

Qualifications of Sean Buvala
for the Distinguished National Service Award

Sean Buvala has made invaluable contributions to the storytelling community and to the general public not only on a local, but on a national and even international scale. (Please note that one of the letters of support for this nomination is from a storyteller in England). Through his performances and work as a teller, moreover, Sean has significantly advanced storytelling as a traditional art form.

To appreciate his contributions to the storytelling community and to the public, let us first turn to storyteller.net, the remarkable, not-for-profit project that Sean initiated and has directed for ten years. Thought to be the first on-line organization to offer tellers a place on the Internet at little or no cost, it has enabled hundreds of tellers who could not afford directory listings to procure storytelling engagements. Moreover, it was one of the first organizations to make audio recordings of stories available on the Internet. Many tellers, therefore, could be heard for the first time by potential sponsors, and even when the recordings were simple and home-made, the opportunity was there for the public to hear the tellers and for the art of storytelling to be further appreciated. Storyteller.net has been described as the “equalizer between the really good tellers who *were* big names and the really good tellers who *could be* big names.” Still today, storyteller.net is the most affordable option in any type of directory for storytellers.

Another aspect of storyteller.net that deserves recognition are the publications that it makes available to tellers and the general public. One can find hundreds of articles on the art of storytelling as well as the texts of dozens of stories. As the teacher of courses on the art of storytelling, I can testify to how useful students find the material offered on storyteller.net/articles/.

An additional feature of the site is storyteller.net/amphitheater/, which has used and still uses an interview process that makes available to any interested listener the views and suggestions of well known tellers such as Margaret Read MacDonald, Laura Simms, Judith Black, and Ruth Stotter speaking right in their own offices and homes. Lesser known tellers aspiring to become professional tellers have been profiled as well. This web site has covered many of the major NSN national conventions through audio, video and pictures when these events were not even covered by NSN itself. A loyal supporter of national festivals, Sean Buvala has interviewed everyone from the big-name tellers to the children in the audience, thus documenting and advancing the growing interest in storytelling in the United States.

We should also note the features of the storytelling calendar (storyteller.net/events/) and of storytellingproducts.com. The former is the most used storytelling calendar on the Internet, listing storytelling events from all over the world; anyone can add his or her event at any time. The latter enables tellers to offer their DVD's, CD's and videos on-line to a world-wide audience; this service benefits both tellers, some of whom make regular sales that they might not otherwise be able to make, and listeners, who have access to products that they would not otherwise have.

Some of the observations about storyteller.net that have been shared with me include such comments as the following:

- “Sean has promoted storytelling in a way that raises the bar in how others see us.”
- “Storyteller.net is the best resource I have found. In fact, NSN's own site could benefit from Sean's help and guidance.”
- “Storyteller.net has been extremely valuable to me for promoting my storytelling. It has also been a highly effective vehicle for getting my articles on storytelling to persons who are interested in that field [...] I've received many e-mails from fellow storytellers who seem to really appreciate those articles, accessed via storytelling.net.”

A recent and very promising project that Sean has initiated is Storytelling.net@Borders. Once a month on a Saturday evening, Sean not only tells stories himself in the coffee shop area of a local Borders bookstore but also invites numerous tellers in the Phoenix area to come and share their passion for storytelling. In this way the local community is introduced to

tellers in their area, and the tellers themselves are offered an opportunity to develop their skills.

Sean also serves as president of the West Valley Tellers of Tales in the Phoenix, Arizona, area. He has proven to be dedicated to furthering the development of storytelling by nurturing the members and visitors of this guild in their storytelling efforts.

Having considered several of the activities through which Sean supports the storytelling community and the public, let us now reflect on the impact of his artistry and talent as a teller.

Sean has been telling stories nationally for over twenty years. He has delighted audiences at innumerable storytelling concerts and festivals, and he has performed in schools, libraries, and churches, just to mention a few of the more common venues. Incidentally, he is especially appreciated for his unique programs for teenage boys. As a teller, Sean is eagerly sought after as a storytelling coach and a presenter of workshops. He has also used storytelling techniques in business and government settings to increase motivation, promote training, and encourage team-building.

Many of his listeners have shared their response to his artistry and effectiveness as a storyteller. Some of their comments are given below.

- “Thank you, Sean, for inspiring us to look our children in the eyes and appreciate the sacred gift of parenting. Thank you for sharing your talent with us in such a way that we could implement it in our daily lives.”
- “I have thought about your story many times in the last week. Your fluency with it and with the telling of it were both a joy to behold.”
- “[Sean] has a way of making a story come alive so that the audience feels they are participating in the story itself.”
- “The presentations I have seen have been catalysts for exploring the messages of peace, justice, truth, forgiveness, reconciliation and unconditional love that sneaks up on people and continues to work on folks long after they have gone back to the routine of their daily lives. I am pleased to offer the highest recommendation possible...”

I, too, would like to offer some thoughts concerning Sean’s creativity as a storyteller. One of his characteristic techniques never fails to astonish me. After having immediately established an intimate bond with his listeners and drawn them into his story, Sean then steps out of the story and into the “real world” to share an observation, usually humorous, about the events of his tale; then, still maintaining that intimate tie with his audience, he moves back into the magic of the story, effortlessly taking his captivated listeners with him.

Sean is, indeed, a rare talent; his performances are of the highest caliber, and they consistently testify to his dedication to the preservation of storytelling as a traditional art form. Moreover, his contributions to the storytelling community and the public at large and the incalculable ways in which he expands public awareness of storytelling demonstrate, in the words of storyteller Kevin Cordi, that he “is not only knowledgeable about the art of storytelling, his vision advances the art.”

Sean Buvala is most deserving of the Distinguished National Service Award.

Joyce Story, Ph.D.