



Susan O'Halloran

# Windy City storyteller to perform

By **KIM O'CONNOR**  
For the Press

Storyteller Susan O'Halloran is up next as teller in residence for the International Storytelling Center's popular Storytelling Live! series.

Her residency, which runs from Sept. 27-Oct. 1, will feature matinee performances daily at 2 p.m. in the Mary B. Martin Storytelling Hall, an intimate theater in the heart of the International Storytelling Center. Tickets are limited and reservations are highly recommended.

O'Halloran's specialty is personal stories that conjure a sense of history and place, often from different perspectives. "I'm curious about the pieces of history we discover later — what we know as a child and what we realize as adults," she explains. "A focus of my work is to get that sense of place and how it affects our world view, and how it changes as we get older and we start to understand the bigger movements of history and life that were underpinning what you saw as a child."

For example, when she reminisces about the area where he grew up — a segregated neighborhood in Chicago — he describes it from at least two points of view: her perspective as an oblivious child, and the more charged social context she learned about as an adult. "I started to get the story of my neighborhood in a whole other way," she says. "I understood the history of my city in a whole other way. You know, who wound up here, and why."

The storyteller is a master of taking a tale from a very personal place and expanding it outward. One of her recent pieces begins as a story about her grandmother, an Irish immigrant, and eventually becomes a piece about immigration to and migration within the U.S.

"I start by talking about this photograph of my grandmother," O'Halloran says. "I didn't even know it was her. It looked to me like a princess up on her wall. The picture was a beautiful lady, and my grandmother is this older lady sitting there with an eye patch and orthopedic stockings.

"As I began to explore my family history, it was like, what moment in her life did this photograph occupy? I learned that she was in this town in upper Michigan working from dawn to well past dark and sending money back home and supporting her whole family. Eventually, I went back to Ireland to actually see what informed her life. I saw a shed that was the house where the whole family lived in winter months. Even the livestock were packed in there to give off heat."

At the same time, the storyteller is skilled in taking a universal angle and scaling it back to a personal perspective. O'Halloran sees her story as more than just a tale about her grandmother, or even about immigration; it is also about the moment in childhood when you begin to see the adults around you as complex human beings. "It's fascinating to me how it is we come to understand what was happening to us because we're in it," she says. "It's like you're in the mosh pit of life and you're just kind of trying to get through. And then there were these moments when you stand above it all you start to see these other pieces of the puzzle."

Tickets for O'Halloran's performances are \$12 for adults and \$11 for seniors, students, and children under 18. Ticket stubs will save audience members 10 percent on same-day dining at Bistro 105, The Cranberry Thistle, The Dining Room, or Main Street Café.

For more information about Storytelling Live! or to make a group reservation, call (800) 952-8392 Ext. 222 or 913-1276.