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The Storyteller and The Grand Feast

By Nancy Read Smith

Once upon a time, there was a storyteller named Bill Grimmette who was wise in the meaning of life and gracious in his sharing of it. He traveled the world from city to city, town to town telling amazing and wondrous stories to children throughout the lands. Oh, what a mighty storyteller he was! Weaving together the threads of fables, folk tales, and legends, he spun a tapestry of magic around all who listened. This mighty storyteller loved the children of the world. That was clear for everyone to see. He honored them for their natural goodness and their clever wit. He taught them lessons about who they are and where they came from, and encouraged them to discover all the possibilities for their lives. Hali Taylor, children's librarian, wise in the ways of children's imagination and gracious in feeding their spirits, invited Bill Grimmette to the little village of Shepherdstown. He came and told his stories to the school children, and all who heard him were enchanted. Dressed in African garb, he told mesmerizing stories of African people and African ways. He danced and sang as he told his stories, and invited the children to do the same. He even let the children help him tell his stories. Each child had an important part to play, something special to do, just like in the story of the man with twelve sons and a particularly powerful cow tail switch given to him by the village storyteller... and in the story of the people who were so proud to be Africans... and in the story of the ancestors - all the people of the world have African ancestors. It's true, the children who heard the story know why.

The children know why vultures circle and circle over their prey before they descend and devour it. They know why 'cant is a coward's argument for not trying and that "I believe in myself" enables a

child to fly onward and upward to make all the "wished-for" hopes "dream~come-true" realities.

No matter what the content of the story or the form it took, the storyteller's message was always the same: Find your own truth and be who you are. The happiness and possibilities of life will be yours. When the storyteller finished all of his tales of truth, beauty, and promise, the children stood to leave. They all seemed taller, fuller, and happier with themselves and each other. They talked about the storyteller and his stories. They remembered his stories for a long, long time. The storyteller's magic never left them.

A year later, Hali Taylor invited the storyteller back to tell more of his stories. This time, being wise in the ways of adults as well as in the ways of children, she graciously planned a grand feast and invited all the grown people of the village to come and eat and listen to the stories of Bill Grimmette.

Word had spread of the wise and gracious storyteller's return. The grown people remembered the children's exhilaration as they retold the stories Bill Grimmette had told them - eyes shining, words spilling over each other, arms and legs moving wildly to keep up with the stories. And they wondered, "When was the last time I had such an experience?"

The grown people, wise in their own ways, went to the library and bought tickets for the grand feast. Excitement grew as the day got closer. The shopkeepers and business merchants of Shepherdstown, being wise in the needs of such a great event and gracious in their giving, provided all the accessories and ingredients necessary for a very grand feast. Bradley and Carol Sanders, being oh, so wise in culinary arts and oh, so gracious in their time and effort, took all the ingredients and cut and diced, mixed and measured, cooked and created an oh, so elegant meal from the land of Ethiopia. At last, the time had come for the grand feast and under the light of the autumn moon, the grown people gathered in the great room of the

Shepherdstown Men's Club to share an evening of gourmet dining and theatre. The meal was indeed magnificent! Au ~ of raw vegetables and yogurt dip introduced a dinner of Doro wat (chicken), Ethiopian lentils, kale and spiced cheese, tomatoes, and eggs all of which "ere scooped and eaten with t'ef injera, (a rubbery flat bread). The feast was finished to perfection with a desert of coffee and Mescouta.

Bill Grimmette, the wise and gracious

storyteller, filled the evening with fables, folk tales and legends. He told stories of his own life and the truths he learned through living. Everyone listened with awe and were inspired by the stories they heard and the truths they held -- stories about the importance of honesty and virtue, truths about ancestors family and self. And this is what is so amazing -- the truths of the storyteller are not his alone. They are universal truths; they belong to all the people of the world, regardless of race, color, creed, age, or gender.

"The character of a person is built into the name. One has to grow into its meaning." "Who you are depends on the story you tell about yourself. That's what my mother told me.

Watch out for the story -stealers who want to change your story who want to build you up with non-truths about you. Tell your story, not someone else's story about you. Some of the stories were very funny, some very clever, some sad, some touching. People were moved to riotous laughter and quiet tears. But no matter the content of the story or the form it took, the storyteller's message was always the same: "Find your own truth and be who you are. The happiness and possibilities of life will be yours.

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At the end of the evening, the grown people heartened by the lessons imparted, stood and applauded and applauded and applauded their appreciation for Bill Grimmette. They left wrapped in the tapestry of magic spun by the wise

and gracious storyteller. With stories and images still swirling in their heads, they went home and dreamed dreams of who they are -- the best selves of who they are, the possible selves, the true selves. The next day when they woke up, they seemed taller, fuller, and happier with

themselves and each other. Being wiser than they were the day before, the grown people understood the children's belief in the storyteller. They knew if they were willing to hold onto the magic, they, too, would be able to fly.

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