



SIEBENQUELL

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# The Story Exchange

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In her Book »The Secret Life of Bees«, Sue Monk Kidd has a telling line about stories. »Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.« Yet, for every thriving storyteller you need a story-listener. Where will the storytellers find and meet the story listeners?

Every year as Canada Day (July 1) approaches I go to my bookshelf and pull out one of the books by Stuart McLean. He is a storytelling legend in my home and native land. Starting in 1994, he began to tell stories on national radio about Dave, the owner of a record store called The Vinyl Café, and the quirky characters in his family and among his friends. He did this until his untimely death of due to cancer in 2017. One million listeners worldwide tuned in every week to hear the latest story. Later Stuart McLean took these stories on the road and traveled throughout Canada and the United States to give live performances of the stories to sold-out audiences. The stories were gradually published in a series of books and many albums were also released.

The book I pull out every year, however, is entitled »Time now for the Vinyl Café Story Exchange«. In 2004, McLean began to invite listeners to send him their own stories. Every week he and his producer, Jess Milton, would select a few of them and McLean would read them on-air. The rule for the stories was simple. »They have to be true. And they have to be short. But after that they don't have to be anything at all; after that, it's up to you.« And the people sent him stories. Thousands of stories every season.

A storyteller encountered his story listeners and they in turn became storytellers. As Jess Milton said: »That is what we wanted people to do. To describe a moment they had experienced, or witnessed, or heard about. We said it could be a moment of kindness or cruelty, of sadness or frivolity, a moment they were proud of or a moment they were ashamed of. It might not even be about them. It might be about someone they knew or about someone they did not know at all. Something that made them smile, or cry. Happy or sad. A photo of life, but taken with words instead of film«.

In my annual ritual to commemorate Canada Day, I am filled with warm memories, deep gratitude, and no small portion of longing for the Story Exchange. And I am filled with questions. Where do the one million listeners now go to hear a story well told? Have they swelled the ranks of the narrative homeless? Have they found a new meeting place to hear and head new stories? And where are they telling their stories to others? Every year thousands of stories were submitted for consideration, but if there were thousands of stories, then that means there were thousands of storytellers. Where have they all gone? Have they found a new home? Or have their voices gone silent?

Sue Monk Kidd is right. »Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.« So in the name of all the guild of storytellers from Scheherazade to Stuart McLean, I ask: Where is our story exchange today?

**Erik Riechers SAC**

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