Mo-Tell Memories Nan Kammann-Judd 9/4/23

The first time I heard of the pending formation of this wacky, fun yet spiritual source for spreading and connecting the storytelling community around Missouri was through Sue Hinkel and Perrin. They had a vision and the spunk and spirit to follow this idea in wonderfully creative, energizingly fun ways.

I was a fledging director of the St. Louis Storytelling Festival at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and passionate and deeply immersed in the wonder and community of that world. When I accepted the position a few years previous to this time, I was completely swept off my feet with this close, creative, evolving community and the underlying values and goals of storytelling. It energized and captivated me in ways I could never have imagined: an art form that created and nurtured community, inspired, delighted, soothed, challenged, and enriched lives. I was grateful for the gift of being a part of it. It was the most compelling, deeply satisfying, and creative work/play of my professional career.

Perrin invited me to join the founding board and I declined because I felt pulled in so many directions with my responsibilities and didn’t think I had the time or energy to give, but I did support the expansive idea and what they might do in Missouri. Both Perrin and Sue are dynamos and once they decide on doing something, it takes powerful Life and Energy and Fun. They always make whatever they are doing FUN!

Actually, Mo-Tell was conceived in fun---ideas sparked---what could we do-connect with Missouri State Parks and offer workshops, storytelling performances, gigs, spread the word. And they did, still do, and will continue into the future!

I attended the workshop at Cuivre River State Park led by Kathy Gentry, Al Barton’s therapy business partner. I can still remember being engaged in her Four Directions of the Medicine Wheel and we each had to find a place to sit before we knew what it meant. Bobby Norfolk and I each chose the Southwest/Yellow and learned later it is the Story Connection between heaven and earth.

I also remember how romantic Annette Harrison and Albert Barton seemed since they were about to be married. What a powerful place it was for such a gathering, deep in the forest and at the lodge of Cuivre River State Park, especially at night.

Mo-Tell went on to initiate other programs around the state and in the parks.

Then there was the Missouri River Storytelling Festival in St. Charles aboard the 1909 Goldenrod showboat, with Jackson Gillman and Kevin Locke. I drove Jackson home and we talked a long time. He is an engaging, creative, energetic guy who left me with the impression he cycled from hunger to eating to performing to sleeping and then repeated it.

Kevin Locke was there, too, and I always greatly admired him both as an artist and as a dignified yet always good humored representative of the Lakotas. What a privilege to know him and to work with him over the years in St. Louis, in Jonesborough, and in Belleville, and eventually to nominate and see him inducted into NSN’s Circle of Excellence. His daughter, I believe her name was Rose, was at the Mo-Tell Missouri River Storytelling Festival in St. Charles and sat across from us at the table. We all did our best to include her and to welcome her. Sadly, Kevin passed this past year (2022) and what a loss to so many people and so many causes. He was known, welcomed, and respected worldwide.

One of the biggest things I remember about Mo-Tell is the ongoing support of the St. Louis Storytelling Festival and to its growth and development. The communities were so intertwined. One of the Festival’s goals was to reach out into the community and to be involved in many cultural institutions. Mo-Tell envisioned a more expansive outreach into the whole state and then worked hard and faithfully to make it happen.

I do recall learning Becky Walstrom helped write grants for Mo-Tell, too, and I pay tribute and honor to the remarkably wonderful person, leader, and friend she was to all of us. I will always miss Becky, too, and how enthusiastically and happily she did whatever she could to enrich lives through storytelling.

Then there is Sue Hinkel and her endless creativity and good humor not only with organizing events, cajoling Perrin, getting us to buy every auction item until it was gone, creating and re-creating at every turn. I remember the first ever National Storytelling Conference outside Jonesborough, Tennessee, held at Fontbonne College in St. Louis. Sue was everywhere throughout the event and, at the end, Jimmy Neil Smith said Sue was the hardest working person he ever saw.

And Perrin. What would storytelling have done without that twinkle, the grin, the easy laughter and abundant enthusiasm? Perrin always makes us laugh or be filled with joy. I loved the energy between Perrin and Annette when they told together while always including us in the fun. Perrin served many roles over the years: leader of Mo-Tell and also fundraising chair for the St. Louis Storytelling Festival for which the Festival was forever grateful.

Talk about multi-taskers: storytellers and their community qualify in every way. That’s what it takes when you are committed and involved in an art form that can change lives or at least enhance, enrich, nourish, comfort, challenge, enlighten, or inspire.

Congratulations, Mo-Tell, for all you have accomplished and have given through the lovely, sometimes wacky but always devoted people who form your community. Long may you and your ideas remain!

With great affection and deep appreciation,

 Nan Kammann-Judd