

ARE YOU A LISTENER?

My mother was a consummate storyteller. While I was growing up we did not have TV and only a radio in the car on our long drives on Sunday afternoons. My mother always had a story to tell to entertain us.

Growing up in a family of British immigrants, Mom told us all the old fairy and folk tales. She recited poems and ballads she had memorized. She had stories of her English family, told to her by her grandmother, also a great storyteller, about life in England during a time before innovation and technology. And we heard about Mom's own life growing up during the depression in New Jersey.

Mom encouraged me to go to storytelling events but I was always too busy with my children and work. Then, one weekend in 2012, I agreed to go to a festival in Trinidad. I was so entranced by the stories and storytellers (one of whom is the master, Willy Clafin) that I searched for a local storytelling group. Fortunately I found Do Tell Story Swap. I have been a regular Swapper now for 11 years.

I told the host and co-founder of the Swap, Kenneth Foster, that I didn't tell stories, I just wanted to listen. He laughed and said: "Don't worry. We need listeners!" That changed everything. I felt good about being a listener.

Since then I have told some stories. The first one just popped out of my mouth one Swap during a Leap Year. My daughter was born on Leap Year Day. In second grade she had circumvented the rule at school against bringing cupcakes to celebrate her birthday. Her audacious campaign to make her the exception to the rule was funny and came naturally as a story that Swap. It gave me courage to explore telling other stories. Some have been folk tales, some memorized poems and ballads and some family stories.

But I am still primarily a listener. I love our Do Tell Swap tellers and have followed them for years now. It is a pleasure that enriches my life. So if you are a listener, join us! You will be entertained, enriched and who knows? A story may just pop out of your mouth too!

Meg Brown