

What an inspiring, exhilarating week!
13 performances
10 locations
2 villages
2 towns
4 cities
1200 kilometres travelled
More than 1200 students and 200 adults.
Many, many, many stories shared and enjoyed by all.

I fell in love - with the people, the skies, the landscape, the art scene. I wanted to take all the children home with me. I was invited to go fishing and berry picking on my next trip out. A group of young boys offered to teach me Cree.

I arrived on a warm, sunny, summer day. By the time I left I had experienced three of the four seasons: spring, summer and winter.

The fires in Fort McMurray were still raging. Almost every day, we could smell the smoke from the fires. The day it rained, we were grateful. The day it snowed, the air smelled clean. A number of the stories I tell have fire in them. Should I tell them? Should I not? I chose to tell them, to create a safe space for the sharing of such tales.

A lot of the stories I tell have plenty of room for participation - either through chants, or repetition or song. Even the children in the higher grades would join in. My goal is that every child leaves with a story or rhyme they can retell to others.

There was little time for questions. When presented with the choice of "Would you like to ask questions?" or "Would you like to hear another story," the shouts were inevitably - "Another story!" There is a hunger in children to hear tales told. No filters. No barriers. Just the teller and the tale and the listener.

Now for the nitty-gritty details.

There was signage and posters up everywhere we went. It was clear the schools and libraries were given lots of information on Canadian Children's Book Week - information they included in their introductions. I would elaborate in my intros to my sets, both about The Canadian Children's Book Centre and Storytellers of Canada. I also referenced Canadian authors and their books, as well as other storytellers, especially those from Saskatchewan. I left SC-CC postcards in every school and always talked about SCRADIO SCC in my presentations.

I was treated like a rock star by the tour coordinator, Danica Lorier. She was simply stellar. An experienced storyteller and author, she was chosen to tour in Ontario a couple of years ago. She also coordinated the tour in the Saskatoon area in the past. Having been on the tour herself, she knew exactly what a storyteller would require or feel comfortable with. Danica went out of her way to ensure everything ran smoothly and that I lacked nothing. I can't thank her enough for her hard work and dedication and care. I feel very fortunate that I was given her area in which to tour. She is a fine ambassador for her province and for Canadian Children's Book Week.

Tour Stats:

Day 1 - St. Louis is a village with a population of 449. It has a ghost story of its very own. Storytelling took place in the library of St. Louis Public School. There was signage both inside and outside the school. I told stories to 80 people, 70 students

from K to Grade 6 and ten staff. Over lunch I taught a story to some of the teachers so they could share it with their students later. Wonderful way to start the tour.

In the afternoon, we went to Tisdale, land of honey. There is even a sculpture of a giant bee in the town. This was a public performance at Tisdale Community Library. A reporter from The Tisdale Recorder interviewed me before the performance and took photos during. In terms of audience, this was the only venue with small numbers. Normally, school groups would be bussed in, as they were in the other libraries. However, the performance fell on a PD day. Children from the daycare attended as did some members of the public. There were about 20 in the audience.

Day 2 of the tour was in Prince Albert - two schools and one library. I told stories to 150 K-6 students and 20 adults at the John Diefenbaker Public School. Then off to Princess Margaret Public School to give a concert for 140 K-6 students and 15 adults. After lunch, I went to the John M. Ceulemaere Public Library. The library theatre has 160 seats. It was filled to capacity with students from Grades 2, 3, and 4. I talked a little about poet Dennis Lee in a preface to one of my stories. At the end of the concert after a couple of questions ("What was the name of your fish?" is often asked), I invited two girls up on stage so we could all recite Lee's "Alligator Pie." Many in the audience joined in. It was delightful.

Day 3 - Reynolds Central School in Melfort where I did four performances. This was the only point in the tour where I had four different age groups, rather than an entire school. That freed me up to tell a variety of different stories for specific ages. It snowed that day. Really snowed. (Enough that snowmen popped up on the school lawn during recess.) The four sessions were K-1 (50 students plus five adults); Grades 2-3 (50 students, five adults); Grades 3-4 (50 students, five adults); Grades 5-6 (75 students; seven adults). The principal came up to me before I left to tell me she had received very positive feedback from all the teachers. Several of the teachers made a point of thanking me before I left. They plan to start telling stories in class. My goal is always to encourage people to start telling stories themselves - it is something everyone can do. I was grateful for the feedback I received.

Day 4 began in Saskatoon. A cancellation from one school (conflict with a field trip) freed up a spot for École College Park where I told folktales and sang traditional Canadian folk songs to 75 bilingual French immersion students. Because they were students from Grades 4 through 6, I was able to do the whole presentation in French. Only the occasional word or two of translation for some arcane terms required. There were seven adults in attendance, three of whom spoke French.

It was back to another land of honey in the afternoon - Langham Elementary School. There I had 120 students from K-Grade 3. The school performance was from 2 till 3 pm. The hour went by too quickly. They were amazing listeners. I said to the principal that I had an hour's more stories I wished I could tell. She replied, "They would all have sat and listened too - every one of them." I love Saskatchewan.

The last day of the tour, oh, the last day of the tour: North Battleford. The North Battleford Public Library has an amphitheatre with the best acoustics. The best. No microphone necessary. The smallest whisper could be heard clearly at the very back. A storyteller's dream come true. This was a Canada Council performance. The place was packed - every seat taken; people were sitting on the steps. Schoolchildren were bussed in. There were 160 students from Grades 1 to 5. Again,

the children were amazing listeners. We greeted one another in Cree (courtesy of some kind boys); we chanted, sang and listened together. The stories seemed to have a life of their own, separate from the teller in that space. The tour coordinator had to drag me out of there. Photos were taken; kids were fist-pumping in joy. Oh, the power of sharing story.

The afternoon's Canada Council performance was in the village of Borden. In a village with a population of 245, Sixty-five people were in the audience. There were members of the public along with the entire elementary school's 45 students (Grades 1 - 6). It was a delightful end to a wonderful week.

I did an interview for SCRADIOCC about the tour which is being streamed on the Storytellers of Canada website.

I found the five days energizing. The energy of the children stayed with me and grew throughout the tour. I was a younger person in soul and spirit when I returned home, nourished by the richness of the week.

Thank you for choosing me to be part of the amazing TD Canadian Children's Book Week Tour.

Donna Dudinsky