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THE ART OF STORYTELLING



CHARLIE BERMAN/PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

Storyteller Brian Rohr gives an impromptu performance on the Port Townsend waterfront last week.

PT man attempts to build interest in ancient process

By CHARLIE BERMAN
PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

PORT TOWNSEND

Despite a burgeoning increase in ways of getting information, a time-tested tale told in the oral tradition can have great resonance.

"All this information that is available to us is not necessarily food for our souls," said Brian Rohr, 33, of Port Townsend, who is building a reputation as a performing storyteller.

"The best stories give us a universal way to understand our lives and our emotions, and this doesn't happen with a lot of what is on the Internet," he said, while adding he recognizes the power of the Internet to spread the oral traditions to those who may not have a storyteller in their town.

Port Townsend, however, has a vital storytelling community,

and Rohr is attempting to build interest in the process by holding workshops and events that showcase the ancient art of telling tales.

Monthly sessions

The basis of the effort is a monthly storytelling session with an open-mic component, occurring from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. the first Friday of every month at Better Living Through Coffee, 100 Tyler St.

Rohr has a repertoire of about 25 stories, all traditional tales on which he places his own stamp.

He doesn't memorize the stories themselves but can recall the different scenes, which he performs sequentially.

He adds patter and percussion to the stories, lengthening and shortening sections in reflection of the audience that he senses in each room.

A story, he said, has a life of its own.

"Storytelling is not the relationship of an active storyteller and a passive audience," he said.

"The creation of a story goes from the storyteller to the audience and back to the storyteller in a loop."

While interpretations of stories can be written down and copyrighted, those in the oral tradition are more ephemeral.

"Each story has a different energy, but in a lot of cases, we are breathing new life into a story that has existed for thousands of years," he said.

While stories begin with tradition, the storytelling process is well explained by the old saying about how a man can never ford the same river twice; the man changes as does the river.

TURN TO STORY/A5

Story: Evolves from day to day

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A story, even if it is told by the same person on successive nights, will evolve from day to day and again when it is told by another storyteller.

Adding to this is the occasional process of "feeding the story," which is a discussion of how it affected the audience.

"The story has fed us, so we then feed the story by saying what we loved about the story, what delighted us, made us furious or made us happy," Rohr said.

After the "feeding," the audience feedback may find its way to future tellings of the story, although Rohr said these additions aren't always conscious.

Aside from his storytelling avocation, Rohr is a healing arts practitioner, working in massage and Reiki.

He first became interested in storytelling in 2007 during a convention in Albuquerque, N.M., where he met storyteller Daniel Deardorff, a Port Townsend resident.

Rohr moved to Port Townsend to study with Deardorff and is now at the point where he feels his storytelling efforts can sustain him.

To hedge this bet, he is taking a business class at Washington State University Extension so he can apply business principles to the storytelling arena and find new ways to market his skill.

Along the way, he has become affiliated with Deardorff's Mythsinger Consortium, which strives to restore mythic wisdom, according to its website.

"Myths take thousands of years to develop," Rohr said.

"I want to explore what it means to bring these stories back into our culture and our community."

For more information, visit www.brianrohr.com or www.mythsinger.com.

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