

The Storytelling Arts Center of the Southeast
Once Upon A Time by Jan Schmidt and Brenda Gilbert
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Be a Spinner of Stories

Scotland County is blessed in its ethnic and cultural diversity, its customs and traditions. Winter holidays paint a beautiful landscape that portrays our rich and diverse heritage. The holidays are a wonderful time to celebrate family traditions and begin new traditions. This year you can make storytelling a family tradition. Sharing stories from holidays past, grandparents and parents enrich the connection children have with family members long gone and with family and cultural heritage. Storytelling is an amazing gift that each of us has to share and share over and over again. By giving the precious gift of time, you give a gift that can last forever. Storytelling defines who we are and how we became the people we are now and is a hint of who we might become. Sharing our experiences, history, and feelings, celebrates our uniqueness and brings us closer together.

Some of our most cherished family times are when we share our stories. Brenda Gilbert remembers “my husband’s telling of what school was like when he attended an all-male parochial school in Mississippi – the seating arrangement (students were arranged in chairs based on their academic achievement, the top student in the first desk), how they used ink wells and had penmanship exercises, how they went home for lunch instead of eating at school. Our children and grandchildren love to hear about his trip to California upon graduating high school and his cross- country trip in a small plane.” She continues, “ Past family vacations are wonderful memories, including the fall tenting trip to the mountains to see the colors when we arrived after dark in the rain and pulled up stakes before daylight, heading home with never having seen one tree in the light of day; the time we stopped for gas and lost our family cat, stayed in a hotel and searched the roads all night only to find the cat in the van the next morning, hiding under a seat; my trips to my aunts’ and uncles’ farms and working in tobacco when I was a child. “

Everyone has a story. Family and personal stories are when we retell events that happened to us or stories we recall hearing others tell us. From www.callofstory.org we find this quote, “Every life is a story like a thread that interweaves with myriads of others to form the tapestry of humanity. The stories we are willing to share with one another give our culture its values, beliefs, goals, and traditions, binding us into a cohesive society, allowing us to work together with a common purpose. Storytelling lives at the heart of human experience—a compelling form of personal communication as ancient as language itself. Since the beginnings of humankind, we have shared through stories the events, beliefs, and values held dear by our families, communities, and cultures.”

“My grandchildren always ask me stories about when I was a little girl a long time ago. They also love to hear stories about when their parent, aunt and uncle were young ...especially when they were naughty! One story I love to tell is about the last Christmas I spent with my Mom. It was a special time for her and all the family,” shares Jan Schmidt.

Just sit down and talk to your family and the stories will come to you and one memory will lead to others. If you don't know where to begin, you may want to start with one of these story starters:

When I was a child, we celebrated Christmas by

My favorite gift of all time was

Our most unforgettable family member is

I look up to _____ because

Kwanzaa is special to me because

I'll never do _____ again because

Dreidel is a game I

What I miss the most from my past is

The place where I felt the most relaxed and at peace was

Keep the tradition alive. Build memories this holiday by sharing memories and stories with your family and loved ones. You can also give the gift of story by dropping by the Storytelling Arts Center of the Southeast to pick up some tapes or books to give as gifts.

If you do not mind sharing your story with others, please email your holiday story to jan@sfoc.info and I will try to print some stories in future columns. If you get hooked on storytelling and want to learn more about the art, join the Story Spinners Guild. It meets at the Storytelling Arts Center at 131 S. Main Street, Laurinburg, on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7 pm. There you can share your stories, listen to others, and ask for help improving the telling of your stories. For more information go to: www.StoryArts.info.

Don't forget the Bold-Faced Liars' Showdown coming up on January 24th. You'll enjoy seeing how stories can be embellished to outlandish lengths. Why don't you consider entering the contest yourself? Just call the Storytelling Arts Center to learn how to register to compete in the Showdown. Rules for the Showdown can be found on the website: www.storyarts.info. Bold-Faced Liars' showdown tickets make a perfect Christmas gift ... and could be the start of your storytelling endeavors.

Have a wonderful holiday and share those stories!