

Not just another song and dance...

Storytelling is Susan O'Halloran's ultimate artform



Susan O'Halloran

by Cathy Sage

Her energy and exuberance for life and living appears boundless. Yet her matter-of-fact, down to earth style reminds you of how very grounded this lady is. She has a way with words as she weaves a teaching without preaching, moral of the story into her work with a golden thread that makes you laugh, think, and understand she's lived life. She makes it easy to relate ... but then that's what storytelling is all about. And storytelling is what Susan O'Halloran, author, storyteller, songster and dancer, loves and does best.

"It's so hard to say when I started storytelling ... as a kid I'd sit on the porch, and I guess that's where it began!"

"For twenty years I was a professional dancer and then I had a disc problem and I did radio and television for awhile. Then I discovered that with storytelling you could speak in a blatant, bold way but it didn't (have to) get the heart involved.

"With storytelling you teach but you don't hit people over the head with it. People can enter in on one level and it's very respectful. My background in standup comedy helps with the humor. In storytelling you can laugh a bunch, and dance and do about anything with it."

O'Halloran, who lives in Evanston, Illinois has two grown sons and a new grandchild. She's woven many of her personal stories around her sons and the "will I live through this terrible teen routine?" with her own experiences.

She said the story about her teenage sons is one she named "Mother Guilt". It is a topic that is timeless for parents. Like all parents she had her doubts about being a good mother, and would her boys grow up okay? She said her worries were for nothing because she has raised two fine sons but her comical routine was peppered with real life fears. She's adds inspiration and hope with her personal "tales of truth".

She says many of her topics are about social justice, with issues including Third World Countries and racial issues. "People's differences are good ... but we need to remember that we're really all the same. We're all a part of something bigger. Spiritually speaking it's all about the human spirit."

When asked about what inspires her she said, "Sometimes with personal stories there is something that just keeps knocking at the door of your heart that says 'tell me'."

"If you really listen you will find each of us have questions inside of us that are reoccurring. One of mine is, 'how do I change things, how do I make a difference?' You enter the world of suffering and you have to let your heart break again and again. How do you make a difference without becoming cynical or bitter ... yet still make things change for the better, and do this on a continuing basis?"

She says her love is to make up and create fables. It is fascinating to her that after she has created it she realizes 'something wasn't there and now it is.'

As far as producing stories O'Halloran says the difficult thing is not coming up with stories, rather it's not having time enough to tell them all. She says she has so many stories within her, yet the stories have to add up to something and have a point to them. "I find in telling my stories you allow yourself to become a character in your own life."

Her most recently released books, *Storybook Marriages, Fairytales for Adults* and *The Woman Who Lost Her Heart*, and *The Woman Who Found Her Voice*, will be available at the Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough.

O'Halloran concluded with, "I'm so pleased to be coming to Jonesborough. Some of the best audiences in the world are there. With some audiences you have to explain to them what storytelling is about. In Jonesborough you don't have to explain ... in Jonesborough they already understand."

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