

Courage My Friends Podcast Series III – Episode 4, Part I
Mouth Open, Story Jump Out:
The Power and Purpose of Storytelling in These Times

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

[music transition]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: I was already worried about my job, food and housing. So now I have to worry about healthcare as well?

STREET VOICE 2: Seems like we wanna jump back to normalcy so bad that we're not even trying to be careful at this point.

STREET VOICE 3: This is a 911 kind of situation for global climate crisis. This planet is our only home and billionaires space-race is not a solution. The earth is crying for survival. It is time for action.

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: It's Halloween, and for many of us, this is a time of stories, the scary kind of course. But stories are surrounding us all the time, throughout our lives. We wonder at them as children. We travel with them as adults. We hope to leave our own, long after we've gone. Stories provide us connections to the past and pathways to the future. And there is power in stories. They can tell hard truths, unearth buried pasts, and become tools of resistance. What stories can we tell? And what stories must we tell?

In this special, and very storied, two-part episode of *The Courage My Friends* podcast *Mouth Open, Story Jump Out: The Power and Purpose of Storytelling in These Times*, we are very pleased to welcome six Canadian storytellers.

In part one, we begin our conversation with First story Storyteller, Teagan de Laronde; actor, author, and storyteller. Ricardo Keens-Douglas; and community animator, author and co-founder of Storytelling Toronto. Dan Yashinsky.

Welcome, Tegan, Ricardo and Dan, Thanks for joining us.

DAN: Thank you.

RICHARDO: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

RESH: Lovely having you here.

And Tegan, I'm going to start with you, your work with both First Story Toronto and Story Nations at the University of Toronto is strongly focused on obviously storytelling. Why are stories and storytelling so vital to you and your work?

TEAGAN: Storytelling is vital to me because I grew up to be a storyteller. It is a responsibility to tell these stories, to share our perspectives, and to use our voice. Through my work with First Story Toronto and Story Nations, I get to retell different stories and different perspectives to audiences that don't get to always hear Indigenous perspectives. So it's really vital to me that I can offer this perspective and again, use my voice to share that.

RESH: And Richardo, as an author and a playwright, actor, storyteller, you wear many hats - your storytelling career has traveled from page to stage and internationally, right now, you're actually calling in from Grenada, right?

RICHARDO: Yes.

RESH: What do stories mean to you?

RICHARDO: Well, to me it's a connection to family and community and the past, because I grew up in a household that I was full of storytelling. We sat a lot around the dinner table and my dad would always start a story, bringing back memories of his youth and stuff like that.

So it is a big part of us. And when I grew up, there was no TV. So the oral tradition is very, very important in my family and in my community, especially on full moon nights because I remember we'd always sit on our veranda and that's when storytelling would start. So it's a big part of me up to today that I still love to tell stories.

RESH: Hmm. And Dan, you have been a storyteller for many years, and among your many credits, you co-founded one of the main storytelling communities in Toronto, which is Storytelling Toronto. Why this focus on storytelling? What is the importance of stories?

DAN: The personal side of it is I grew up in a diaspora household. My mother was a Holocaust survivor and we had families scattered around the world. And I remember growing up with this feeling of if I don't take responsibility for stories, people will disappear, they'll vanish. That we lived through our stories. And in the house I grew up in that was a strong feeling, although no one ever said it out loud. You could just feel it. And my parents' friends were all from the concentration camps and I just grew up feeling that it's really important. It's almost life and death important to remember stories.

But the other side of it was I was a summer camp counselor and I noticed that stories were the best way to hold the attention of these very squirrely eight year-old boys that I was responsible for. And when we sat around the fire and told stories, particularly ghost stories, but really any kind of story, they were the greatest listeners in the world, even though they spent the whole day running pretty wild.

So I was very intrigued by that, the power of a story to turn a wild little eight year old boy into the world's greatest listener. And after working at that summer camp, I decided I wanted to go deeper into this strange mystery called storytelling and find out why a story, just told by word of mouth, could have such power for people as they listened.

RESH: So it's interesting that stories can draw diasporic communities together, recuperate histories that are on the verge or have been lost, and also create new visions of the future for our younger generations as well.

And this episode is quite performative in that we're not only talking about stories, but we're also telling stories.

And we're going to start our stories with you Teagan. So set the stage for our podcast listening audience, and then please tell us a story.

TEAGAN: I'm no expert like I am. I'm in a conversation with people when I'm in a storytelling mode. I guess. I want people to talk back to me. I don't wanna be the only person talking or telling a story, cuz we're in a relationship. This is my relationship to you. You're hearing me, I want to hear you, I guess in the podcast format. It's not so viable right now. But yeah. I'll begin with my story.

I always thought I understood storytelling. I grew up on stories told to me by my family and those stories consisted of family stories, fictional stories and those stories from books and other written accounts.

When I entered university and into my Indigenous studies degree, I came to appreciate the power of these different forms of storytelling, especially that of oral storytelling or oral tradition.

In many academic spaces, storytelling in the form of written forms are seen to be factual and respected. These forms tend to be prioritized over stories told orally. As

growing up with a respect for oral stories, mostly informed me by my family; entering into academic spaces and trying to share and cite my oral knowledge, I experienced many problems managing this dynamic between orality and textual forms of stories. Within many Indigenous cultures, oral tradition is the way in which we share knowledges. Oral stories connect us to our own voice, our relations, our responsibilities, our past, present, and our future.

Indigenous peoples became disconnected from our stories and we lost aspects of our cultural selves through processes of colonization and other assimilation policies and practices like residential schools.

We are increasingly reconnecting to our identity by means of rediscovering our cultural stories. And it's through these cultural stories that we begin to once again see ourselves in a web of cultural relations, fostering social and community connections.

During the beginning of the pandemic, I was reached out to by John Johnson, a lead organizer for First Story Toronto. And it was through my work with First Story that I became labeled a storyteller.

First story originated in 1995 as the great Indian Tour Bus. A five hour bus tour focused on Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. And it continues to this day as an Indigenous-led community-based organization focused on researching, keeping and sharing stories of traditional, ongoing, and future Indigenous forms of presence in and what we now know is Toronto.

Whenever we begin a First Story tour, we begin by acknowledging that we are no experts in the stories of this land. The stories I share through the tours are the ones that I've learned through other Indigenous oral storytellers. And I think it's on every tour with a different storyteller, that I'm taught something new or a little bit is added to my own story.

It's through oral tradition that I share with new generations of peoples. And to me this is a re-ignition of Indigenous traditions, which becomes really powerful when they're on the land together. Cause it's almost a way to say we never really left, did we? You just tried to cover us up.

On the University of Toronto, St. George campus, there exists a little part of campus called Philosophers Walk, located just beside the Royal Ontario Museum. Philosophers Walk runs upon what was once Tattle Creek; still running, but now covered upstream.

Before it's covering, Tattle Creek affected greatly how Toronto operated by influencing directions of streets in the Downtown core. But now the stream is covered. The spirits, the land and the water are buried and submerged. The stream is concealed. The fish are gone. And the people no longer gather. If you visit this site, it's actually still possible to hear this stream, even though it's underground.

Here's an example of colonial agents seeing nature as something to be molded or changed. The University of Toronto actively pumps water out of the buildings near Tattle Creek. But even so, Tattle Creek consistently floods the basements of these buildings as if saying, "You tried".

In Toronto, like many places, there are many stories of the land; in the land, based on the land. I think one of the biggest misconceptions about Toronto is that there are no Indigenous stories. We tend to see urban places as non-Indigenous spaces.

Toronto though is a city, is an urban space because of Indigenous design. It was a meeting place, a council ground, a shared space, and it still is.

There is so many stories to share about the land in which we gather, and I'd very much recommend listening to Indigenous storytellers to find them.

There are so many ways to get knowledge. You could extract it from every little bit of piece of everything until exists as simply that thing, But connecting it to a place, to a people or peoples and the process of storytelling is as important as the story itself.

RESH: Teagan, thank you. And your story is, again, quite performative in telling a story within a story about stories, which really sets the stage for this discussion as well. And you have been touring with First Story Toronto, so what do you hope to see in your audiences and who is your audience? Because I know there are different audiences for different stories.

TEAGAN: Yeah, so our audiences are very geographically placed. So we do tours across Toronto, so like High Park Tour, a St. George Tour, Mississauga Tour.

I'm always looking for a bit of transformation within my audience. I want them to see the landscape as different, as shared, as Indigenous. you know. And then obviously stories are very political. I'm hoping for also some justice within these stories.

There's a lot of harm and legacies that I talk about in my stories. And recognition of that and moving forward from those stories is ultimately my goal.

RESH: And Richardo, just going on that. So stories are very much about social connection and when you are in a storytelling relationship with your audience, how do you connect to your audience and what do you hope they're getting out of this relationship?

RICHARDO: For me, it's connecting through the soul. Storytelling for me is a passing on. It's a sharing of yourself. It's a sharing of where you came from. It's a sharing of a history. It's a sharing of a knowledge. And when I connect with my audience, when I tell my stories, I want them to go through the process with me. And I remember when I had this show called Cloud Nine on CBC, a storytelling show. And I realized that every storyteller tells their story differently

The Indigenous people, they use drums. Africans use drums, call and answer. Caribbean people tend to be very outgoing with their story, very visual, very animated. They take you through, like if they actually part of it and they want you to come along with them.

So when I sit with my audience, I try to get them to move along with me and be part of it and experience what I am going through. And then I've experienced tellers who just sit and just talk, you know? And which is so effective as well.

So storytelling depends on the storyteller and it depends on the listener. But whatever story is told, the listener goes with you. And that's the magic of the oral tradition and the magic of radio. Because the only thing they have is the teller and the listener, and that umbilical chord between the storytelling and the listener. So it's an experience that they use their imagination. And that's the greatest gift that we have.

And in today's society where everything is like 30 seconds, everything is a quick video, a quick TikTok. Nobody has the time anymore, they want it right away. So nobody wants to go through the process of the storytelling, of the oral tradition; which is a totally different feel from being passive in front of a TV and sitting there and let everything happen for you. All the excitement is on the screen. All the telling of the imagination is right there. So to me, it deadens the imagination. But storytelling brightens and lightens up the imagination. Gets it going.

RESH: Yeah, Indeed. And Dan, you have spent so much time building a community of storytellers in Toronto. Could you speak more about that connection between stories and community?

DAN: Well, I mean, I didn't grow up in an oral tradition like Teagan's describing. So for me it's you know, that old proverb, you make the path by walking it. So it's been a matter of trying to find places and find people and people who love stories and want to recreate this art-form in our contemporary society. So part of that is just making a space, putting out chairs, inviting people to join you.

We won't talk about how old I was, but long time ago, I really wanted to be in a community of storytellers and listeners. A place where there was quiet and no rush, and people could really savor the spoken word, both as tellers and listeners. So there was a little cafe in Kensington Market - and anybody listening to the podcast who's not from Toronto, Kensington's, this wonderful neighborhood, still lively and diverse and kind of cool. - And there was a cafe called Gaffers. And I remember going to the owners at some point in 1978 and said, "Look, I wanna do storytelling. Can I, can I do an open mic here?" It was a tiny little joint. And, they were amenable to that. So that started out that every Friday I would get up and I really didn't know what I was doing, but I stood up, and with the audacity of youth, I used to welcome people and say, "Welcome to Gaffer's Cafe, Home of the World, Renaissance of Storytelling" . That's still going on all these years later, every single Friday in Toronto.

Now it's online with the pandemic. But for all those years until the pandemic, we met. Every Friday, there'd be a host. It is an open mic. People could tell whatever story was in their heart to tell. Always oral, so no written word allowed.

You know, a lot of these things, you need time. You just need to gather. You need to listen to a lot of stories. And sure enough, after x number of years you've built a community. And people who love stories. They're your story kin-folk. And anybody interested, just go to 1001fridays.org and you'll find out about the next time people are meeting.

RESH: Sounds like a vibrant community and a really vibrant atmosphere for storytelling. Now, speaking of atmosphere, and forgive the forced segue, this episode is airing on Halloween, which is sort of perfect for the story that Richardo is about to share with us because part and parcel of stories is the atmosphere surrounding that story. In my part of the Caribbean, which is Guyana, stories were most often a night-time affair, told by star-light or a gas-lamp on a Friday or Saturday night when everyone would gather. And if it was a ghost story or what we call a jumbie story, the kids would make sure that their feet would not touch the ground so they couldn't be grabbed by whatever creature, whatever creature would be visiting through the story or visiting through the storyteller, as we would say, and you probably know this, "Mouth open, story jump out"

RICHARDO: ...story jump out. Yeah!

RESH: So Richardo, could you set the atmosphere for us and tell us a story?

RICHARDO: Okay. The story I'm going to tell you is called *La Diabliesse and the Baby*.

And we used to sit on the full moon night, as you were saying, and we would tell these stories. And when we were younger, our parents would tell us these stories to keep us from going out late at night. They'll always want us to be back at home, at around six o'clock before the street lights are out, right? So they would say, you want to go out tonight?

And we say, "Dad yes, I wanna go hang out with some friends outside". I said, "Okay, before you go, let me tell you this story". And they come and tell you a ghost story.

And by the end of the story, they say, "All right, dad. All right. Alright, I think I'll stay in tonight."

So that kind of storytelling also, it's an education and it's a disciplining way. So the story I'm gonna tell you is called *La Diabliesse*, and it's from my culture, the French part of Grenada.

And *La Diabliesse* is a devil woman. She's tall, beautiful, impeccably made up. She's always wearing a wide-brim straw hat that covers part of her face. And she's always

dressed in a long gown, right down to the bottom of the ground, covering her toes. And the reason why she does that is because she has one human foot and one cow foot.

Yes! One human foot and one cow foot.

And she likes to take children. And she'd bring them up to the mountains and nobody would know where she hides these children.

So children out there listening, remember, be inside your house by six o'clock or else the La Diabliesse will take you!

Now, one night it was raining, thunder and lightning. The moon didn't come out that night. And way up in the country where my grandmother lived, a house is surrounded by a lot of mango trees and cocoa trees. And when you see the rain hit those leaves, oh, it'll hit the leaves, the noise.... pa, pa, pa, pa, chup, chup, chup, chup, chup!

And that, mixed with all the noise and the thunder, is enough to wake the dead.

The only sound you could have heard coming through all that noise was a sound of a baby crying and the voice of a woman singing. It was coming from inside my grandmother's house. Granny was sitting next to her frightened little baby and rocking the baby to sleep, and she was singing,

"Oh, no, no, don't cry no more. The thunder is good cause it comes from the Lord. Don't cry no more, sleep my little one. Don't cry no more. "

[KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK]

RICHARDO: There was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Grannie asked,

"It's just a little lady outside. Is it okay if I sit on your veranda and shelter the rain?", the voice came through the window as clear as a bell.

And Granny said, "It's very strange for woman to be out in this thunder and lightning way up by Granny's house."

So Granny said, "All right, you can sit on the veranda and shelter the rain." There was silence. You can hear the wind getting heavier outside.

"I'm getting more wet outside. Is it okay if I come inside and shelter the rain?"

Granny's good heart said, "All right, you can come inside and shelter the rain."

Very slowly the door started to open and the woman walked in. She said she was "the little lady". The woman was tall, like a young coconut tree. And she'd a face granny had never seen in the neighborhood before. So Granny took a chair and she put it next to the door and the woman sat down and Granny went back to the crying little baby, never taking her eyes off the stranger.

And Granny kept on singing, "Oh no, no, don't cry no more. The thunder is good cause it comes from the Lo.."

"Let me hold the baby for you a little while," the woman said.

Granny said, "Thank you but no thanks. It's quite alright!"

"Let me hold the baby for you. I'm very good with children."

Granny said, "I say thanks but no thanks. What happened, ya deaf?!"

And right away Granny got suspicious, cuz Granny suspected it was a La Diabliesse. And Granny picked up the baby and she held the baby in her arms.

And what the La Diabliesse like to do, they like to ask the same question three times.

And all of a sudden, the woman stood up. She seemed taller than before. And for the third time she said, "Let me hold the baby for you. I am very good with children"

And Granny said, "It's quite alright. The baby's okay in my arms."

And all of a sudden, the woman walked over to Granny, looked at the baby, and looked at Granny and smiled and turned her back and walked out the door.

And by the time Granny ran to the door to see where the woman was going, she disappeared like lightning.

And the next morning, because of all the rain and the red mud outside; where the woman walked on the veranda and where she walked inside of Granny's house, there were footprints on the flooring.

One human foot and one cow foot. One human foot and one cow foot.

It was a La Diabliesse that had come to visit Granny that night. And if Granny had only given her the baby to hold, she would've disappeared with that baby like lightning.

And I wouldn't be here telling you this story. .

RESH: Thank you Ricardo. So stories can be told and heard on a number of different levels, right? They can be taken literally. Very often, as you said, they contain a lesson. We see it in fables, morality, tales, the story of the *La Diabliesse*. And where there is no text without context, Richardo, what is some of the context to this story?

RICHARDO: This is from the French, right? Because Grenada was colonized by the French as well as English. So a lot of the French culture remained in Grenada. If you go to certain parts in Grenada, places will still have French names certain streets will still have French names. So It's part of that culture that La Diabliesse comes from. But what's also very powerful, it's the African culture. So we have the African culture mixed with the French culture. It's part of our heritage, you know?

RESH: And as you say, this story is often told to children. And stories are very much a part of growing up for kids over there who are familiar with the heritage and the context, but also for kids over here who perhaps are not. And you are sharing these stories everywhere. So could you go a bit more into how you connect to children through storytelling?

RICHARDO: When I moved to Canada, I had this program with these 6 or 8 or 10 kids. And I used to do this storytelling where I would say, "You tell me what you learned from your home." And they would go back home to their parents. And these are kids from all over the world living in Toronto.

And they would get stories from their parents, where they grew up. And you'll be amazed when they came back to tell me the stories. Some kids came back with camping stories. Some kids came back with war stories. Stories where they've seen their families killed. And this is things that these are 9, 10 year, 11 year old kids, you know, telling me these stories.

So for me, context is very important. Where you come from, your experience and you bring it in because for them it was a way of expressing themselves. And the teachers who saw that, they were so amazed at what came from these kids because these kids had never talked about their experience before.

And here there was a safe zone in this classroom. They could express themselves and tell what their experience was. So that's the power of storytelling.

TEAGAN: Um, I also wanted to talk about Richardo's thought about asking the kids to tell their stories. We had this tradition where it's like saying the same thing but in a different way. You take some teaching stories and you don't repeat it back the same, you repeat it back in the way that stood out to you. And so you're finding those teaching moments, but in a way that you want to retell it. Not everything, not all the details stand out, but the details that made sense to them did. And they're still telling a story, but, in their own way.

RESH: Right. So it's not just telling stories to children, but actually fostering the power of storytelling within children. And kids seem to be natural storytellers anyway.

And stories are not just for kids, but they're also for adults or for everyone, as all of you have said, in that stories can also be told and or understood through a political, historical context as well.

RICHARDO: Like the revolution, in Grenada. People are suffering still because they cannot talk about it. There are people who were executed during the revolution, the Maurice Bishop days and stuff like that. And a lot of people don't know the stories. They don't know because a lot of people have lost people. And right now we're trying to get people to tell their stories. And it's really, really hard. It's 40 years and people are still suffering. Because a lot of people don't know where their loved ones are gone. Some people lost their children. They were just gathered up and gone. We don't know where Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister who was executed in the Fort.

So people are living with these things .And we are right now say, Please, people who are old and have these stories and you're scared to tell it. Don't die without telling these stories. It's very important. It's very important for the country to move forward, for people to move forward. If you're scared of telling these stories, write it down and give it to somebody to hold or put it in a safety box somewhere. So when you die, we know the truth, you know? And that's what we are asking folks to do right now, because people were jailed for it. People got life sentences for it.

That's why storytelling is so important.

People write books, but you don't know if it's the truth. People who hurt, who lost people, they're not seeing it in the books.

They're not saying How did my dad die on the Fort? My dad was executed, but it's vague. The story's vague. So somebody must have given the orders. Somebody must have executed it. Somebody must have pulled the trigger. We just want to know where are the bodies? The bodies were taken, They've disappeared. They said the Americans took it, ba ba bam, bam, bam!

That's why oral tradition is so important. That's why we're saying, please tell your story. If you're scared to share it now, write it down, put it away so when you pass on, we can dig it up, literally, so to speak. And give people a peace of mind, you know? Mm-hmm. . So that's why context and stuff like that is so important.

RESH: Absolutely.

RICHARDO: You know? So important.

RESH: So stories as you point out very much about recuperation, very much about healing,

RICHARDO: Right.

RESH: But also about resistance as well. And Tegan, this is also very much part of your work as well in terms of dealing with resistance and decolonization.

And I wonder if you could speak, a bit more to the importance of storytelling when it comes to truth and reconciliation for Indigenous communities in Canada?

TEAGAN: Yeah, so to talk firstly about healing, I think storytelling is especially prominent in the whole Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We listen to survivors all the time tell their stories and it's a form of healing, but also survival. Right? We're learning from them. We're learning about acts of violence against Indigenous communities and Peoples, in hopes of getting transformation.

But through those processes of storytelling, the survivors are healing, families are healing. We're finally getting to know what has happened to our families for so long. And why are we hurt and why we are in pain and suffering sometimes. That's again, not always the case though. We are very much surviving and resisting and emerging.

When I get to tell these stories about Toronto and the Indigenous presence that happens here all the time. And where we get to practice our ceremony. And what happens here at this season. Like what has traditionally always happened, I get so much power from it because you get to imagine that we were always here. They tried to cover us up, They tried to take these stories away from us. But the fact that I'm still able to tell people about it. Talk about how we still engage with the land, engage with peoples. And continue to make our own stories, is so powerful.

RESH: You know, many of the stories in this episode are centered on or they're connected to issues of social justice. And issues that are also discussed in the news, activism, politics, film, television, etc. And Dan, what is unique about discussing these issues, whether they be social justice issues or what have you, through oral storytelling? What does oral storytelling bring to it?

DAN: When Stalin was trying to destabilize the Ukraine and deliberately caused a famine, he had the traditional storytellers brought together and had them killed because he knew that if you try to kill the storytellers of a culture, you will have a way to control them.

I used to go up North to the Yukon and spend time with a native storyteller named Angela Sidney. She was Tagish and also spoke Tlingit and a number of other languages, including English. And, near the end of her life, she said, "I have no money to give my grandchildren. My stories are my wealth."

And she was revered throughout the Yukon as a great Elder and storyteller and got the Order of Canada and so on. But that phrase has always stayed with me, that she felt herself to be an extremely rich person, but not measured in material terms. She knew so many, many stories.

The other thing that the, social justice question brings up for me is something that Chinua Achebe said in one of his novels, which is that storytellers are the enemies of all champions of control. . And I think that that's true, that stories have a way - they're not prescriptive. they don't necessarily have a simple moral, they don't come with an operating manual.

You really have to just absorb the story and - it's a little bit what Teagan just said - you know, find the teaching for yourself that, that story has. And they're like, time-release medicine, because what a story might mean when you're young is going to be different for when you're older.

And that's why I think stories have a way of crossing borders. They don't really respect political frontiers. They slip through all the barricades and they end up being subversive because of that. They're deep and they're personal. and they live by word of mouth. And every attempt to control them has failed. So I've always thought about that, storytellers are the enemies of all champions of control.

RESH: Hmm. And with that, Dan, I wonder if you could tell us a story now.

DAN: So let me give you an example. Again, this comes from Chinua Achebe and he has a novel called *Ant Hills of the Savannah*. And great Nigerian novelist of course.

In the novel, the villagers are trying to fight the dictator around water rights. They've come to the capital, they're trying to rally, but they know that the next day they'll be facing the guns of the dictator's army. And they are really, really scared.

So the old elder who's come with him from the village, he gets up and he gives a speech. And by the way, anybody listening, if you can get that novel *Ant Hills of the Savannah*, the speech he gives is so beautiful. It's one of the greatest speeches I've ever read in any literature.

But among other things, he tells them a story. And this is the story he tells.

He says: One day the tortoise was walking down the road. And along the road the tortoise met a leopard. And the leopard looked at the little tortoise and said, "I have been looking for you for a long time. I'm going to kill you. I'm going to eat you. I am going to destroy you."

And the little tortoise looked up at the mighty leopard and said, "Just give me one moment to prepare my mind for what you're going to do to me."

The leopard was surprised by the request, but said, "Yes, you have one moment."

And so the tortoise began to run all around the road in the dust and the sand, and threw the sand this way and that way. Made a big bunch of marks in the road like

that. Made a big mess of sand and so on, and came back and finally said, "Now I'm ready."

And the leopard was so surprised and said, "What? Is that how you prepare for what I'm going to do to you?"

And the tortoise said "Yes, because whoever walks down the road now will see these marks in the sand and they will say, ' This was a struggle between two equals.' And they will remember that even a little tortoise could fight the mighty leopard as an equal. "

When the old man gave the speech he said to the villagers, "We don't know what's going to happen to us tomorrow, but at least our grandchildren will say they left their mark in the road."

And I often think of that story because of course, look at all the leopards we face nowadays.

The leopard of racism and of colonization and pollution and so on. You pick your leopard! And you sometimes can think, what can we possibly do to resist the deprivations of these mighty forces in the world? Climate change, What can we do?

And then that little story keeps whispering its wisdom in my mind, which is to say, resistance is never futile. And that what you do today will be remembered by those who come after us. .

There's a phrase, "a companion story" that Arthur Frank writes about storytelling and healthcare. And he uses that term. And I like it a lot. What are the companion stories that you carry with you. That might just be whispering their wisdom, but you can't ignore it. They're there with you, at your side.

RESH: You know, it's a very different time, right? I mean, we're, we're living in an incredibly media saturated environment. Media touches every corner of our lives, has altered our attention, spans, how we communicate, even rearranged the furniture, so to speak. I say to my students, over the course of a single generation, the baby boomers, we've moved all the living room chairs from facing each other when we used to tell each other stories, to facing the television set. And now each chair is fast becoming an island onto itself occupied by an individual and their personal device, their iPad, their iPhone.

Richardo, what is the place of oral storytelling in this mediatized 21st century world? Is it more challenging? Are there more opportunities? What are you finding?

RICHARDO: I think it is more challenging for the younger generation. Dan said some really funny, incredible things like the "time-release stories". I love that, it's so true. Cause the story you would hear at 10 years old, you might just take it in. But at 40 years old. When the older woman said, I don't have much, but I have the wealth of

my stories. Today you hear folks say, I want to give you what I didn't have as a child. And what do they give? They give 10 sneakers. The fancy shirts, the 10 computers, this and that. What did they have as a child? They didn't have those things, but what they had was the connection. What they had were the values, the morals. We didn't have all this distractions.

So when I tell young folks, " Stop saying you're giving your kids things that you didn't have, and you give them 10 sneakers." I said, no, give them the values where you can sit around the table and talk to each other. Put down that computer. You have to make the effort to pull folks together.

And in today's society, I don't know how it's gonna be done. Like this podcast is so fantastic because it's oral. It's listening. It's people sitting and listening to the podcast. It's not just scenes happening in front of you.

The magic of storytelling can change a whole room because I have done it. I've gone into the inner cities where I'm dealing with these kids. Who are deep down, they are just youth, they're just children, they're longing for connection. And they have these characters, they're cool, or "I don't wanna hear no storytelling!" and a moment you sit them down and you start telling a story; by the end of this story you have them in the palm of your hand. And you realize how important human contact is. That is the power of the oral tradition, the power of the listening and the imagination.

I go into schools now and it's tough because everybody's on a computer. Computers is great. I'm not putting it down, we're connecting right now. But what's happening is storytelling now is becoming a specialty act. It's not the norm. And I'm glad that Dan is still doing the Friday nights.

I live in Canada, but in the Caribbean, storytelling is still very big because. If you go down to the market and an accident happens; in Canada, we would say you know I went down to the market and there was a car that ran into another car, and that's the end of it.

But in the Caribbean, in Grenada, the oral tradition is very powerful. And they would say, I went down to the market and there was this woman in a red dress and wearing a big hat. And you know, Mr. Johnson, who was driving the car, the one nobody likes? He was coming down the road at this speed. And all of a sudden he, he just ran into the woman and everybody scatter! And every...

That is the magic. And that's a story. And they'll make into like 20 minutes and you taking it in. And you say, "Really?" And the answering back saying, " and I don't like that man. He used to drive so fast. I keep telling him, Stop driving that fast!"

What we are doing today is that we take it on the phone. Looking at the phone, not at the actual thing that's happening, and then go home and look at the experience on the phone. We are not living the moment anymore. The moment is being recorded and then we take it home, and then we live the moment. But then we are so dead and numb, it just becomes something that we just look at. We don't experience.

RESH: It's interesting, right? I mean, again, you go to concerts and you see more people now just sort of secondhand experiencing, right? Rather than in that primary moment

RICHARDO: That's right.

RESH: ...through their phones.

And Tegan, you are very much a storyteller of this generation as well. And so the same question to you. What is it to be a storyteller in the 21st century? And also, how did the pandemic impact your work as a storyteller?

TEAGAN: I think that a lot of opportunities were created over the pandemic for storytelling. We are coming together in more accessible ways.

Traveling the land together is not always feasible for everyone. So when we meet online, I was engaging with so many more people who I wouldn't be able to in person.

But what are stories and what are now lost when we're not sitting with, say, plants, the plant nations? When we take the story out of the place, what are we now missing from that story?

I definitely think the pandemic created a need for more stories. We were open to hearing more from minority groups and minority stories. And from that I'm really grateful because a lot of more people are coming to hear Indigenous stories and coming on to First Story Tours and even the My Story Nation's work.

But again, like Richardo was saying, there's a lot more that happens when we come together and when we meet, than what we can say online and through a screen. We're missing a bit, but we're, I think we're on the right track.

RESH: And Dan, as you say, you've been at this for a while now. So when you're looking at your future as a storyteller, how is it being impacted by this time of technology? And we're also in the age of pandemics, so by the pandemic as well.

DAN: I always thought storytellers are ambassadors from the past, but also ambassadors from the possible future. Look, people have never lost the hunger for oral stories. Babies are born with this. You know how a sunflower turns to the light? We're story-tropic. We're human beings. We turn to story. So there's some deep, deep hunger for stories that's never gonna go away. Doesn't matter how many cell phones are hanging outta your back pocket. or in your, whatever. There's no replacement for the experience of an oral story told lovingly to a listener, in an unhurried way. Nothing has ever been invented to replace that.

I used to tell kids, you can't double click on wisdom until my son said, "No, people don't double click on anything anymore. And I thought, uh oh, I've already dated myself.

But there's never been a replacement for listening to a story as some form of opening the imagination and gaining wisdom. As a matter of fact, there's a phrase that a friend of mine in Germany used, "storytelling decolonizes the imagination".

You can't own a story. It lives inside you. It takes root in your heart, your memory, and so on. But you don't own it, you're gonna pass it on. You have a responsibility to give it to the next person, pass the seed along. They're very resistant to the forces of standardization and control that are so much part of our society.

We storytellers just cultivate the garden of stories and at least I believe that that hunger that children and adults as well have for stories will never go away.

Maybe the big threat is time, because there's so much time spent on screens. Maybe the idea of unhurried time, just listening, is rare nowadays. But it's gonna come back. I don't have any great despair about that.

About the pandemic, I decided, people need to laugh a little bit, so I recorded all these folk tales with a donkey hand-puppet. And they're on YouTube under the title, The Storyteller's Ass. They're really just for fun to get people to laugh. So if anyone listening to the podcast, wants to have a giggle, you can see me and my ass on YouTube.

RESH: That is quite the draw.

DAN: And I just have to tell you, my little ass, Eysele is her name, she's a terrible listener. She has the shortest attention span in the world. So whenever I start a folktale, she interrupts almost immediately because she wants to be in the story. So every story on the YouTube series has a donkey in it, because Eysele insists.

RESH: Okay. Well, so long as she insists,

I'm gonna ask for an all in on this question. What are some of the key elements of a good story?

RICHARDO: For me it's the plot-line, so to speak. The characters. Setting. The connection with the listener.

I deal with rhythm and sound. Everybody's different. Everybody's different. I like to speed up, slow down, take the listener on a journey with me. Painting images are very important in a story. So those are the things I try and set in the mind.

What I like too are surprises in a story, like sounds. One my catch-phrases I always use in my stories, like "all of a sudden!". All of a sudden, you know? That all of a sudden anything can happen. So I always jot that in, "All of a sudden, somebody came in the door!" "All of a sudden, the door opened!"

So I think these are the little catch things that storytellers will find that works for them. And I think every storyteller is unique and different.

RESH: Mm-hmm. And adding to this recipe, Teagan, what do you see as some key elements of a good story?

TEAGAN: I don't entirely have a prescription for what a good story is.

I think maybe some of my favorite stories are the ones that are like, "what?" You know, leaves you a little confused and you're thinking about it for a while and you're trying to make sense of it. Those stories don't necessarily have the same type of elements that another story would. But I think the diversity of what stories could be are why I love storytelling so much.

RESH: Okay. And somewhat can defy expectations. So stories are always changing; not only in their content, but in their form as well. And Dan, what are some elements of a good story?

DAN: When the mother of my sons was trying to get our eldest to sleep. He was three years old and he sure didn't like going to sleep. She has a beautiful deep voice and she tried to bore him to sleep by telling him a story. She said, "All the animals in the barnyard were getting so sleepy. The piggies were getting sleepy. The ducks were getting sleep. Chickens were getting sleepy," Just on and on, a long list of animals. So he finally piped up from his pillow, and he said "suddenly they heard footsteps!" And to me, that's kind of the essence of storytelling. That if it was just the animals going to sleep, there's no transformation coming. But that one moment, something's coming to the barnyard, you don't know what. But at that point, the story is about transformation. It's what's gonna happen next.

I don't really have an answer in terms of the techniques of storytelling, but I would say as a listener, if I wanna know what happens next, then the storyteller's doing a good job.

And if I remember the story the next day, that storyteller has done a good job. The story has stayed with me.

And those two things of memory and just being caught in the suspense of the story - and that's true for a personal experience that someone's telling me, or a folk tale or an ancient myth that takes an hour to tell - as long as I wanna know what happens next, it's being told pretty well. And if I remember it, and I'm still in the world of the story the next day, then that story has successfully leapt between the voice of the teller and my imagination.

RESH: A final question, and again for all of you, and starting with you Richardo, what stories do you still want to tell?

RICHARDO: I still want to tell my folk tales. I wanna tell stories that would make you think, to look at yourself or look at what's around you. For instance, my story *Freedom Child of the Sea*, or *Grandpa's Visit* deals a lot with the electronics around you.

Freedom Child deals a lot with the Black Lives Matter, the Slave-Trade and stuff like that and the future, the positiveness.

Most of my stories tend to want people just to connect, you know? Those are the stories I want to continue telling.

RESH: Dan, same question to you. What stories do you still want to tell?

DAN: One of my obsessions is around how stories teach us to listen. And what I mean by that isn't literally only listening to the teller. It's also that in the stories themselves, there are moments of listening that seem so interesting and important for the times we're living in.

For example, in all the fairy tales, there's a moment when the person on the quest meets a mouse, or maybe it's an old woman, a beggar perhaps, or an old man, and they say, "Do you have any bread?"

And the first two princes who run by, or the first two princesses or whoever they are, will just push right through and say, "No, no, I don't have any bread for you. I can't, I don't have time to listen." But the true hero in the old time stories is the one who listens and says, "Of course I have bread to share." And they stop their journey and they listen to what the mouse has to say, which is always the important key to how the quest will continue.

And that idea of listening to the voice that's beyond the bandwidth, that most people would ignore or walk by, seems to me the most important thing in the times we're living in. The ability to listen in a new way to the voices that are so easy to ignore or forget.

RESH: And Tegan, when you are looking at the world, what are the stories that you feel need to be told?

TEAGAN: I think a lot of my stories right now revolve in the past and bringing them forward in a way that's showing that things are ongoing.

But I really wanna start talking about the future and reimagining what a better world looks like. For me, being an Indigenous young person, I think that's really important nowadays. Processes of decolonization happen through more stories like this.

Also I cannot wait for the future when I can tell my sister's kids about our family. Those stories I really want to tell as well.

RESH: And with that, I want to thank all of you, Teagan, Richardo, and Dan. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure.

DAN: Thanks for having us.

TEAGAN: Thank you

RICHARDO: Thank you. This has been wonderful. Really enjoyed this.

RESH: That was First Story storyteller, Teagan de Laronde;, actor, author, and storyteller. Richardo Keens-Douglas; and community animator, author and co-founder of Storytelling Toronto, Dan Yashinsky.

Please join us for Part 2 of Mouth Open, Story Jump Out: The Power and Purpose of Storytelling in These Times. We'll be joined by storytellers Rhoma, Spencer, Lynn Torrie, and Rico Rodriguez as we explore how old stories can deal with new realities, the storied origins of Carnival and therefore Caribana, and the power of storytelling for Queer communities.

I'm Resh Budhu, the host of The Courage My Friends podcast. Thanks for listening.

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