

National Storytelling Network

VOLUME 8 • ISSUE 6 • JUNE 2026

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

NSN CHARTERS AN AMBASSADOR FOR EMERGING TELLERS



Rishi Nixon

President & Chair of the Board of Directors
National Storytelling Network

One of the major priorities of my term has been to set up the infrastructure our organization needs to sustain and expand our membership to our pre-COVID levels. These steps have included:

1. Relaunching our member grants program and articulating an annual funding pathway to keep its endowment over five figures.
2. Reconstituting our membership committee with wonderful new appointments, including our next president Caleb Hubbard.
3. Caleb's initiative to include new conference items on the Texas 2026 conference program on NSN membership benefits, Special Interest Group (SIG) membership, and a member discussion on NSN's future priorities.

This month, our board voted to take another step toward this long-term membership goal: creating the **National Storytelling Network Ambassador for Emerging Tellers** volunteer position.

As the service organization for our art, much of NSN's frequent incoming communications are inquiries from individuals seeking to learn how to engage with storytelling as a new artist. We see this as an opportunity for *an experienced storyteller in our community to contribute their mentorship* by 1) corresponding with these emerging tellers, 2) directing them to storytelling resources and programs (within or outside of NSN) that would be useful to their journey and 3) stewarding a resource sheet of this information to become publicly accessible on the NSN webpage.

You can both help our organization engage a new crop of enthusiastic members and play a key role in the development of tellers across the country! Please contact me at rishi@storynet.org if you are interested in being considered to serve as NSN's Ambassador for Emerging Tellers. The responsibilities of this volunteer position are virtual, primarily by email, and will rarely exceed 2 hours per month.

IN THIS ISSUE:

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Featured Events

National Storytelling
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The Story Beast

DID YOU KNOW?

NSN Board of Directors meetings are open to all members!

Read minutes and learn how to attend [here](#).



The **NATIONAL
STORYTELLING NETWORK**

invites you to the

2026 NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

Prairie Voices

**HONORING HERITAGE
INSPIRING TOMORROW**

**July 23 – 26 • Canyon, Texas
West Texas A&M University**



**JOIN US *for* NSN's 50th
ANNIVERSARY!**

*Scan QR or visit storynet.org
to learn more and register.*

Image credit: Clinton Steeds; Palo Duro Canyon, vectorized.

***15 minutes away from conference, Palo Duro Canyon is
the largest in the U.S. after the Grand Canyon! Reserve a
spot to visit Palo Duro on the NSN ECO Tellers' guided
field trip, with your conference registration.***

NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

ENJOY THE BEST OF STORYTELLING WITH OUR FEATURED PRESENTERS



Caleb Hubbard & Trudy Hanson
Conference Co-Chairs
National Storytelling Network

The **FRINGE SESSIONS** happen each evening of the conference following the featured concert. Each evening, you have the choice of attending one of three fringe sessions. Not to be missed! Thanks to Barbara Schutzgruber and Loren Niemi for organizing the fringe sessions.



Ric Vice

Windwagon Smith and Sam Peppard and the Tall Tale and Legend Behind It (Thursday): "Windwagon Smith", the tall tale has its roots in the true story of blacksmith, Sam Peppard, who sailed an actual "windwagon" from Oskaloosa, Kansas to within miles of Ft. Collins, Colorado.



Tim Ereneta & Sufian Zhemukhov

Tales of the Narts (Thursday): The Nart sagas are to the Caucasus what Greek mythology is to Western civilization. Come hear ancient tales collected and passed down at the crossroads between Europe and Asia.



Walt Belcher

Sallywag of the Scrubs: Tales of the Orneriest Cow Wrangler in Florida History (Thursday): Sallywag of the Scrubs: Tales of The Orneriest Cow Wrangler in Florida History Bone Mizell could outride, outshoot, out wrangle, out talk, out drink and out prank any cowboy of his era (1863 to 1921), and I've got stories to back it up



Paul Strickland

Eavesdropping on the Dead (Friday): Dark, sometimes funny, always gripping tales from long ago. Strange old stories, reupholstered for contemporary audiences, carried into unlikely rooms and told like they still matter—because they absolutely do.



Ty France

Becoming Ty—Part One (Friday): Storytelling performance featuring poignant, humorous and heartfelt stories from my life. A journey, vivid in sense of time and place, of family connections and the environment that influenced me.



Larry Castleberry

38 Years of Aikido (Friday): Follow the life of an Aikido student, from enthusiastic youthful beginner, to a nearing 60-year-old still training (but oh he moves so much slower now!!)



Les Schaffer

Ought Not Remember, Mustn't Forget: Hasidic Stories from the Baal Shem Tov to Chelm, the Shoah and Beyond (Saturday): Hasidic stories, from the Baal Shem Tov, Chelm fools, shtetl Tzadiks, the darkness and flame of the Holocaust to today. Stories of survival, terror, bravery, unimaginable loss, intense joy.



Linda Batlin

The Story of Doc Susie, Colorado's Mountain Doctor (Saturday): Hear about Colorado's first woman doctor in Fraser, Colorado. Learn about her challenges and triumphs in treating lumberjacks, ranchers and railroaders of the area over many years and about a way of life that is gone.



Denise McCormack

The Kenning Place: A Well of Wisdom from the Collective Memory (Saturday): Old stories have a way of rising up when we need them most. Shared in a relaxed and engaging style, Denise McCormack shakes out a few dust-covered tales from our collective memory—tales meant to linger with us as new companions, each offering well-meaning pages from life's little instruction booklet that we might keep and revisit again and again.

Over the four-day 2026 NSN Storytelling Conference, those attending have the opportunity to attend 3 storytelling concerts (Regional Tellers, National Tellers, and Oracle Award Winners); wake up and participate in 4 early morning sessions; choose from 36 workshops, performance presentations, or coaching sessions; learn more about the Special Interest Groups through SIG meetings; choose from 9 fringe sessions (each night); participate in story swaps (on Saturday); focus on the future through the general membership meeting and the Future Directions panel; experience the beauty of the Palo Duro Canyon through ECO's field trip (on Saturday), and enjoy the annual Story Slam (on Friday).

Here's a teaser of some of the **PANELS and PERFORMANCES** that you can look forward to attending:

Living History: Unifying Stories From World War II with Alton Chung and Adam Mellema



Alton Chung and Adam Mellema are both passionate about preserving and sharing the stories of World War II. In this powerful and unique session, attendees will not only hear a curated collection of true stories, lovingly preserved and re-told, but will also experience different storytelling techniques and styles, intended to encourage listeners to consider expanding their own repertoire and preserving historical stories.

Alton and Adam will alternate, telling complementary stories from WWII. Chung's and Mellema's stories will reveal the humanity of those on both sides of the conflict. Adam will begin with an account of Herb Elfring, a 19-year-old National Guardsman stationed at Camp Malakole when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Alton will then share an account of a Japanese-American who was born in Hawaii, trapped on Okinawa at the beginning of the war, trained in Japan to become a kamikaze pilot and then kamikaze submarine pilot. The war ends before he is sent out on his one-way mission. The soldier then makes his way from Japan to Okinawa, and then back to Hawaii. For 50 years he keeps the secret of his participation in the war, telling only his wife. It is only after an American general tells him that “all young men who serve their country are worthy of respect” that he finally decides to share his story.

Next, Mellema shares the account of James Tinker in his own words. Arriving in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, Tinker led a company of men from city to city en route to Berlin. They raced to release the prisoners at Gallenhausen but arrived too late. As Tinker grapples with these painful recollections, Mellema applies an old-age make-up, aging as the story is told.

Alton closes with the story of the bugler aboard the USS West Virginia during the attack at Pearl Harbor, and how his hatred for the enemy almost destroys him and how he reconciles with a Japanese pilot who took part in the raid 50 years later. The program will conclude with a Q&A and audience discussion and reflection.

At a time when our nation and our world is experiencing so much uncertainty and division, our aim is to inspire hopefulness, compassion, and reconciliation with stories from those who have gone before us. Both Chung and Mellema are honored to bring this powerful collection of stories to the NSN Conference attendees.



Engaging the Listener Through Imagery with Dorothy Cleveland and Barbara Schutzgruber

This workshop is an updated revision of a workshop presented at the 2019 Northland's Conference.

Throughout the Imaging Workshop, participants are encouraged to experiment with different descriptive techniques and share their observations. By focusing on vivid imagery and the nuances of sensory details, tellers can connect more deeply with their audience, making narratives more compelling and memorable.

The Imaging Workshop is a series of lectures followed by writing exercises, each building on the previous lecture/exercise. Topics covered include:

1. The five sensory traits of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile
2. Emotional responses – internal and external
3. Kinesthetic responses

In small groups, the attendees discuss their written responses in relation to the Who, Where and When of their stories for the purpose of generating positive responses from future audiences.

The whole group discussion allows for sharing of what worked for the participants, what they discovered about changing the way they think of imagery, and what they plan to keep for their stories. General Q&A and closure.

In creating our own stories and working with folktales, we frequently find there is a lack of imagery in these stories. We also find the more descriptive the story, the more the story remains in the mind of the listener. Therefore, it is important and necessary for storytellers to acquire this technique of creating imagery for their stories.



Teaching Storytelling to Adults and Teens with Emily Stamets

This hands-on workshop invites educators, teaching artists, and community leaders to explore how to design and facilitate storytelling experiences that engage both adults and teens. Participants will learn practical strategies for helping students find, craft, and share their stories in supportive, imaginative environments.

We'll begin by examining why storytelling matters—how oral narrative strengthens communication skills, emotional literacy, and cultural connection. Participants will experience a series of warm-ups and low-stakes activities designed to ease students into sharing: sensory prompts, character “lenses,” and quick collaborative exercises that can be used in classrooms, youth programs, or community settings. Each exercise is rooted in developmental psychology and trauma-informed practice, balancing creative risk-taking with emotional safety.

From there, we'll move into the how: how to scaffold story development for different ages and levels of experience, how to guide feedback that is constructive rather than evaluative, and how to support students who may feel vulnerable telling personal stories. We'll explore multiple entry points—personal narrative, folktales, historical retellings, and devised story-theatre—so participants leave equipped to adapt storytelling for a wide range of goals, from arts integration to leadership training to community-building.

Participants will also learn to analyze and teach performance craft: gesture, pacing, imagery, and vocal variety. Through guided practice, we'll experiment with short stories and coaching techniques that help storytellers bring their narratives to life. Special attention will be given to how storytelling differs from acting—how to help students find authenticity, rather than performance polish, and how to cultivate presence, rhythm, and connection with an audience.

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Understand key developmental and emotional differences between teaching storytelling to teens versus adults.
- Experience and collect a toolkit of adaptable warm-ups, prompts, and exercises.
- Learn frameworks for feedback and reflection that deepen growth and confidence.
- Leave with a draft mini-lesson plan for a storytelling session they can implement immediately.

This workshop is designed for teachers, librarians, directors, and teaching artists who want to integrate storytelling into their work—or deepen their practice as facilitators of creative expression. All levels of experience are welcome. Participants will leave with renewed confidence in leading story-based activities and a clear sense of how to inspire students to discover their own authentic voices.



Color It Local: Celebrating the Regional in Storytelling with Donna Ingham

This workshop focus, "Color It Local: Celebrating the Regional in Storytelling," explores and exploits not only the folklore of a region but also its elements of speech, dress, mannerisms, habits of thought, and even topography. For perhaps more than any other artists, storytellers are able to capture and pass on "local color." Participants can learn how any teller or writer can choose to portray, through stories, the people and life of any geographic setting — realizing always their universality in the end. The prevalence of regional settings and references can be cited in the works of such nationally known tellers as Garrison Keillor, Donald Davis, Willy Claflin (from his New England roots), and, of course the late Kathryn Tucker Windham. Beyond personal narratives, adaptations of literature, myths, and folktales can be retold using regional speech patterns and vocabulary. Andy Griffith's version of "Hamlet" comes to mind or Barbara McBride Smith's retelling of classical mythology.

Designed as a showcase/workshop, much of the session early on will be devoted to lecture/discussion about and demonstration (including Texas and Southwest stories told or referenced as examples) of the aspects of regional "local color" storytelling. Then participants will be invited to explore their own sources and applications of regional material in participatory activities. Throughout, questions about the goals and the effectiveness of incorporating "local color" in personal narratives and traditional tales must be addressed. Is it all about humor or setting or authenticity or characterization? There is much to ponder, which should lead to lively and productive discussions!

And this is simply a sample of the engaging sessions that are part of Prairie Voices!

And this is simply a sample of the engaging sessions that are part of Prairie Voices!

One final note:

If you plan to bring items to sell at the **CONFERENCE BOOKSTORE**, sign up for bookstore volunteering [here](#). NSN takes 20% of the sale price of your materials, and asks that you volunteer two hours in the bookstore. Any attendee is welcome to bring items to sell!

NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

UNABLE TO MAKE IT TO TEXAS IN PERSON? PARTICIPATE WITH A VIRTUAL TICKET (\$99)

[CLICK HERE TO GET YOUR VIRTUAL TICKET](#)

 NSN 2026 CONFERENCE VIRTUAL TICKET OFFERINGS	
THURSDAY JULY 23rd	
4:00pm-5:15 pm Central Daylight Time	President's Welcome & Conversation with the Board <i>by Rishi Nixon</i>
6:30pm-8:30pm Central Daylight Time	REGIONAL TELLER SHOWCASE <i>Eldrena Douma, Paula Schlegel, Fran Stallings, Decee Cornish, Juba Mae, Chester Weems</i> MC: Darlene Richard
FRIDAY JULY 24th	
10:45am-11:15am Central Daylight Time	Texas: The Musical Dancers
12:45pm-2:00pm Central Daylight Time	Mr. Patches, from the Appalachian 20th Century Series: 1990s <i>with Adam Booth</i>
2:30pm-3:45pm Central Daylight Time	Voices of Asia: Folktales, Memories & More <i>with Karin Amano, Anne Shimojima, Alton Takiyama-Chung, Linda Yemoto</i>
4:15pm-5:15pm Central Daylight Time	Story Slam MC: Loren Niemi
6:30pm-8:15pm Central Daylight Time	NATIONAL TELLER SHOWCASE <i>Sheila Arnold, Pippa White, Adam Mellema, Laura Simms, Willy Claflin</i> MC: Michael Brundy
SATURDAY July 25th	
9:00am-10:15am Central Daylight Time	Living History: Unifying Stories From World War II <i>with Alton Chung & Adam Mellama</i>
12:30pm-1:30pm Central Daylight Time	Virtual Community Gathering on Zoom <i>hosted by Healing Story Alliance</i>
1:45pm - 3:30pm Central Daylight Time	NSN ANNUAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING <i>This session is free to all Virtual Ticket Holders and all NSN members.</i>
4:00pm -5:15pm Central Daylight Time	FIND and TELL the STORY of YOU: PRO SIG Panel <i>with Alton Chung, Lyn Ford, Miriam Nadel</i> <i>Moderated by Jessica Piscitelli Robinson</i>
7:00pm-8:45pm Central Daylight Time	ORACLE AWARDS & CONCERT <i>Concert by Oracle Winners:</i>
SUNDAY JULY 26th	
9:00am -10:15am Central Daylight Time	The Future of NSN: Panel of SIG Directors <i>hosted by Caleb Hubbard</i>
10:45-11:30am Central Daylight Time	Virtual Community Gathering on Zoom <i>Hosted by Healing Story Alliance</i>

Youth, Educators, & Storytellers presents



STORY LAB: ONCE UPON A LESSON

Discover how **classic fairytales** can be reimagined to **teach STEM, robotics, and cybersecurity**, in a way students never forget.



JUNE 11
5 PT 6 CT 7 MT 8 ET

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CEO, My Cyber Academia

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REGISTER TODAY

VISIT storynet.org/events to REGISTER

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Tejas STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

LEARN | PRACTICE | PERFORM

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION WON'T LAST FOREVER!

EARLY BIRD PRICING ENDS **JUNE 6TH!**

INSPIRING SPEAKERS | DYNAMIC WORKSHOPS | NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES | CPE CREDITS | PERFORMANCES & MORE!

JUNE 12-13, 2026 | VIA ZOOM

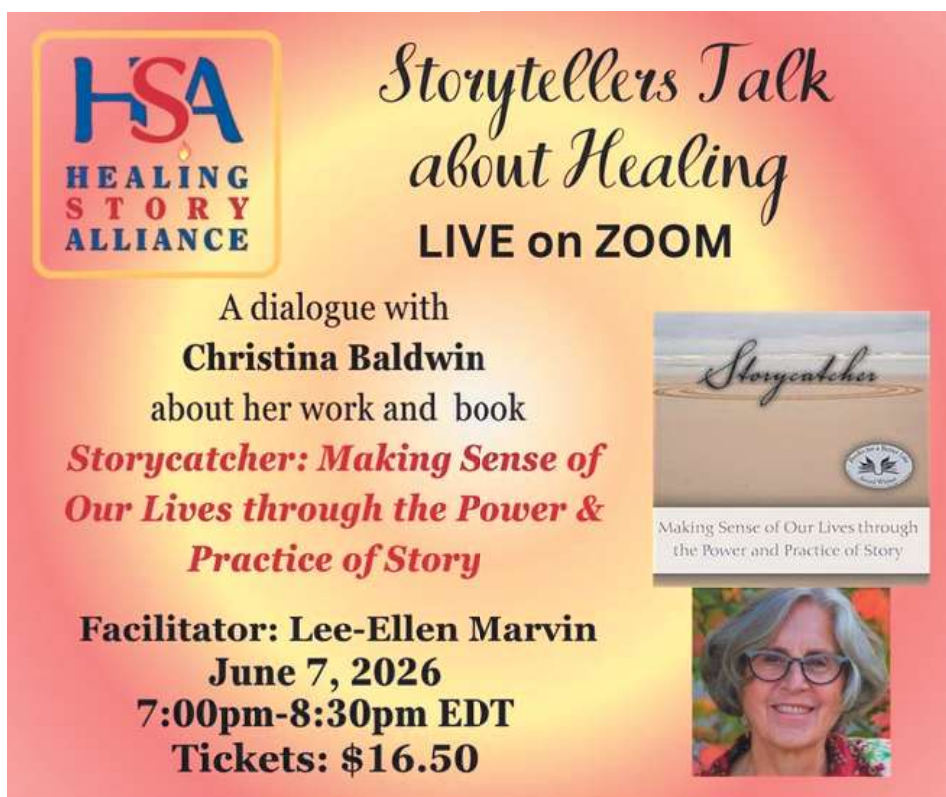
Where storytellers and professionals come together TO TURN STORIES INTO TOOLS FOR TEACHING, LEADERSHIP, AND TRANSFORMATION.

★ LEARN. PRACTICE. PERFORM. LEAD. ★

→ REGISTER NOW! | <https://conference.tejasstorytelling.com/registration/>

Don't miss your chance! TO SAVE & SECURE YOUR SPOT!

TEJAS STORYTELLING ASSOCIATION



HSA HEALING STORY ALLIANCE

Storytellers Talk about Healing
LIVE on ZOOM

A dialogue with
Christina Baldwin
about her work and book
Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power & Practice of Story

Facilitator: Lee-Ellen Marvin
June 7, 2026
7:00pm-8:30pm EDT
Tickets: \$16.50

Storycatcher
Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story

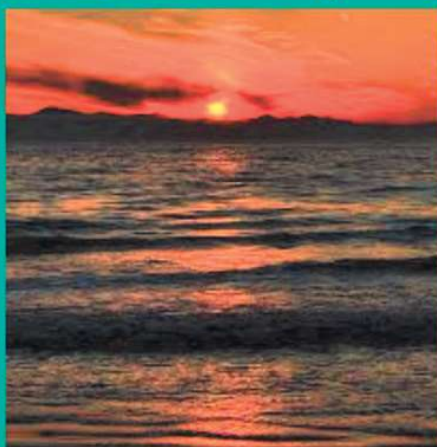


CLICK AD FOR LINK

Discover the Power of Storytelling!

2026 CONFERENCE

Celebration of Story



TALES AND TELLERS BY THE SALISH SEA

JUNE 3-7, VICTORIA, B.C.

Learn, listen, and connect with storytellers from across Canada

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- Full Conference or Day Passes •
- Keynote • Concerts •

REGISTER & LEARN MORE

<https://www.storytellers-conteurs.ca/en/conference/2026Victoria.html>





NATIONAL STORYTELLING CALENDAR (*click links in titles to access events*)

MAY 2026 STORYTELLING EVENTS

Patchwork Storytelling Guild | EarthWoven: Stories of Connection, Creation, and Wonder

June 2, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 9, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 16, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 23, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

June 30, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm Central

VIRTUAL

Traditions and Truth: A Virtual Open Mic

June 6, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

VIRTUAL

Email jdelnegro@dom.edu for the Zoom link and/or if you are interested in telling a story (7-10 min) in the open mic.

Healing Story Alliance | When Storytellers Write About Healing

June 7, 2026 | 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm Central

VIRTUAL

Better Said Than Done | Love is Love: a Benefit for Human Rights Campaign

June 11, 2026 | 8:00 – 9:00 pm Eastern

VIRTUAL

Voices in the Glen | Monthly Story Swap

June 13, 2026 | 7:30 – 8:30pm Eastern

VIRTUAL

Laura Packer, thinkstory | Advocacy Storytelling: Identifying, crafting, and using stories to create change

June 14, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 Central

VIRTUAL

Laura Packer | The Storytellers Salon: An online sharing and feedback circle

June 22, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

VIRTUAL

Sierra Storytelling Festival

June 26, 2026 | 2:00 pm Pacific – June 27, 2026 | 11:00 pm Pacific

North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center | 17894 Tyler Foote Road, Nevada City, California

Laura Packer | Fairy Tales for Grown Ups: Darker, sexier, funnier, grimmer

June 27, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Central

VIRTUAL

National Storytelling Network | 2026 National Storytelling Conference

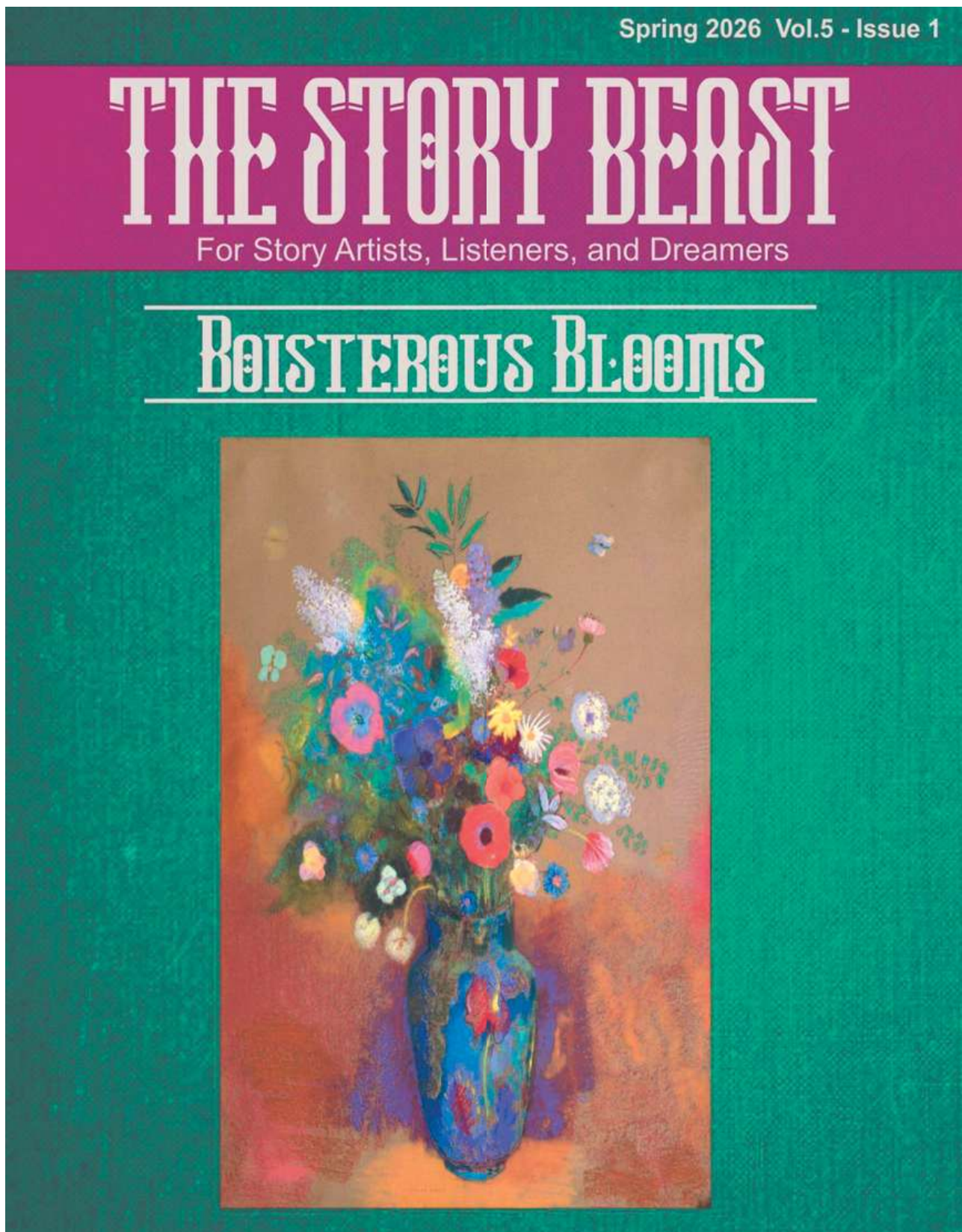
July 23 – 26, 2026

West Texas A&M University, Canyon, Texas

THE STORY BEAST

Click the cover below to access the Spring 2026 Story Beast issue: *Boisterous Blooms*.

Visit storybeast.org for submission information.





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HOW TO SUBMIT TO THE NEWSLETTER:

Send us your events, articles, opportunities, storytelling, or storyteller news, and more in an email to newsletter@storynet.org to go out to the national storytelling community!

1. Contributions due on the 25th of the month.
2. Membership in the National Storytelling Network *not* required.
3. Content subject to editing and inclusion in final issue not guaranteed.
4. If you are the author of your contribution, please also attach a headshot photo of yourself to go next to your byline.