

- Bine, Elizabeth C. *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Frankel, Ellen. *The Classic Tales: 4000 Years of Jewish Lore*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc, 1989.
- Habteyes, Lois Hassell. "Tell Me a Story About Long Time": A Study of the Folkstory Performance Tradition in the United States Virgin Islands. Unpublished dissertation: University of Illinois, 1985.
- Holtz, Barry W. *Back to Our Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit Books, 1984.
- Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. New York: Atheneum, 1965.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- . *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. New York: New American Library, 1969.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 1982.
- Sadeh, Pinhas. *Jewish Folktales*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Sanger, David E. "Nankan Journal: Such Stories to Tell, but He's 91 and in No Hurry." *The New York Times*. November 16, 1992.
- Schram, Peninnah. *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987.
- . *Tales of Elijah the Prophet*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991.
- Schwartz, Howard. *Elijah's Violin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- . *Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales from Around the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- . *Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- . *Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition—A Reference Guide*. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1946.
- Weinreich, Bina. *Yiddish Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Zenani, Nongenile Masithathu. Collected and edited, with an introduction, commentaries, and annotations by Harold Scheub. *The World and the Word: Tales and Observations from the Xhosa Oral Tradition*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

## The Continuing Circle Native American Storytelling Past and Present

Joseph Bruchac

JOSEPH BRUCHAC WRITES from across the divide of two cultures: Abenaki and Slovak American. His journey paradoxically reveals how, for him, moving forward is essentially a journey back. The cultural underpinnings of a family affect all of its members, for even when adults deny a past, children experience pieces of it. Their world view, ethics, faith, and understanding of the relationships of people to one another and to the environment all grow out of this deeper cultural substrate. Although the tenets were not articulated and defined as "the Abenaki way," his grandfather's child-rearing practices were distinctly Abenaki and culturally bound. So that long before Bruchac could recognize and articulate what it was to be Abenaki, he was steeped in their ways.

In a sense, the journey Bruchac articulates in this paper embodies the process we're inviting readers to consider in this book: the exploration of the relationship between oral cultures and print cultures. In modern times this relationship has generally been skewed towards valuing print over orality. Though literacy itself is a neutral tool, used by dominant cultures it was often used as a weapon. Even with the best of intentions, many times the cultural context of orally told stories was

*often absent, misinterpreted, or misused in its transcription. Now, oral cultures are devising their own systems for using print technology as a means of cultural preservation and perpetuation. After generations of having the tool of literacy, many native nations now use the tool to present the stories the way their aesthetics dictate.*

*Bruchac also reminds us that, as storytellers, we must commit ourselves to careful cultural research. The research itself might suggest ways to proceed through ethical and aesthetic questions raised in telling stories from cultures other than one's own. Learning to be culturally sensitive in our treatment of the stories and the cultures from which they come, whether Native American, Irish, or Laotian, is a requirement for all of us.*

Almost twenty years ago, I was invited to do some storytelling for an evening program offered as part of a special, one-time only "Native American Literature Course" at Skidmore College. The program included a Euro-American professor who had written his Ph.D. thesis on Sioux music, Duane Niatum, who is a Klallam Indian poet from the Pacific Northwest, and myself. In the audience was an eminent scholar who has enjoyed a long reputation as the expert on the Iroquois and it was Iroquois stories I chose to tell that evening. In the discussion that followed, the scholar made this simple declaration: "There are no more Iroquois storytellers."

Any discussion of Native American storytelling—past or present—has to begin with the recognition that there is a peculiar blindness in American culture about the realities of Native American life, a blindness which is as prevalent among those who have "studied" Indians as those who get most of their information from John Wayne movies and reruns of "F Troop." If things are not stereotypically visible or easily understandable from a Euro-American frame of reference, then they do not exist. Indeed, at the time when William Fenton made that statement, the old style Iroquois storyteller—usually a man in his middle years, wearing a gustoweh cap and clothing made of deerskin, traveling from long house to long house to share

the tales kept in his storytelling bag—was not to be found. But then, and now, the stories of old were being remembered and recounted—sometimes in English—by many Iroquois people. The hardest thing to comprehend may be how cultures change and yet still remain the same.

The climate for storytelling as a whole has changed drastically for the better since 1973. National festivals feature storytellers; the telling of traditional Native American stories—sometimes even by Native tellers themselves—is commonplace. Most people no longer believe that all of the Native American storytellers are long since departed. Yet many of the misconceptions about Native American stories and storytellers still exist and all too many non-Native storytellers still get their American Indian tales only from books and not from the mouths of Native tellers themselves. Moreover, even when they do hear stories told by Native tellers, there is often a lack of understanding about the place of those stories and about the responsibilities involved in telling them or the knowledge and permission which are often required in Native cultures before one tells the stories of another.

Despite the writings (past and present) of innumerable non-Native experts, storytelling is very much alive within virtually all of the still existing Native American communities in North America. In many cases, stories are still being told in the original Native languages, but English has become an important language for bearing the traditions, especially because it enables the communication of those stories within the Pan-tribal context of contemporary American Indian life. Just as colonialism is a shared past and present experience for Native Americans, familiar to every American Indian, English remains one of its legacies and a legacy which, more and more, is being used by Native storytellers to ensure survival.

Some historical context is necessary. When the first Europeans arrived in North America—and immediately began a slave trade which, along with the introduction of new diseases, quickly decimated the populations of the West Indies and the East coast—there were at least 400 distinctly different tribal nations in North America, each with their distinctive languages, cultures, and oral traditions.

Uncounted millions of Native Americans died. Those who did not perish found themselves faced with laws and institutions so foreign to them that their new masters and their ways might have come not from another continent but from another planet. In the United States, the land of the free, the Native American was the least free. Few know, for example, that slavery of American Indians was still legal after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. And although America is the land of religious freedom, until the 1930s all Native American religious practices were forbidden by law. Faced with genocide, the theft of their lands, and religious and social persecution, it is a wonder that any Native Americans survived at all. It is also no surprise that among the 1.5 million Native Americans counted in the United States in the last census, there is often a feeling that those surviving traditions must be protected and sometimes kept secret from those outside their tribal nation. In the past, disclosure usually meant destruction.

However, despite this bitter legacy, the Native peoples of America have been and remain among the most generous people in the world and the amount of sharing from Native cultures in the past can be seen in many ways—from our American system of democratic government and the foods we eat to the wealth of Native American stories which are to be found in print, stories which were usually given by Native elders to ethnologists and historians who were usually non-Indian. There is a tradition of sharing traditional stories with outsiders, especially outsiders who looked like they really needed the teachings in those tales! This was not done purely out of benevolence but in a spirit of enlightened self-interest. Storytelling seems to have always served at least two purposes among Native people—to entertain and to instruct. Perhaps if these new people heard the stories and learned the lessons in them, they would be less likely to do things dangerous to the Native people and their continued survival. That is why the Iroquois League began making concerted efforts at treaty-making councils in the early 1700s to urge the various colonies to join together into a democratic union like the Great League of the Iroquois. Having one unified group to deal with rather than a dozen or more different colonies would make life easier

for the Iroquois. They did this through storytelling, inviting influential Colonial representatives to listen as they told the tale of the long-ago founding of the Great League out of the chaos of inter-tribal disputes that existed before the arrival of The Peacemaker and Hiawatha. One of those Euro-American delegates who listened well and acted on the knowledge he gained was Benjamin Franklin, one of the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Euro-American culture, the dominant culture in 20th century America, has been a "Youth Culture." Knowledge and power are concentrated in the hands of the relatively young, and growing old means "retirement," relative uselessness to the culture as a whole and even "being a burden." Native American cultures, to the contrary, place emphasis on old age being a time of wisdom and honor and the old are seen as living treasures. Because it is the elders who are entrusted with the primary responsibility of sharing those traditions with the young—for in the circle of life, the old and the young are the closest together—it was often from elderly individuals that Europeans heard those stories and had the often mistaken impression that they were speaking to the "last" person who knew those traditions. It is also politely said by those who are younger—even if they themselves are in their sixties—that they do not know as much as their elders know. Yet it is understood that when they take the place of the old ones, the same things will be said about them. Unless one understands this cultural difference, one is not going to understand the nature of the Native American oral tradition. It is held most strongly by the old, but it is usually not concentrated in a single person.

The role played by storytelling in Native North America also needs to be understood. I've already mentioned that storytelling was associated with teaching. It may be generally said that throughout Native North America most stories were lesson stories. A well-told tale will be remembered longer than saying "You should!" or "You should not!" In fact, because harsh physical punishment and even shouting angrily at children was almost universally frowned upon, a misbehaving child would, as a first step towards correction, be told a lesson story. In my own experience, this role of stories remains the

same today and even very short stories—jokes, for example—are often told not just to make people laugh but to get across in an indirect but very forceful way, the fact to one of the listeners that he or she has done something wrong and that the lesson in the joke is directly applicable.

Some kinds of Native American stories, like jokes, circulate freely among the community, but even where such stories are concerned, it is standard practice to credit the person who told it to you. The acknowledgement of sources and the understanding that something very much like copyright exists in Native American oral tradition is another overlooked or totally unknown aspect of American Indian stories for many non-Native tellers. Some stories, in fact, clearly belong to a particular individual or a particular family. No one is to tell those stories without the direct permission of that person or that family. How can non-Indian tellers know which stories fall into this category? They usually cannot tell it when they get a story from a book. But when they hear a Native teller relate a story that they would like to tell themselves, it is their responsibility to directly ask permission of that Native teller. And if permission is refused, they must understand that it would be irresponsible for them to then tell that story. There are certain stories which I have been given permission to tell which I do not tell at large public gatherings where many non-Natives are present because I know that there will be people in that audience, even when I caution them not to do so, who will steal that story and even publish their own version of it. I know of at least one Native American teller who now refuses to perform at a certain storytelling festival because his stories were stolen there. There are other kinds of stories and other uses for stories, including a use in healing, but I will not go into those. This essay is not the right place to discuss them.

Insofar as non-Natives go, the most important point that I wish to make is *not* that only Native Americans should be allowed to tell Native stories. I do not believe that. However, I do believe that many Euro-Americans who are telling Native stories do not understand the stories they tell. They sometimes tell "made-up" Indian stories, Victorian romances involving doomed lovers from different tribes

jumping off a cliff together. Virtually all such stories were invented by Euro-Americans. They also sometimes tell authentic Native stories wrong, or tell them in ways which are offensive to Native people. Imagine, for example, what it would be like if someone told a story about you which was not true or which made you look foolish or evil. I do not believe that one can order anyone to stop telling such stories, but I can offer some simple advice which may prevent non-Native tellers from spreading harmful stereotypes and offending Native people. For example, if you wish to do a good job of telling a Cherokee tale, you would be well advised not to do it without careful and specific research into Cherokee history and culture. Libraries are useful, but first and foremost, one should seek advice from Native people themselves. One of the best research methods is to consult a Cherokee person who knows that story. Equally important, you should really listen to what that person tells you! I do not mean that reputable printed sources are unreliable—although in the case of some Native cultures that is very close to the truth—but that there are so many Native storytelling traditions that going directly to the source, to a knowledgeable person of that particular tribal nation, is the most reliable approach.

To most, if not all, Native American storytellers, a story is not just a story. It is alive and it carries great responsibility. For example, there are generally certain times when stories are not to be told. There is a general prohibition against telling most traditional stories in the summer, with the exception of historical narratives or stories from one's personal experience. This prohibition is found not only among the Native peoples of the Northeast (where it is said that stories should only be told between first and last frost), but also among the Lakota and other peoples of the Great Plains (where the first sound of thunder from the sky marks the end of storytelling season). I have been told of similar restrictions by Native storytellers from many other tribal nations on this continent. In some of the tribal traditions of the Southwest, stories are only to be told at night.

Stories, for Native storytellers, are not just words strung together. They are the oral re-enactment of powerful happenings which often relate very specifically to a particular Native nation and

times for stories

a specific physical place. Stories make things happen. One of my Onondaga teachers, Dewasentah, says that the telling of stories in the summer will cause snakes to come into your house. Larry Littlebird and other Native friends of mine from the Southwest have said that telling Coyote stories at the wrong time—or even mentioning Coyote's name at the wrong time—is an invitation for the trickster to visit you and bring you more trouble than you want.

There is never room in a brief essay to say everything that should be said about Native American storytelling. It is a circle and thus is best talked about not by one voice but by many voices in a continuing discussion. What Native American storytelling was, is, and will be is being expressed today by the voices of a growing number of Native American storytellers. People who have kept quiet about their living storytelling heritage are now, after many years of silence, making it known to the larger public that Native stories do not just exist in books put together in the last century by non-Native ethnologists and folklorists.

For the last few years, I've been putting together a list of active Native American tellers, people of Native ancestry (Aleut, American Indian, Inuit) who perform their work for audiences outside their own Native community. I began the list in part for myself. I wanted to have in one place as many names, phone numbers, and addresses as I could find of my contemporaries in the Native storytelling community. I also made the list in response to the often voiced comment that there were almost no contemporary Native American tellers. At first my list had only a few names on it, but it grew and continues to grow. It now includes more than fifty Native American tellers from Alaska to Florida and from Maine to southern California representing more than thirty different tribal traditions. Let me point out that I only list experienced Native tellers who are recognized by their own tribal communities and who are willing and able to travel outside their communities.

There is an abundance of variety of Native American storytelling traditions from across the country. Take the Northwest. The Institute of Alaska Native Arts, in Fairbanks, Alaska, has a list of more than twenty Alaskan natives who identify themselves as storytellers. In

Washington and Oregon, several groups bring indigenous storytellers together. One list of Native storytellers made by The Cedar Tree Institute numbers over a hundred. The Cedar Tree Institute is designed to support and encourage Native storytelling and offers annual conferences which bring together educators, counselors, ministers, historians, writers, teachers, and therapists who wish to use story in their work and lives. Native teachers and master storytellers work intensively with attendees over a five day period. (A similar Native-run storytelling conference is Hama-ha in New Mexico.) The En'owkin Centre, a Native-run college program in Penticton, British Columbia, emphasizes the importance of storytelling and maintaining indigenous languages as part of a post-secondary education and it has identified dozens of Native Canadian storytellers, most of whom tell either primarily in an original Native language or in a Native language and English. Until recently, Vi Hilbert, a Skagit elder and internationally known storyteller, published her own newsletter devoted to storytelling and the preservation of her language—the *Lutshootseed Newsletter*.

In almost every region of Canada and the United States there are now active professional Native American tellers, many of them working in unexpected areas. Not only are they doing storytelling performances and workshops in both Native and non-Native schools, but they are also working in areas where they come in contact with other segments of the public. Several years ago, I took part in a program in cooperation with the National Parks Service to develop a stronger storytelling component for National Park interpreters, relying on Native American stories to explain the history of their parks. In many cases the park employees who do the telling are themselves Native Americans. Wilson Hunter, a Navajo National Parks worker, has even started a Native American Park Interpreters Association.

There is also a growing awareness of the link between Native American writing and storytelling. This is a link which has, of course, always existed—when one reads the Pulitzer prize winning Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, one sees clearly how much he and most other contemporary writers of Native de-

scent owe to oral traditions. There was, at one time, in both the Native and the non-Native community, the feeling that writing something down from the oral tradition removed it from that tradition and weakened it. Now, however, there is an awareness that writing down a traditional story from one's own tradition will ensure that it is told in a better and more respectful way and also help to pass it on to future generations. Tom Porter, a Mohawk tradition-bearer from the Akwesasne community, spoke at a gathering of Native writers two years ago about the link he now saw between the telling of the old stories and writing. "There is an old prophecy," he said, "that I never understood until now. That prophecy said, 'One day our children will speak to the world.' Now, I see that is what we are doing."

I am in regular contact with elders from many different tribal nations who have decided that this is the time for them to write down and publish their oral traditions. In some cases, these are traditions which knowledgeable non-Native scholars said vanished a century ago. Not that it is always easy to find those stories. Persistence is important. Robert Perry is a Chickasaw storyteller who discovered this when he tried to collect a certain kind of traditional story from his Chickasaw elders. "No one knows any of those stories anymore," they said. But when Bob spoke to some elders from a nearby and different tribal community, they said, "We got plenty of those stories" and shared enough of them for him to put together an entire manuscript. When Bob went back and showed that manuscript to the same Chickasaw elders who had told him, only two years before, that they did not know such stories, their response was totally different from the earlier one. "We have plenty of stories like those," they said. "Even better than those." Then they began to tell them to him.

In some places, even more modern technology is also being used in this way. For example, at Cornell University, Iroquois elders have been videotaped relating important oral traditions in the indigenous language. These recordings are being made with the understanding that those tapes will be used not by the general public but by members of their own tribal nations, or by those given permission

to view them. This is one way to counter the problem of Native children not learning their language and traditions when they are young. If, later in life they do wish to learn, it has been preserved in a fashion closer to the old way than mere print can accomplish. It can even be used to keep future generations in touch with the oral and the visual aspects of traditional telling.

At this point, as a storyteller working within the Abenaki traditions, I think it may be useful to speak of my own journey as a storyteller. Although I was raised by my maternal grandparents, and it is from my mother's father that I inherit my Abenaki ancestry, I was not raised in a traditional way. In fact, my grandfather denied his Abenaki ancestry and called himself French-Canadian. (This was, I would later discover, common practice among dark-skinned Abenaki people like my grandfather. It was a way to protect themselves and their families from the racial prejudice which still exists against Native people in many parts of New England.) Having Native ancestry was our family secret. Like most family secrets, it was something everyone knew (including the people who lived around us) and no one dared to talk about. It was not until my grandfather and his brother Jack, who looked just like my grandfather and whom I did not meet until he showed up at my grandfather's funeral in 1970, had died, that his brother's widow talked openly with me about the Abenaki ancestry in the family. Wolf Song, another Abenaki storyteller friend of mine from Vermont, had a similar experience. When, in his adult years, he began talking openly about being Abenaki, at least one of the older members of his family was afraid that the police would come and take her away because she was Indian.

However, as a young child being raised by grandparents, I was given certain things which prepared me to work with Native elders later in life. First, being raised by loving and approving old people meant that I would always be at home in the presence of elders. Second, though I was not told the old Abenaki stories, my grandfather was a storyteller. He told to me about his life, working in the woods, about horses and logging, hunting and fishing. He did not talk often, so I was always waiting and listening for that time when

a story would come. Thirdly, my grandfather never struck me when I misbehaved. Instead, he talked to me. And he told me something which I never forgot, something which would later make me realize just how Indian my grandfather really was. "My father never hit me," he said. "No matter what I done. Instead, he'd talk to me." Fourthly, I knew that there was another life which my grandfather had but could not speak of. He would sometimes disappear for days at a time, off to visit relatives in Vermont. He never spoke much about those relatives, his brother, his nephews and nieces, but I knew that there was a larger family there and I wanted to find it and to know their stories, too. Even as a child, I somehow knew that without those stories the circle of my life would be incomplete.

As soon as I was old enough to go off on my own, I found myself seeking out Native elders. Even though no one in the family would talk about it, I had grown up with a grandfather who looked Indian and was surrounded by things that pointed to his ancestry. It was commonly said around the town (though not to his face) that "Jesse Bowman was as black as an Abenaki." Even his own words provided that evidence. I remember, for example, his story—which I taped—of how he left grade school in the fourth grade. What caused him to leave? Another kid, he said, "called me an Indian. So I flattened him and jumped out the window and never come back. I went to work in the woods with Seneca Smith."

As a student at Cornell and then Syracuse University, I went often to the Onondaga Reservation and listened to the old people I met there. The way they looked and the way they talked was familiar to me. I put the stories they told me into poems and I read every book I could find about the Native people of the Northeast, looking for the stories of my relatives. I spoke freely of my desire to seek out my Native roots, slender and hidden though they were at that time, and elders were generous with a young man who had that interest and the patience to listen to them—pointing me in directions I have now been following for three decades. After finishing college and after the three years my wife Carol and I spent as volunteers in West Africa (another place which showed me the power of storytelling), I returned to live in the house where I was raised by my grandparents.

My grandfather was still living, having kept himself alive to welcome us and his new great-grandson back into the home he had held for us.

It was with the birth of our sons that I became a storyteller. There was so much that I wanted to share with them, so much that I had wanted to hear when I was young but had never heard. My older son, Jim, is now twenty-five and he grew up hearing stories. Sometimes, though, he heard those stories only a few days after they were shared with me by one elder or another. For as I was teaching, I was also being taught. I paid close attention to the way the stories were told to me and I was amazed at the difference between the style of oral narrative and the often stiff, mannered fashion in which those stories had been written down. The oral narrative was so clear, so direct that, by comparison, many of the written versions seemed to have been dictated by wooden Indians.

By now I was hearing stories from a wide range of elders living in the Northeast, not only Onondaga, but also Mohawk, Abenaki, and even Pueblo, and each time I heard a story, I used the scholarly skills I had gained from obtaining a Ph.D. in comparative literature to seek out the written versions. I never carried a tape recorder with me, but relied, instead, on my memory and on hearing the same story told more than a single time. Then, using both the written versions and the oral version which had been given to me, I began to try to write down my own tellings. I found myself leaving out details which did not ring true, but seemed to be impositions of a Euro-American voice, and including elements which had been given me by the oral tellings. I constantly consulted dictionaries of the Iroquois and Abenaki languages, asked elders how things were said and what the exact meanings of the Native words were. If a story had a lacrosse game in it, I learned all that I could learn about lacrosse and how it was played, what the game meant to the particular nation whose story it appeared in. When I wrote a story down, I strove first for accuracy and second for clarity. Then, I read the stories aloud to myself again and again. Finally, I told them to my most critical audience—my two small sons. And whenever I reached the point

when my younger son, Jesse, could tell the story back to me, I knew that my storytelling had succeeded.

In 1974, I was asked by John and Elaine Gill, the editors of The Crossing Press, if I had any stories which I told my children. They knew me as a poet whom they had published in their literary magazine (*New: American and Canadian Poetry*). They wanted to try publishing books for children and they thought, having seen me with my sons, that I probably had stories which I told to them. I did, I said, and the result was the publication—before I was known as a storyteller—of my first storytelling book, *Turkey Brother*, in 1975. Because these were Iroquois stories, I showed my versions of them to my Iroquois teachers, Dewasentah at Onondaga, for example, before publishing them. It was only with their approval that I felt able to continue. It was in the year of that book's publication that I did my first public storytelling performance. I was invited, as a visiting author, to read from my book to an audience of fourth graders at the Caroline Elementary School near Ithaca, New York. But, instead of reading, I put the book down and began to tell the stories. I had read my poems to young audiences before, so I was used to standing in front of a crowd, and no one there knew it was my first such performance. As I told the story, I found myself not thinking of how it began or ended, but simply following along with it, describing it as I saw it happen before me. I trusted the story because I knew that it knew more than I could ever know. And the story did not let me down. It took me safely around its circle, and as I spoke, I heard my grandfather's voice join the voices of my ancestors.

It would be very hard for me to discuss in detail how my style today has changed from the style I used in that first performance, for I cannot think in terms of past and present when I think of stories. When I begin to tell one of the old stories it takes me into that timeless place and I understand why there is no word for *time* in the Abenaki or the Iroquois languages. Of course, I have changed. I know more stories now, having learned thirty or forty stories each year since 1975. I have a firmer grasp of the Abenaki language, and my pronunciation of Iroquois words has improved, so that I am able to insert

more words and phrases in those Native languages into my tellings. I had already learned sign language in 1975, taught me by my Pueblo teacher, Swift Eagle, and I used my hands then as I use them now to shape a story. It seems to me that my stories and my voice have been strengthened the way a tree is strengthened as it grows older and becomes more firmly rooted. Having worked for many years with the Abenakis and having been accepted as an enrolled member of the St. Francis/Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Nation has been part of that strengthening.

Today I find myself growing closer to the age my grandfather was when he brought me into his home. And my own sons are now telling the stories I taught them to other children. Many of the children they share their knowledge with are Native children, and Jesse, who carries my grandfather's name, works with the Abenaki Nation in Vermont and in Canada. He has become fluent in speaking Abenaki.

The ideas of "past and present," of time as a straight line, have never really worked when talking about Native American culture. Instead, there is a sense of a continuum and a connection which can only be represented by the circle. And so it is that when I look at Native American storytelling and my own storytelling journey I see a circle. It connects those who have spoken in the past with those of us whose voices are still carried on the winds of breath and those who are yet to come. It is a circle which is growing stronger.

#### RESOURCES

- The Cedar Tree Institute, P.O. Box 98228, Tacoma, WA 98498
- The Enow'kin Centre, P.O. Box 218, Penticton, B.C., Canada V2A 6K3
- Hama-ha, c/o Larry Littlebird, P.O. Box 2900, Santa Fe, NM 87504
- The Native American Authors Catalog, P.O. Box 308, Greenfield Center, NY 12833
- The Wordcraft Circle of Native American Writers and Storytellers, 2951 Ellenwood Drive, Fairfax, VA 22031