

Dan Yashinsky, 2017 Storykeeper Award Recipient

It is impossible to imagine the development of the storytelling movement in Canada without thinking of the prize-winning author and storyteller Dan Yashinsky. Over the last forty years he has actively developed as a professional storyteller and artistic director, from modest café beginnings to international festivals.

Dan founded the 1,001 Friday Nights of Storytelling in 1978, an open-mike tradition that continues every Friday night year round to this day, and has long since passed the hallmark telling of 1,001 stories. As well, he founded the Toronto Festival of Storytelling in 1979 and is currently its director. He co-founded The Storytellers School of Toronto in 1979 (now known as Storytelling Toronto) and created The Telling Bee in 1994, a curriculum programme to introduce storytelling into the classroom. He received the Jane Jacobs Prize in 1999 as an acknowledgement of his contribution to the cultural life of Toronto. Dan was there for the very first gathering of storytellers from across Canada in Montreal in 1993. His voice was an important one in the visioning of our national organization Storytellers of Canada/Conteurs du Canada.

Dan's passion for social change is reflected in his distinct performance projects which include "Stormfool's Cool Gig" wherein he envisions a perfect, compassionate, cared-for world and "Talking You In" about a father who tells stories to his baby son in the neonatal intensive care unit. Dan currently works as a resident storyteller with dementia patients in a long-term care health facility and recently coined the term "Storycare" that involves exploring practices and research on older adults' responses to storytelling and listening.

Dan has enriched our professional lives as the author of seven books (some of them anthologies) as well as numerous articles about storytelling. His books include "Tales for an Unknown City"; "The Storyteller at Fault"; and "Suddenly They Heard Footsteps." He has also enriched and broadened our experience of storytelling by inviting sometimes unknown international guests as well as indigenous tellers from Canada, to his festival.

Dan constantly reinforces the idea that we can only be great storytellers, if we are great listeners, and Dan is a great listener. The world of story exists for him around the kitchen table, in any vehicle he happens to be traveling in, and in any encounter he has on his many travels around the world and just outside his door. It is an honour to be able to present this award to someone whose spirit of generosity and inclusiveness has changed our world.

- President of SC-CC, and Storykeeper Award Committee Chair

Dan's Acceptance of the Award:

Many thanks for this lovely honour, and for the chance to attend the conference. On Wednesday night the room was filled with people who have worked so hard as artists and volunteers and animators to bring the art of storytelling to life in our society. I feel like contemporary storytellers are all Storykeepers, and all of us are trying to reinvent an art that is still at high risk of becoming an endangered species. I realized in one of the hallway conversations I had at the conference - those late night chats that are the highlight of every gathering - that I'm now the age Alice Kane was when I staggered out of the wilderness of the

60s in search of a *métier*, a purpose, and a mentor. I was in my early twenties, and she had just retired from her career as a children's librarian.

Meeting an artist of such immense skill, such generosity, and such personal grace changed my life. She always had time to hear about my struggles and questions, which she never answered directly but always found a way to provide the guidance I needed. I'm a natural hero-worshipper, and my good fortune was to find storytelling heroes. Alice Kane, Joan Bodger, Angela Sidney in the Yukon, my Chaucer prof at University - they were all storytelling nobility for me. Now I am the age Alice was when a long-haired, Homer-loving, long-haired ex-hippie from California sought her out.

As an older storyteller, I'm looking around for the new generation, the ones who are on fire for an art they want to dedicate themselves to. Like the other older members of our tribe, I'm eager to share, not answers, but rather the questions that continue to exercise me, provoke thought, make me realize how great an enterprise this reinvention of an ancient art can be.

So the very best thing that could come of this honoring is for newer and younger tellers to hear my invitation, issued on behalf of all of the more experienced storytellers in our movement, to knock on our doors. We will welcome you to the company of storytellers. There's lots of room in the circle, and we're still at the very beginning of our wondrous renaissance.