylor House. Photo credit: Pat Johns. Used by permission, courtesy of Pat Johns.

<http://www.wataugalakemagazine.com/jonesboroughbuildings1.html> accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 29.

The Folktellers in a photo from an article in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, possibly telling "The Two Old Women's Bet." Photo credit: Louis Sohn. Used by permission, courtesy of Louis Sohn.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 30.

Regan-Blake (left) and Freeman on the cover of the *School Library Journal* in 1989, sitting in the window of the Christopher Taylor House. As she did in 1978, Barbara Home Stewart wrote this follow up article, "The Mountain Sweet Sound of Success: Folktellers '89" on the duo. Photo credit: Unknown. Used by permission of *School Library Journal*.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 31.

The featured tellers gathered after the twentieth annual National Storytelling Festival in 1992. Photo credit: Tom Raymond of Fresh Air Photography. Used by permission, courtesy of Tom Raymond.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 32.

Snapshot of Connie Regan-Blake as a solo performer, sitting in the window of the Christopher Taylor House in Jonesborough, Tennessee, sporting her new gray "do." Photo credit: unknown. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 33.

Originally founded as a retreat group in 1987, the Blue Lakers are pictured at right on the steps of "The Castle" in Isle of Palms, South Carolina where they met from 1993 until 2003. From the top left: Jim May, Connie Regan-Blake, Beth Horner, Bill Harley, Jay O'Callahan, Gwenda LedBetter, Jon Spelman, Milbre Burch, Michael Parent and David Holt. Len Cabral. Photo credit: Barbara Freeman. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 34.

Pictured at right are conversation partners, Jay O'Callahan (left) and Connie Regan-Blake. Since O'Callahan lives in Marshfield, Maine and Regan-Blake lives in Asheville, North Carolina, the two meet regularly on the phone to help each other develop new work. Photo credit: Phil Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 35.

From left to right: Ted Nathan Hicks (1954-2014), Rosa Violet Harmon Hicks (1931-2014) and Ray Hicks (1922-2003) on their front porch at the cabin on Beech Mountain in North Carolina. Rosa is holding a bouquet of her dahlias, while her son (left) and husband (right) talk about the wooden "whatnot" in Ray's hand. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 36.

Another of Regan-Blake's favorite pictures of Rosa Hicks on her porch with the wood stacked near her kitchen door to fuel to the cook stove and the wood stove in the cabin. Photo credit: David Holt. Used by permission, courtesy of David Holt.

http://www.storywindow.com/photo_album.htm
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 37.

The view from Regan-Blake's "tree house" where she lives in Asheville, North Carolina. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

<http://www.storywindow.com/garden.htm>
accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 38.

Like Rosa Hicks, Connie Regan-Blake is a devoted gardener. This window through which her garden may be seen came from Ray and Rosa Hicks's home after the remodel there. Photo credit: Connie Regan-Blake. Used by permission of CRB.

<http://www.storywindow.com/garden.htm> accessed 1 May 2014.

Illustration 39.

Connie Regan-Blake in performance. Photo credit: Chris Bartol. Used by permission, courtesy of Chris Bartol.

http://www.storywindow.com/press_kits.htm accessed 1 May 2014.

APPENDIX C:
RELEASES AND IRB EXEMPTION

The Storytelling Project of The Cotsen Children's Library

Project Office: 582 Eldora Road, Pasadena, California 91104

Fax: (626) 798-3064

Berkley Hudson
Director
(626) 798-5906
bhudson582@aol.com

Milbre Burch
Associate Director
(626) 797-6817
kindcrone@aol.com

RECORDING RELEASE

FOR NON-COMMERCIAL, NON-PROFIT PURPOSES

The undersigned ("STORY TELLER") hereby grants to COTSEN FAMILY FOUNDATION ("FOUNDATION") and COTSEN CHILDREN'S LIBRARY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ("LIBRARY") and their successors and assigns, the right to record in audio or audio/video format as well as in writing, specified story or story telling material of STORY TELLER and personal material related to STORY TELLER's career as a story teller, all for non-commercial/non-profit use. The recordings and materials will be used for archival and related purposes so that future generations will be able to enjoy and learn from the unique talents of these individuals and for research purposes at the LIBRARY.

The FOUNDATION and LIBRARY have the right to edit, publish, display, reproduce, and use in any manner whatsoever (within the scope of the non-commercial/non-profit purposes stated above), all or any portion of the recordings and materials. STORY TELLER will be given appropriate credit, the exact form, size and placement of credit to be at the sole discretion of FOUNDATION or LIBRARY.

STORY TELLER will receive one complementary copy of any videotape or other publication which includes the recordings and materials produced under this release, with all copyrights in the actual tape or publication belonging to FOUNDATION or LIBRARY. STORY TELLER warrants and represents that he or she has the right to enter into this agreement and has the right to use of any intellectual property which is a part of his or her performance or materials.

Dated Sept 24, 19 99

STORY TELLER

Shipping Address: 10650 Holman Avenue #207, Los Angeles, California 90024
Phone: (310) 441-0104 Fax: (310) 446-1882

To: Connie Regan-Blake
51 Vance Gap Road
Asheville, NC 28805

From: Milbre E. Burch
513 Rockhill Road
Columbia, MO 65201

RECORDING AND RELATED MATERIAL RELEASE
FOR NON-COMMERICAL, NON-PROFIT PURPOSES

The undersigned ("STORY TELLER") hereby grants to Milbre E. Burch ("RESEARCHER"), the right to record in audio format as well as in writing, specified interviews with STORY TELLER, conducted in person and on the phone beginning in September of 2012, as well as related materials such as personal email exchanges, regarding this research about the STORY TELLER's career, all for non-commercial/non-profit use. The recordings and related materials will be used for archival and related purposes so that future generations will be able to enjoy and learn from the unique talents of this individual and for research purposes.

The RESEARCHER has the right to edit, publish, display, reproduce, and use in any manner whatsoever (within the scope of the non-commercial/non-profit purposes stated above), all or any portion of the recordings, their transcripts, and the related materials specified herein. STORY TELLER will be given appropriate credit by the RESEARCHER. The exact form, size and placement of credit to be at the sole discretion of the RESEARCHER.

STORY TELLER will receive one complementary copy of any publication, which includes the recordings, transcripts and related materials produced under this release with all copyrights of the publication belonging to RESEARCHER. STORY TELLER warrants and represents that he or she has the right to enter into this agreement and has the right to use of any intellectual property, which is a part of his or her performance or materials.

Dated 4/14/2014

STORY TELLER

Dated April 9, 2014

RESEARCHER

Campus Institutional Review Board

65211

University of Missouri-Columbia

9585

umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/

483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO

PHONE (573) 882-

FAX (573) 884-0663

E-MAIL:

WEB:

April 18, 2014

Milbre Burch
129 Fine Arts Bldg
Columbia, MO 65211

Dear Ms. Burch,

Based on the information in your exempt application entitled "Cotsen Storytelling Project Interviews" I have determined that this project does not constitute human subjects research as required for exemption under 45CFR 46.101(b).

- The investigator is not obtaining data through intervention or interaction with living individuals.
- The investigator is not obtaining data through identifiable private information.

There are no further IRB requirements for this project. Please notify the IRB if the project changes in ways that could affect the determination.

If you have questions please feel free to contact the IRB office 882-9585.

Sincerely,

Heidi Mitchel
Compliance Specialist, Campus IRB

APPENDIX D:

PERMISSIONS

Andrea L. Immel <aimmel@Princeton.EDU>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Permission to use material

Dear Milbre Burch,

Permission to publish excerpts from transcribed 1998 interviews with Connie Regan-Blake collected by Milbre Burch and Berkley Hudson for the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library as described in your April 2014 e-mail is hereby granted by the Princeton University Library as its rights extend as the owner of the physical property. The excerpts will appear in your dissertation

"In Her Own Words: Connie Regan-Blake, the Foremother of the Festival-Based American Storytelling Revival" successfully defended on 23 April 2014 in the Department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

The Library does not, however, assume any responsibility with regard to literary property rights, copyright, or any other issues involved with the use of the quotations.

Acknowledgment should be made as follows: identification of specific item; date (if known); collection name; Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

With best regards,

Andrea Immel

Curator, Cotsen Children's Library

aimmel@princeton.edu

609-258-1510 (direct line)

609-258-2324 (fax)

Erica R Bossier <ebossie@lsu.edu>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

RE: URGENT: Seeking permission to quote an excerpt of Lisel Mueller's poem "Why We Tell Stories" in my dissertation

Dear Milbre Burch:

We will grant this use gratis.

Erica Bossier
Permissions Coordinator
LSU Press
3rd floor, Johnston Hall
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [<mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>]

Sent: Monday, May 05, 2014 9:45 AM **To:** Erica R Bossier **Subject:** URGENT:
Seeking permission to quote an excerpt of Lisel Mueller's poem "Why We Tell Stories"
in my dissertation **Importance:** High

Dear Erica Bossier,

In 1986 as a professional storyteller, I first read Lisel Mueller's poem "Why We Tell Stories," and loved it. I have kept a copy of the poem in a file folder ever since, returning to read it for my own pleasure over the years.

Twenty eight years after my first exposure to the poem, as I was finishing my dissertation for a PhD in the Department of Theatre at the University of Missouri, I searched for my copy of the poem again. Because my diss is about Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the festival-based American storytelling revival, I was moved to include the last fifteen lines (the third stanza) as the frontispiece for my dissertation. The excerpt reads:

From "Why We Tell Stories" by Lisel Mueller

Because the story of our life
becomes our life

Because each of us tells
the same story
but tells it differently

and none of us tells it
the same way twice

Because grandmothers looking like spiders

want to enchant the children
and grandfathers need to convince us
what happened happened because of them

and though we listen only
haphazardly, with one ear,
we will begin our story
with the word *and*

The poem is attributed in a footnote on the same page as this excerpt and the attribution is also included in my bibliography. At present, the attribution reads:

Lisel Mueller, "Why We Tell Stories" in *Alive Together - New and Selected Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 150-151.

Two weeks ago, I successfully defended the diss, and now am madly making revisions and prepping it for the final submission to my university.

Having read the online booklet, Code of Best Practices in Fair Use of Poetry, offered by the Poetry Foundation (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/bestpractices>), I am writing to ask if my inclusion of the lines above would be considered fair use, or if the excerpting of the poem in this way would be considered inappropriate by either the poet or the publisher.

My materials are due to be turned in by Friday May 9th, 2014. I would deeply appreciate hearing from you in time to make any change that is required in my text.

If you instruct me to take out the stanza, I will do so with alacrity. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Milbre Burch, PhD
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, Missouri

Connie Regan-Blake <connie@storywindow.com>

To: Milbre Burch <kindcrone@aol.com>

Quick question - he said yes

Here is his 'yes' answer

Connie

Connie Regan-Blake

www.StoryWindow.com

connie@storywindow.com

828-258-1113

From: Tom Raymond [<mailto:tom@freshairphoto.com>] **Sent:** Friday, May 2, 2014
11:30 AM **To:** Connie Regan-Blake **Subject:** Re: Quick question

Go for it my pleasure Sent from my iPhone

On May 2, 2014, at 10:55 AM, "Connie Regan-Blake" <connie@storywindow.com>
wrote:

Hi Tom,

Hope you and Phil are enjoying golf on this gorgeous day! HE was excited to be coming over to play.

Here is a quick question:

A dear friend and storyteller – and Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Theatre at the University of Missouri, Milbre Burch has recently written and defended her dissertation about my work as a storytelling artist, NAPPS community leader and artistic director of the NAPPS festival in its first ten years. Her research is based on an in-depth interview with me that she and Berkley Hudson collected for the Cotsen Storytelling Project in 1998 and other sources.

She is including a number of images from my personal photos and website in an "illustrated timeline" of the narrative and would like to include 2 of yours - your image of Ray and Rose Hicks onstage at the Festival (the one with Ray looking up at Rosa) and the 20th anniversary festival photograph of all the tellers gathered at the park with the gazebo. Of course, she will give photo credit.

Can you let me and/or Milbre know if you are OK with her using the images in her appendix? Her final draft is due next Friday, May 9th, so hearing back from you ASAP would be much appreciated. I am ccing this to Milbre.

Hope to see you before too long. Thanks for all your brilliant photographic work over these years!

Cheers,
Connie

Connie Regan-Blake
www.StoryWindow.com
connie@storywindow.com
828-258-1113

Alicia Phelps <aliciap@jonesboroughtn.org>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

RE: storyteller and graduate student Milbre Burch is seeking permission to use image from your website with correct attribution

Hi Milbre!

That one belongs to the Jonesborough Department of Tourism, and you'd be welcome to use it. Here's a larger version. Let me know if we can be of any assistance!

Alicia Phelps

Director of Tourism & Marketing 117 Boone St. Jonesborough, TN 37659 423.753.1013

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [<mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>]

Sent: Friday, May 02, 2014 2:44 PM **To:** Alicia Phelps **Subject:** storyteller and graduate student Milbre Burch is seeking permission to use image from your website with correct attribution **Importance:** High

Dear Alicia:

Thanks for your help on the phone just now.

A 35-year veteran of the storytelling revival movement, I am also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri. I found my way to your site while seeking an image of the historic Christopher Taylor House in downtown Jonesborough. The photograph I'm interested in is attached above.

I have recently completed and defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival, based on an in-depth oral history my husband and I conducted with her some years ago for the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library. Jimmy Neil Smith has been a frequent source for my research in the last few years.

The Christopher Taylor House figures not only in the history of the NAPPS organization, appearing in a drawing on the cover of an early Festival program, but also it has been the site of some of the Folktellers and Connie's publicity photos in the past.

If possible, I would like to use a photo of it in the "illustrated timeline" in the appendix of my dissertation.

I did not find the photo credit for this image displayed, so I'm writing you to ask if you have any leads as to who took the picture and how to gain the photographer's permission

to include the image in the timeline.

I am currently making my way through revisions in my diss, as the final draft is due next Friday, May 9. Thus time is of the essence.

To that end, I called your office just now, and you invited me to send the image along with my query. In the current draft of the diss, I have used this as an attribution for the photo: <http://www.historicjonesborough.com/strolling-tours-historic-jonesborough-tn.php?mo=08&yr=2012>

Thank you in advance for any suggestions you may have about how to gain permission and how to give proper credit for this image.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
www.kindcrone.com

Jimmy Neil Smith <jns@partnershipforabetterfuture.net>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Re: URGENT Permission to use this image in an illustrated timeline in the appendix of my dissertation

Milbre,

You have my permission to use the photo of the performing board members of NAPPS in this 1975 photo.

Jimmy Neil Smith

Sent from my iPhone

On May 8, 2014, at 4:59 PM, "Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student)" <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu> wrote:

Dear Jimmy Neil:

With your encouragement and the help of Russ Manning at the Knoxville PBS station, I spoke to Bob Hutchison this afternoon about using his 1975 photo of you, Connie Regan-Blake and Barbara Freeman in the illustrated timeline in the appendix of my dissertation.

That leaves the attached photo of members of the early NAPPS board < Kathryn Windham, Doc McConnell, Connie Regan-Blake, Barbara Freeman and David Holt > shot, you thought, at the Laurel Theater in Knoxville at the time of their group performance as an early NAPPS outreach event.

You said that you were at this event, and since you were taking pictures at the time, you may have been the shooter of this image. As I have found no other attribution for it, I am writing to ask your permission to use it in the illustrated timeline of my diss.

Please pardon my urgency in asking for a return email at your earliest convenience. The deadline for submitting my dissertation to the university is tomorrow and I have been tracking down permissions to use the images till the very last minute.

Many thanks for your consideration in this matter.

Gratefully,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate

Department of Theatre
University of Missouri

Robert Hutchison <rhutch42@charter.net>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

RE: URGENT doctoral student seeks your permission to use photo image(s) in the appendix of her dissertation on storytelling

Milbre,

As a follow-up to our telephone conversation, I believe that the photo of Connie, Barbara and Jimmy Neil was one that I took while we were producing the documentary for PBS about the Storytelling Festival in 1975. Feel free to use it. Unless my memory has totally failed me, I don't remember the group photo of the board at the Laurel Theatre. I will try to search my negatives from the 1970's and those at the TV station to see if I can give you more detailed and definite verification of both of the photos. If I find anything I will get back to you within the next 24 hours. I'm glad to see people working actively to keep the art of storytelling alive. Keep up the good work and good luck with your dissertation.

Bob

Robert Hutchison
107 Mayfair E
Maryville, TN 37803
865-984-2091
rhutch42@charter.net

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [<mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>]

Sent: Thursday, May 08, 2014 9:43 AM **To:** rhutch42@charter.net **Subject:** URGENT doctoral student seeks your permission to use photo image(s) in the appendix of her dissertation on storytelling **Importance:** High

Dear Bob Hutchison:

Russ Manning gave me your email address and urged me to contact you.

I am a 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival and also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri. On April 23, I successfully defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival of which I have been part. As you probably know, Connie and her cousin Barbara Freeman toured for twenty years from 1975-1995 as the Folktellers.

I understand from Connie and Jimmy Neil Smith that the Knoxville PBS station shot a documentary film of the National Storytelling Festival in 1975 and that you, Elaine Tomber and Jim Tindall were the production team.

Connie credits you with taking the attached picture of her with Jimmy Neil Smith and Barbara Freeman.

I'm wondering if you might also have taken the second attached picture of Kathryn Windham, Doc McConnell, Connie Regan, Barbara Freeman and David Holt -- an early iteration of the board of directors of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS). It was taken when they performed together in Knoxville at the Laurel theatre as a NAPPS outreach event.

If possible, I would like to include the thumbnail images of both these pictures in an illustrated timeline in the appendix of my dissertation, but would need written permission to do so. I look forward to your reply by return email.

Please pardon my urgency, it has taken me a while to find my way to you. The final version of my dissertation is due tomorrow. I hope to hear back from you in time to include the image(s) above.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration in this matter.

All best in the meantime.

Gratefully,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
[Www.kindcrone.com](http://www.kindcrone.com)

Shannon Butler <shannon@islandportpress.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Fwd: Shannon: Send this to her.

Hi Milbre,

I got in touch with Dean and he wanted me to forward this letter to you. I hope it will suffice for your needs. You will find the letter below.

Thank you,

Shannon Butler

Islandport Press

shannon@islandportpress.com

P.O. Box 10

Yarmouth, ME. 04096

[\(207\) 846-3344](tel:(207)846-3344)

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Dean Lunt** <deanlunt@islandportpress.com>

Date: Wed, May 7, 2014 at 3:41 PM

Subject: Shannon: Send this to her.

To: Shannon Butler <shannon@islandportpress.com>

May 7, 2014

Dear Ms. Burch,

Islandport Press, Inc., a Maine-based publisher, currently holds all distribution and reproduction rights to the classic Bert and I series of stories and albums as performed by Marshall Dodge and Robert Bryan. You have our permission to use the image of Marshall Dodge requested for non-commercial use in the academic paper you have described. Please use the following credit: Photo of Marshall Dodge courtesy of Islandport Press, Inc.

Sincerely,

Dean L. Lunt

Publisher

Islandport Press, Inc.

247 Portland Street

Yarmouth, Maine 04096

Ian Singer <isinger@mediasourceinc.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

RE: URGENT request to use images of 1978 and 1989 SLJ covers in the appendix of my dissertation.

You have our permission, Milbre. Based on your intended non-commercial usage intentions, we are approving your request.

Good luck!

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [<mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>]

Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2014 3:42 PM **To:** Ian Singer **Subject:** Re: URGENT request to use images of 1978 and 1989 SLJ covers in the appendix of my dissertation.

You are the best! Thanks, Ian! MB

From: Ian Singer <isinger@mediasourceinc.com> **Date:** Wednesday, May 7, 2014 2:40

PM **To:** Milbre Burch <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>, Mark Tuchman

<mtuchman@mediasourceinc.com> **Subject:** RE: URGENT request to use images of 1978 and 1989 SLJ covers in the appendix of my dissertation.

Congrats on your dissertation.

We're digging in for you, Milbre.

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [<mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>]

Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2014 3:38 PM **To:** Ian Singer **Subject:** URGENT request to use images of 1978 and 1989 SLJ covers in the appendix of my dissertation. **Importance:** High

Dear Ian Singer,

Thank you for your kindness in getting back to me so quickly.

As you may have heard from Joanne or Nina, I am a 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival and also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

On April 23rd, I successfully defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival of which I have been part.

Connie and her cousin Barbara Freeman toured for twenty years from 1975-1995 as the Folktellers.

If possible, I would like to include the attached thumbnail images of two School Library Journal covers, both featuring the Folktellers, and one other image of them from the body of the November 1978 cover article "Sheherazades in Denim" by Barbara Home Stewart.

From what I understand, the November 1978 cover was the first in the history of the journal to feature people on it.

Stewart was also the author of the 1989 cover story, "The Mountain Sweet Talk of Success: Folktellers '89." From the image I have, I cannot tell what month that article appeared.

The images of the two covers are my priority.

If you are able to determine that you can grant permission for this use, I would appreciate a return email telling me so. If you can determine the photographer for any of these three images, I'd like to include a photo credit along with any attribution that you provide.

Please pardon my urgency, it has taken a while to find out who is the person who can help me in this request.

The final version of my dissertation is due on Friday of this week.

Thanks for anything you are able to determine in pursuit of my cause, including directing me elsewhere if it turns out your office doesn't have the authority to grant the permission I am seeking.

All best in the meantime.

Gratefully,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
www.kindcrone.com

From: Ian Singer <isinger@mediasourceinc.com> **Date:** Wednesday, May 7, 2014 1:55 PM
To: Milbre Burch <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu> **Cc:** Mark Tuchman <mtuchman@mediasourceinc.com> **Subject:** SLJ COVERS

Good afternoon. I understand you are looking for permission to use some old SLJ covers. Can you tell us the exact issues? We do not own all the art, so we may not have the right to grant permission.

Best,
Ian

Ian Singer

VP, Group Publisher - Library Journals, LLC

Media Source, Inc.

160 Varick St., 11th Fl.

NY, NY 10013

O - 646.380.0747

C - 917.886.0718

libraryjournal.com / schoollibraryjournal.com / hbook.com

Judy Walton <jwalton@timesfreepress.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Re: URGENT request from grad student hoping to use a George Baker photo in the appendix of her dissertation

OK, Milbre, you're in business. You have permission to use the photo. Please credit George Baker, The Chattanooga Times (there's been a merger since then, but George was a Times shooter.)

Good luck!

Would you be interested in being interviewed for a feature story about your thesis? This sounds like a fascinating story and one our readers would like to hear.

Judy

Judy Walton

Reporter/Editor

423-757-6416

jwalton@timesfreepress.com

<http://media.timesfreepress.com/signatures/main.png>

On Wed, May 7, 2014 at 3:27 PM, Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu> wrote:

Dear Judy Walton,

Thank you so much for your help on the phone just now.

A 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival, I am also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

On April 23rd, I successfully defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival, who began her storytelling career as Ms. Daisy for the M.O.R.E. Program of the Chattanooga Public Library in the early seventies.

From 1975-1995, she toured with her cousin Barbara Freeman (a former children's librarian at the same library) as the Folktellers.

Connie also served as the Artistic Director of the National Storytelling Festival during its first decade or so.

It was in that capacity that Connie brought the late Gamble Rogers to the National Storytelling Festival for the first time in 1978. That's when George Baker took his picture. I have attached the image above.

Connie told me that Baker was with the Chattanooga Times, so it may be that ownership of the photo's copyright resides with the newspaper instead of the estate of the late Mr.

Baker.

Because of Connie's close friendship with Gamble, I am seeing permission to use his image in an "illustrated timeline" of Connie's life in the appendix of my dissertation.

If the newspaper is willing and able to grant this permission, I would like to know what kind of attribution you prefer I include with it in the appendix.

The final draft of my dissertation is due this Friday, May 9. Please pardon my tardiness in contacting your department. It took some digging to find the current publishers of New Age magazine.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration in this matter. I hope to hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
www.kinderone.com

copyright <copyright@marthastewart.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>, copyright
<copyright@marthastewart.com>

RE: URGENT request by doctoral student to include a thumbnail pix of New Age
magazine cover from July 1980 in the appendix of her dissertation

Hi Elizabeth,

I have spoken to our Publishing department and permission is granted as long as it is used
only in the academia setting. We cannot grant you permission if you use it commercially
or if you publish anywhere else that is not for the sole purpose of your academic
endeavor. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me.

Thank you and best of luck on your Dissertation.

Pamela Aquino
Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia
601 W. 26th Street 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Tel: 212-827-8089
Paquino@marthastewart.com
www.MarthaStewart.com

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu]

Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2014 2:30 PM **To:** copyright **Subject:** URGENT request by
doctoral student to include a thumbnail pix of New Age magazine cover from July 1980
in the appendix of her dissertation **Importance:** High

To whom it may concern:

I am a 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival and also a
doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

On April 23rd, I successfully defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the
foremother of the storytelling revival of which I have been part.

In the nineteen eighties, Rex Weyler did a cover story on Regan-Blake and her cousin
Barbara Freeman for New Age magazine. The two women toured for twenty years under
the name: the Folktellers.

The cover story appeared in the July 1980 issue. I have attached an image of the cover.

I am seeing permission to use this image in an "illustrated timeline" of Connie's life in the appendix of my dissertation. If you can grant this permission, I would like to know the name of the photographer (if it's available) and what kind of attribution you prefer I include in the appendix.

The final draft of my dissertation is due this Friday, May 9. Please pardon my tardiness in contacting your department. It took some digging to find the current publishers of New Age magazine.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration in this matter. I hope to hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
[Www.kindcrone.com](http://www.kindcrone.com)

Joseph Martin <illinoisgenie@gmail.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Re: Storyteller and doctoral student Milbre Burch is seeking permission to use a photo of Ken Feit found in your book, Foolish Wisdom

Hello Milbre,

How delightful to hear from you. And how interesting that Ken is still inspiring people so many years after his death. I was interested to read of your project and how you have progressed. I never met Ken either.

All the photos I have from Ken came from his mother, Helen Feit, who I visited in Chicago while doing my research. She is now deceased. She did not recall where the photos came from, and some she received after his death. The photos all were duplicates with no indication who took them or who might have held the copyright. It has been too many years now for me to recall any discussion with my publisher about how to proceed. But he clearly decided to use them in my book.

I have the photos in my file, and they might be the only extant copies for all I know. Thus, if you would like to use the photo of Ken wearing the hat, I would suggest that you proceed. To help you along, I have attached a copy for you, which might reproduce better than one that you might scan from my book.

Best of success with your project.

Joseph

On Fri, May 2, 2014 at 2:07 PM, Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu> wrote:

Dear Joseph Martin,

John Towsen gave me your email address and encouraged me to contact you.

A veteran of the storytelling revival movement, I am also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri. I found my way to an image of Ken Feit (see attached) on John Towsen's blog at <http://physicalcomedy.blogspot.com/>.

And I found it in your book which I ordered while doing my research on tellers at the National Storytelling Festival. I never met Ken, but I know he had an impact on a number of my friends in the storytelling and mime communities during his life.

I have recently completed and defended my dissertation on the Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival, based on an in-depth oral history my husband and I conducted with her some years ago for the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library. Connie mentions Ken fondly and given that the National Storytelling Festival in

1981 was dedicated to him in memoriam, I would like to use an image of him in the "illustrated timeline" in the appendix of my dissertation.

I am currently making my way through revisions as the final draft is due next Friday, May 9. Thus time is of the essence.

The photo of Ken wearing a beard, a brimmed hat and a patchwork jacket is found on page 91 in your book *Foolish Wisdom*.

But I find no photo credited listed there, and John Townsen also doesn't know who took the picture. Were you able to locate the photographer to get permission to use it in your book?

If so, can you share the photographer's name and any contact info you may have for that person so I can inquire about including it in my dissertation?

Many thanks for any suggestions you may have about how to gain permission and give proper credit.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Kind Crone Production
P.O. Box 1113
Columbia, MO 65205
www.kindcrone.com

Scott Dedman <scott@mtnhousing.org>

To: mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu

Photo use

Yes Ms Burch, I did take that photo and would be happy to have you use it. I ask that you include my name as a photo credit, either with the photo or somewhere in the document.

Good luck with your project.

Scott Dedman

Cell phone 828-273-8300

Watauga Lake Magazine <contact@wataugalakemagazine.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

RE: Storyteller and doctoral student Milbre Burch is trying to contact Pat Johns for permission to use a photo in my dissertation appendix

Milbre,

You are welcome to use my photo.

The best of luck to you with your dissertation. What a fascinating topic!

Pat Johns

www.WataugaLakeMagazine.com

From: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) [mailto:mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu]

Sent: Friday, May 2, 2014 3:22 PM **To:** contact@wataugalakemagazine.com **Subject:** Storyteller and doctoral student Milbre Burch is trying to contact Pat Johns for permission to use a photo in my dissertation appendix **Importance:** High

To Whom It May Concern:

A 35-year veteran of the storytelling revival movement (and a featured teller in Jonesborough on a number of occasions), I am also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

I found my way to your site while seeking an image of the historic Chester Inn in downtown Jonesborough. The photograph I'm interested in, taken by Pat Johns, is attached above.

I have recently completed and defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival, based on an in-depth oral history my husband and I conducted with her some years ago for the Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library. National Storytelling Festival founder Jimmy Neil Smith has been a frequent source for my research in the last few years.

Obviously, the Chester Inn features in the history of the NAPPS organization and if possible I would like my dissertation readers to have an image of the building in their minds.

Thus, if the photographer is willing, I would like to use Pat Johns' photo in the "illustrated timeline" in the appendix of my dissertation, but I have been unable to find out how to contact Johns directly. Can you forward this inquiry?

If not, can you suggest another way to gain the photographer's permission to include the attributed image in my appendix?

I am currently making my way through revisions in my diss, as the final draft is due next Friday, May 9. Thus time is of the essence.

In the current draft of the diss, I have used this as an attribution for the photo: Photo credit: Pat Johns. And then under the image, I have noted the website: <http://www.wataugalakemagazine.com/jonesboroughbuildings1.html>

Thank you in advance for any suggestions you may have about how to gain permission and how to give proper credit this use of the image.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

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[Www.kinderone.com](http://www.kinderone.com)

Louis Sohn <lsohn1@epbf.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Re: Hello from Milbre Burch, storyteller and doctoral student, who is asking permission to use your photo of The Folktellers in her dissertation

Dear Milbre Burch,

You are certainly welcome to use the picture we spoke about, as long as you understand I have no recollection of taking the picture.

Because of the condition of the picture, frankly, I have no idea what value it would be to you.

That said, you have my permission.

FWIW: I have worked on the picture, removing as much junk as I could, not sure it really helped, but it is attached.

Good luck.

Louis Sohn
www.louissohn.com

On May 7, 2014, at 2:22 PM, Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) wrote:
Dear Louis Sohn:

Thank you for your patience in speaking with me when I called you out of the blue just now. As I mentioned on the phone, I am a 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival and also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

I found my way to your name and number by googling it after Connie told me that you had taken a photo of her and her cousin Barbara Freeman for an article that appeared, she thought, in *Good Housekeeping*.

Before they became full-time touring storytellers traveling under the name of the Folktellers, the two women began their storytelling careers at the Chattanooga Public Library in the early seventies. In fact, Barbara lived in Signal Mountain at that time. They both live in Asheville, NC today.

I would like to include the attached image in an "illustrated timeline" of Connie's life in the appendix of my dissertation. I have attached the image above. It would have been taken in the eighties.

On the phone you were kind enough to give me permission to use the image. To include

it, I will need a return email giving me that permission in writing.

The final draft of my dissertation (which I successfully defended on April 23) is due this Friday, May 9.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration in this matter. I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Theatre
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

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<good_houskeeping.jpg>

Louis Sohn
lsohn1@epbfi.com

David Holt <david@davidholt.com>

To: Milbre Burch <milbre@kindcrone.com>

Re: Milbre wonders if she may have your permission...

Yes, you can use. You are coming down the home stretch.

All the best,
David

David Holt
www.davidholt.com
PO Box 28
Fairview, NC 28730
828 628 1728

On Fri, May 2, 2014 at 1:49 PM, Milbre Burch <milbre@kindcrone.com> wrote:
Dear David:

I'd like to include your photo of Rosa Hicks on her porch with the wood pile behind her that Connie has on her tribute website in the "illustrated timeline" of my dissertation.

May I? No is an okay answer, but I need to know ASAP as the final draft gets turned in on Friday, May 9. Xo, MB

Chris Bartol <chris.bartol@gmail.com>

To: Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Re: FW: URGENT request from grad student who is seeking permission to use your photo in the appendix of her dissertation

Dear Ms Burch,

Thank you so much for getting in touch. I have been somewhat retired for the past few years, and phone numbers have been lost in the dust.

You most certainly have my permission to use the image. If possible, I would appreciate a credit:

Photo courtesy of Chris Bartol.

Thank you for asking, and best wishes on your project.

Most soncerely,

Chris

Chris Bartol
217 Mockingbird Hill Rd
Landrum, SC 29356
Hm: 864 457-5363 **Cell: 828 817-4960**

Chris Bartol
217 Mockingbird Hill Rd
Landrum, SC 29356
Hm: 864 457-5363 **Cell: 828 817-4960**

On Thu, May 8, 2014 at 9:59 AM, Burch, Milbre Elizabeth (MU-Student) <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu> wrote:

Dear Chris Bartol:

Found this email address for you as well. Here's hoping one of them works! Please see the details of my rather urgent request below.

All best, Milbre Burch

From: <Burch>, Milbre Burch <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Date: Thursday, May 8, 2014 8:57 AM

To: "bartolphotography@windstream.net" <bartolphotography@windstream.net>

Subject: FW: URGENT request from grad student who is seeking permission to use your photo in the appendix of her dissertation

Dear Chris Bartol:

I'm forwarding an email I wrote yesterday to an email address that Connie Regan-Blake had given to me (see below). Today I found this address at Zoominfo.

I was unable to reach you by phone at [828-859-0497](tel:828-859-0497) or 8282-859-0409 but remain hopeful that you will respond to my request in time for me to use your photo of Connie Regan-Blake in an illustrated timeline in the appendix to my dissertation on her.

All best, Milbre Burch

From: <Burch>, Milbre Burch <mebmb2@mail.missouri.edu>

Date: Wednesday, May 7, 2014 7:46 PM

To: "BARTOLPHOTOGRAPHY@ALLTEL.NET"
<BARTOLPHOTOGRAPHY@ALLTEL.NET>

Subject: URGENT request from grad student who is seeking permission to use your photo in the appendix of her dissertation

Dear Chris Bartol:

I am a 35-year veteran of the festival-based American storytelling revival and also a doctoral student in the department of Theatre at the University of Missouri.

On April 23rd, I successfully defended my dissertation on Connie Regan-Blake, the foremother of the storytelling revival of which I have been part.

It was Connie who gave me your name and email address just now.

If possible, I would like to include the attached thumbnail image of Connie in the appendix of my dissertation.

If you are able to grant me this permission, I would appreciate a return email telling me so.

Please pardon my urgency, it has taken me a while to make my way to your contact information.

The final version of my dissertation is due on Friday of this week. I hope to hear back from you in time to include this picture.

Many thanks for your help in this matter.

All best in the meantime.

Gratefully,

Milbre Burch
Doctoral Candidate
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Columbia, MO

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VITA

The youngest of three children and the only girl, Milbre Elizabeth Burch was born September 28, 1953, in Atlanta, Georgia. She attended public school through the tenth grade, before graduating from Westminster Girls' High School in 1971. A peripatetic scholar, she attended Rollins College and Georgia State University, and studied mime with Meli Davis Kaye (a protégé of Doris Humphrey and student of Jacque Le Coq) before finding her way to Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. With Dr. David L. Paletz as her advisor, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. At Duke she also studied modern dance with Carol Richard. As a member of Duke's Freewater Film Society, she wrote, directed and edited her first short film, *Last Tentacle in Paris*, a French-language horror movie spoof.

Upon graduation in 1975 she returned to Atlanta where she worked as a freelance manuscript editor before joining the staff of the Television, Radio, Audio Visual department of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., writing and producing pamphlets, filmstrips, slide shows and documentary film scripts, while also serving as newsletter editor of the Atlanta chapter of Women in Film. In addition, she performed and choreographed professionally for Company Kaye Dance/Mime. In 1976 she attended a five-week summer film production workshop at UCLA, performing her solo mime work "The Magician's Laundress" on film, and editing it; the cinematographer on her film was John Joseph who won an Academy Award the following year for *Gravity is my Enemy*, his documentary about quadriplegic artist Mark Hicks. Burch worked as an independent filmmaker with Fran Burst-Terranella and Cheryl Gosa on two award-winning

documentary shorts: "Meli" (about dancer/mime and choreographer Meli Davis Kaye) and "Lila" (about Dr. Lila Bonner-Miller, a pioneer in art therapy).

Burch left Atlanta in 1978 to become part of a team of four artists-in-residence for the Arts in Motion program of the South Carolina Arts Commission. Funded by the Emergency School Aid Act, the program paired African American and Euro-American artists sending them into schools (K-12) in the island communities of Beaufort County, South Carolina. The two-room (K-8) schoolhouse on Daufuskie Island, featured in Pat Conroy's memoir, *The Water Is Wide* (New York: Dial Press, 2002), was one of Burch's teaching sites. She worked with Arts in Motion for two years, conducting creative drama, mime and film-related workshops in the classroom and in community settings. She also hired and hosted visiting artists in puppetry and kabuki theatre.

In 1979 Burch began her studies with Tony Montanaro at the Celebration Barn in South Paris, Maine, inspiring her move to Providence, Rhode Island in 1980 to found the Heart of Gold Vaudeville Company with Michael Bresler and Rick Adam, two fellow "graduates" of the Celebration Barn. Leaving the field of new vaudeville to focus her work as a kinetic storyteller and solo performer in 1983, she co-founded the Spellbinders storytelling collective with Ramona Bass, Len Cabral, Sparky Davis, Bill Harley, Marc Joel Levitt and Marilyn Meardon. Since that time she has appeared at storytelling, theatre and solo performance festivals and in school, library or community venues in 36 states and Washington, DC. She has also performed in thirteen European cities.

Burch met another Southern expatriate, Fraser Berkley Hudson, a reporter and later Sunday magazine editor for the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, in 1984. That same year she began a still ongoing collaboration with award-winning author Jane Yolen,

interpreting Yolen's stories in live performance and on numerous audio recordings. 1984 was also the year that Burch was first featured at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Now a fulltime, freelance, teaching, touring and recording artist, she married Berkley Hudson on December 7, 1986.

When Hudson took a job with the San Gabriel Valley edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, the couple relocated to Pasadena, California in 1988. From 1988-1994, Burch served on the board of directors of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS). In 1989 she founded By Word of Mouth, a storytelling concert series for adult listeners that ran for six seasons in Pasadena. From 1995-1999, as a rostered resident artist for the California Arts Commission, she worked with Dr. Carol Per Lee, then director of the independent Walden School (pre-K to sixth grade), to create a school-wide storytelling-based curriculum that became a national model, showcased at education conferences across the country. She also worked as a Visiting Artist in the Wasco State Prison in Wasco, CA, and in the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, CA. She co-founded the With Our Words storytelling collective with Karen Golden, Vicki Juditz, Leslie Perry and Kathleen Zundell; the group offered an adult storytelling series at the Beverly Hills Library for several years. Burch became a mother at midlife when her two daughters were born in 1992 and 1996.

From 1996-1999 she taught "Children's Speech Arts: Creative Drama, Storytelling and Folklore" under Judith Hamera, chair of the Communication Studies Department, California State University – Los Angeles. From 1997-2000 Burch and Hudson developed the archival Storytelling Project of the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University, capturing 200 hours of interviews and performances by seventy

five storytellers – both oral narrators and platform performers – and purchasing 1200 print, audio and video resources by storytellers for the collection. In 1999 Burch was named to the Circle of Excellence by the NAPPS organization under its new (if fleeting) name: the National Storytelling Association. The national storytelling membership organization is now known as the National Storytelling Network.

Burch and her family moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina when Hudson entered a Ph.D. program in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina. While there, she joined the teaching artist rosters of the North Carolina Arts Council and the Durham Arts Council. At the end of four years, the family moved again when Hudson joined the faculty of the Journalism School of the University of Missouri (MU). After that move in 2003, Burch became a touring artist with both the Missouri Arts Council and the Mid-America Arts Alliance. In 2007 she went back to school, first as a post-Baccalaureate student and then as a full-fledged master's student in the MU Theatre Department. That was the same year that the thirteenth of her fifteen recordings, "Making the Heart Whole Again: Stories for a Wounded World," was nominated for a GRAMMY Award for Best Spoken Word Album for Children.

In 2008 Professor Clyde Ruffin, then-chair of the Theatre Department at MU, asked Burch to write an ensemble-driven play grounded in folktales about peace and justice and reconciliation from her solo repertoire. She created a one-act workshop version of the play, *Holding Up the Sky*, for her master's project, and then completed the 90-minute version for a main stage production in the first semester of her doctoral program at MU in the fall of 2009. The production, directed by Ruffin, was chosen as a regional finalist for the Region V Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival.

As a student of performance studies scholar Dr. M. Heather Carver, Burch wrote two auto/ethnographic performance pieces: *Hear and (k)Now: A Woman's Health Care Narrative about HPV* and *Scout's Honor* about being the intimate partner of a sexual abuse survivor. In 2009 she presented *Hear and (k)Now* at the Annual Women's Health Update for Advance Practice Nurses for the MU Sinclair School of Nursing, and she presented *Scout's Honor* as part of a poly-vocal forum on "Community Stories" at the American Folklore Society annual meeting in Boise, ID.

In 2010 Burch received a Huebner grant from the National Storytelling Network to create *Changing Skins: Folktales of Gender, Identity and Humanity*, performed research about the wealth and persistence of transgender folktales and folkways around the world. MU sociology professor and queer studies scholar Wayne Brekhus guided Burch in her sociological research in this area. Since its premiere at Columbia College, *Changing Skins* has toured to Atlanta, Austin, and two SUNY campuses; it has also been an invited performance at the American Folklore Society in Nashville TN, and at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in Prescott, AZ. Championed by folklorist and queer studies scholar Dr. Kay Turner, *Changing Skins* was also featured at Dixon Place in New York City on a double bill with Holly Hughes' *Dog and Pony Show (Bring Your Own Pony)*.

In the spring of 2011 Burch's dramaturgical protocol on Susan Glaspell's 1916 feminist masterwork, *Trifles: A One-Act Play*, in a seminar with Glaspell scholar Dr. Cheryl Black led Black to commission Burch to write, *Sometimes I Sing*, an original monodrama in the voice of *Trifles'* unseen protagonist Minnie Foster Wright. The following spring, Dr. Cheryl Black mounted *Justice Served*, three short plays about

women confronting violence, featuring *Trifles*, *Sometimes I Sing* and *The Devil's Own*, a new work by cfrancis blackchild. As part of the show's run, Burch fundraised for and produced two one-day residencies featuring class visits, lectures and post-show talkback sessions by Zora Neale Hurston scholar Valerie Boyd, and Susan Glaspell scholar Patricia L. Bryan.

Burch has toured *Sometimes I Sing* to Kean University, Georgia College and State University, and the National Storytelling Festival. She also performed it at an international conference, the Romance of Theatre: American Drama and its Stories in Seville, Andalusia, Spain; at the MidAmerica Theatre Conference in Cincinnati, OH, and the American Literature Association in Washington, DC. In 2013, Burch received special commendations at the Region V Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for both her *Trifles* dramaturgy and her playwriting for *Sometimes I Sing*.

While at MU, Burch also wrote a ten-minute play, *Washing Up*, under the tutelage of playwriting professor, Dr. David Crespy. *Washing Up* was chosen as a regional finalist for the Region V Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in Lincoln, NE. There it was chosen as one of four finalists for the 2013 National Ten-Minute Play festival at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in Washington, DC. It has also received concert or stage readings at the MidAmerican Theatre Conference in St. Louis, MO, Potluck Productions in Kansas City, MO, and the Mizzou New Play Series at MU.

As an artist-scholar, Burch has presented keynotes, plenary sessions, workshops, pre-conferences, forums and panels for the MU Women's and Gender Studies graduate conference and the Body Conference at MU, the American Folklore Society, the New

York Folklore Society, the Popular Culture Association, the Central States Communication Association, the MidAmerican Theatre Conference, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the International Conference on American Drama (in NJ), American Literature Association, the National Storytelling Network and the International Conference on America Theatre and Drama (in Spain). She has published scholarly and professional book reviews and articles, and from 2009-2012 she was the performance review editor of the peer reviewed journal, *Storytelling, Self, Society*. She is currently a co-convenor of the Storytelling Section of the American Folklore Society.

She also organized and raised the funds for numerous community residencies by artists, activists and authors. In 2007, she spearheaded "Touch Magic...Pass It On! Explorations in Folklore, Fairytales and Fantasy with Jane Yolen," a three-day residency featuring Yolen (called "America's Hans Christian Andersen") in linked literary, performing and visual arts events throughout Columbia (including the campuses of Stephens College, Columbia, College and MU), and in Canton, MO. In 2009 Burch organized "Telling Stories, Changing Lives" with *New York Times* best-selling author Ishmael Beah, and his American mother, internationally known storyteller and human rights advocate Laura Simms in Columbia, MO. That four-day community residency included lectures, workshops, interviews, performances, an exhibit of images by photojournalist Gina Bramucci, a film screening of *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars* and a post screening talkback with Beah and the film's director Zach Niles. It also featured an interdisciplinary panel on "Narrative as a Pathway to Reconciliation," featuring Beah and Simms; Rwandan genocide researcher, Dr. Rangira "Béa" Gallimore; Palestinian-born

poet Ibtisam Barakat, and professor of psychiatry and children's trauma-specialist, Dr. Syed Arshad Husain.

In 2010, through the MU Graduate Theatre Organization (GTO), she brought Holly Hughes, an internationally acclaimed performance artist and professor in the School of Art and Design at the University of Michigan, to campus for a two-day residency. Hughes gave a reading of her then-work-in-progress, *The Dog and Pony Show (Bring Your Own Pony)* and conducted a workshop on autobiographical performance with theatre students. Working with GTO the following year, Burch brought performance ethnographer Dr. E. Patrick Johnson, chair of Northwestern University's Performance Studies Department, to the MU campus for a two-day residency. He performed *Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales*, and presented "In Search of Countess Vivian: Queerness and the Making of Southern History," a keynote lecture for Campus Pride Month sponsored by the MU LGBTQ Resource Center.

In 2013 in recognition of the 25th anniversary of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie Scotland, Burch directed *The Women of Lockerbie* by Deborah Brevoort at Columbia Entertainment Company. In addition, she produced a four-day residency with Helen Engelhardt, author and activist widow of a Pan Am 103 victim. Outreach events included radio appearances, a public reading and book signing, two post-show talkbacks, a personal story performance, and three class visits by Engelhardt as well as talkbacks with cast, crew and assorted interdisciplinary scholars from MU and the community.

In 2011 Burch received a Catalyst Award from the MU LGBTQ Resource Center. She was recognized by the MU Chancellor's Status of Women Committee's annual

Tribute to MU Women and was inducted into the Rollins Honor Society of the MU Graduate and Professional Council. In 2014 the MU Graduate Student Association recognized her as one of three Superior grad students on the MU campus.

In 2014, Burch completed and successfully defended her historiographic and ethnographic dissertation, *In Her Own Words: Connie Regan-Bake, the Foremother of the Festival-based American Storytelling Revival*. At this writing, she is a professional educational consultant, public speaking coach, storytelling and solo performance workshop leader, dramaturg and playwright. She continues to tour nationally and internationally as a performing artist.