

STEVEN HENEGAR

STORYTELLER

TRUTH
AND
LIESsm

Complete Biography

My Midwestern family told stories, mainly about other people in the family. The stories rose up out of conversation at the breakfast table, sitting around in the evening, gathered at reunion, leaning under the hood of a car. When these casual stories ricocheted off one another, they would spark memories that we would shape into even more stories.

Some of those stories had a nice beginning, middle and end, but others were just bits and pieces of our lives. Some stories took ten minutes to tell, while others required twenty or thirty years of repetition to remember all the details correctly. Invariably, they were shaped by what we knew happened, what someone told us had happened (other stories), and what should have happened—the truth and lies that we wrap around our lives to remember where we come from, share who we are, and speculate on who we might become.

No one called it telling stories; it was just talk. But over the years, the stories joined together into a shared memory made up of stories. We live entangled in a web of informal storytelling that ties us to family and friends and guides us out in the broader world. And, of course, each time we step out into that world we encounter someone else's web of stories and become entangled further.

It was years before I recognized the art in the casual talk that surrounded me growing up, particularly in my father's stories. After graduating from the University of Oklahoma with a BA in acting and directing, I helped found the Oklahoma Playwrights' Theater to produce original regional work. I worked as the house manager for the Minnesota Opera and found work as an actor, director and stage manager while heading west. I co-founded the Children's Theater Committee in Oregon, writing and directing for three seasons. During this time, five of my original scripts (two adult comedies and three children's plays) were produced.

Then I rediscovered the art of storytelling and the wonderful cadence of casual language. I was trying to write down my father's stories and found the rhythms weren't right until I began to speak them. My wife, a children's librarian, introduced me to the beginning of the public storytelling renaissance. And I knew I'd found a life's work where I could join the joy of talk and language that I found in my family with the movement and sense of the dramatic gained in acting and writing for the theater.

In fact, I adopted my father's attitude of "there's not just one way to get there." Everything was fair game in his telling, so he began with a willingness to share stories that mixed straight-ahead narrative with observation and a structure that sometimes seemed to wander from the main point. Eventually, even those wandering asides found their way back to broaden and deepen the story.

Over the years, I have worked to wrap that casual attitude and structure within more formal theatrical conventions. This provides me the flexibility to move from traditional stories drawn from my Midwestern and Southern background to contemporary personal stories and fiction as well as the

skills to chart both the everyday and the fantastic that we run across in the world, joining--like memory--the past and present to find the experiences and feelings that we all share.

After telling stories and leading workshops for several years, I returned to school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study folklore. I then had the opportunity to spend four years as an artist-in-residence at colleges through the prestigious North Carolina Visiting Artist Program. This allowed me to spend nearly every day concentrating on my work, as well as performing or leading workshops in many different circumstances for an amazing variety of audiences. I spent time performing in concert or at church meetings, museums, with students at all levels, at camps or university forums, developing work in performance as well as in rehearsal.

During that time, I founded the Piedmont Storytelling Festival and received a North Carolina Emerging Artist Grant to produce a video of my father's Depression-era Texas story, *Bridling Old Red*. Before leaving North Carolina, I released a live concert recording, *Moving Stories*, which the University of Illinois *The Bulletin Storytelling Review* called "a prime example of a melding of family and traditional stories that is both witty and well told."

Since then I've performed at leading storytelling festivals, such as the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival, the Bay Area Storytelling Festival, and the Sierra Storytelling Festival along with the Exchange Place for regional tellers at the National Storytelling Festival and the San Francisco Fringe Festival. I continue to work with colleges, schools, libraries, and many types of community groups including churches, literacy, and senior organizations. I was selected for the North Carolina touring roster, as well as working with the Washington State Cultural Enrichment, the North Carolina Mountain Arts, and the South Carolina Arts in Education programs. Prior to moving to southern California, I directed the storytelling program for Stagebridge, America's oldest senior theater company in Oakland, CA.

Along the way, of course, people tell me stories in return. So, storytelling remains a vital part of American life. We share our lives in stories to discover who we are.