
Jewish Storyteller Brian Rohr Honored

Gwen Davis

Reprinted with permission from JTNews, the Voice of Jewish Washington.

For the past four years *JTNews*, The Jewish Newspaper for Washington State, has honored ten Jewish people under the age of 40 who they consider inspirational and who are doing “great” things in the community.

This year a storyteller, Brian Rohr, was chosen as one of the ten. Brian Rohr lives in Port Townsend and tells Jewish and non-Jewish stories to all types of audiences around the country.

“All the storytelling I do I feel is sacred,” he said. “Stories teach about the human condition, our own spirit and our own soul and how we relate with each other. There’s a sacredness in that.”

Rohr began storytelling in 2007 after his introduction to the craft.

“I signed up for a storytelling class. The teacher was not Jewish himself but was connecting the Kabbalistic story of the four worlds. Upon meeting him, I was so blown away by what he did that I gave up my job and life in Chicago and moved to Port Townsend as a storyteller.

“The essence of what I aim to do is breathe life back into these stories. A lot of times we get these stories in written form, but they were originally oral. They got written down but a story likes to live and respond to listeners.

“We like [stories] because even if they are totally fantastical, they resonate. It’s like, maybe I didn’t have that experience right before the Red Sea parted, but through storytelling I understand what happened.”

Rohr does not write down his stories or memorize them. Rather, he has a mental outline of what he will say, and will let the mood of the audience tweak his story accordingly.

“I don’t memorize the words like a script of an actor. The words of each story will not be the same, but the core essence of the story is absolute. The flesh is always a little bit different and having that flexibility allows the

storyteller to respond to the needs of the audience consciously or subconsciously.

“I’ll read the story way ahead of time,” he said. “I’ll read it, practice it, read the commentaries on it, and in that way I’ll move forward.



Brian Rohr. (Photo by Meryl Alcabes)

“I want to let go of the rational — these stories are not rational. But instead, have people listen with the ears and the heart. I like bringing people into the magical realm.”

Gwen Davis is a correspondent for *Jewish Times News*, the Voice of Jewish Washington.