

National Storytelling Network

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

APRIL PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Delanna Reed
President & Chair of the Board of Directors
National Storytelling Network

To everything, turn, turn, turn
There is a season, turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven
A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep...
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late. (The Byrds, 1965)

As spring breathes new life, flowering buds break through the earth reminding us we have yet another chance to start afresh. April is upon us and with it, changes are occurring for all of us at NSN. March heralded the sorrowful departure of Jimmy Neil Smith from this earth, the founder of The National Storytelling Festival and a cornerstone of the storytelling revival. March also marks the selection of the Oracle Award recipients for 2025 – a joyous opportunity to recognize those who have given so much of themselves to the storytelling community. As July nears, we see the next National Storytelling Network Conference taking shape as the components begin to fall in place. In this newsletter you will also read about the people awarded the Kathryn Windham Scholarship, allowing them to attend the conference. Let me begin.

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Letter:
ORACLE Awardees
Announced

2025 Conference

2026 Conference
Announced

Kathryn Tucker Windham
Scholars Announced

SIO SIG Member Spotlight

Remembrances

Featured Events

National Storytelling
Calendar

**DID YOU KNOW? NSN
BOARD MEETINGS ARE
OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS**

Click [here](#) to read this
month's and prior meeting
minutes.

CLICK THE RED HALF OF
THE PAGE TO TURN BACK

CLICK THE BLUE HALF TO
TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE



Jimmy Neil Smith, former teacher, mayor of Jonesborough, Tennessee, and the founder and first President of the International Storytelling Center (ISC) died on March 15 after a long illness. It was through his vision that the National Storytelling Festival began in 1973, leading to the creation of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), later to be called the National Storytelling Association and finally ISC and NSN. His legacy lives on at ISC in the capable hands of the current board, staff, and President Michael Carson. Jimmy Neil was known and loved by storytellers from around the country. He will be missed. To read more, you can go to the International Storytelling Center website at storytellingcenter.net.

Just as winter is followed by spring, a somber note is followed by one of celebration. The NSN ORACLE Award committee has selected the recipients of the 2025 ORACLE Awards to be presented at the conference in Kennesaw, Georgia this July. The Board of Directors is proud to announce ten winners.

ORACLE Regional Service and Leadership Award recipients

Clinton Atwater, Roanoke, Virginia
Jo Ann Dadisman, Independence, West Virginia
Meghna Bhat, Sacramento, California
Jim Brule, Fayetteville, New York
Jennifer Pahl Otto, Lansing, Michigan

ORACLE Talking Leaves Award recipient

Sherry Norfolk, St. Louis, Missouri

ORACLE Distinguished National Service Award recipients

Trudy Hanson, Amarillo, Texas
Bob Johnson, Greeneville, Tennessee
Sara Armstrong, Berkeley, California

ORACLE Lifetime Achievement Award recipient

Susan O'Connor, Johnson City, Tennessee

We hope you will attend the conference this year to celebrate these fine people who have shared their talents and hard work, often without compensation, to preserve a legacy of storytelling through their leadership, performance, and publications.

While we are acknowledging those who have contributed so much to NSN and the national and international storytelling community, I want to acknowledge those who have recently agreed to accept a leadership role as members of the Board of Directors.



Melissa Fees, who joined the board last summer as a member at large has enthusiastically taken on the much needed role of Public Relations Director. We look forward to improving our outreach through social media and other media with Melissa in this position.

Another important role on the board and for the special interest group Youth, Educators, and Storytellers (YES) was left vacant at the sudden death of Angela Lloyd. Karin Amano immediately stepped in to fill that position on the board. Finally, a position we have searched to fill for over a year, the Publications Manager, is in the hands of the capable Upasna Kakroo. Please help us welcome these women and offer your support to them as they take these sometimes daunting volunteer positions to bolster the smooth operation of our organization.

As I sign off this month, I encourage NSN members to volunteer at the National Storytelling Conference July 17 – 20. Not only will you be contributing to your member organization, but you will also receive a discount on your registration! Visit storynet.org/conference-registration to learn more.

Until next month, remember:

To everything, turn, turn, turn

There is a season, turn, turn, turn

And a time to every purpose under heaven.



NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

REGISTER NOW!

Registration: ONLY \$249 for NSN members until May 31. Not an NSN member? \$324 non-member registration will include *a full year* of NSN membership for the first time! Take advantage and register right away.

Housing: Kennesaw State's spacious, premium dormitories for this year's conference include a kitchenette and lounge! They are also more affordable than all local hotels, as of our last check. Reserve now!

Meals: KSU's award-winning dining hall ranked #10 of all 1,344 college dining halls in the United States!

Virtual Ticket: Unable to make it out to Georgia this summer? Our \$99 live-streamed virtual ticket is available for viewing until the end of September.

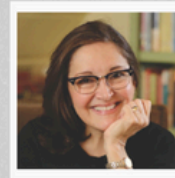
Volunteer: Conference discounts ranging from \$50-\$100 available for volunteer shifts at the conference!

Print Program Ads: Know what you want to advertise but don't have an ad yet? We have a free design service!

FOR ALL OF THIS AND MORE:
CLICK [HERE](#) TO VISIT OUR
CONFERENCE WEBPAGE.

GEORGIA 2025 NATIONAL TELLERS

July 17-20 at Kennesaw State University



- Adam Booth - emcee
- Carmen Agra Deedy
- Lyn Ford
- Bill Harley
- Rev. Robert Jones
- Connie Regan-Blake





NATIONAL STORYTELLING NETWORK
APRIL 2025 NEWSLETTER

ANNOUNCEMENT

TEXAS 2026

Summer
2026

*Where the
Buffalo Roam*



NSN IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THE SITE OF OUR 2026 NATIONAL STORYTELLING CONFERENCE
...CANYON, TEXAS!

Get ready to stampede towards adventure because the National Storytelling Network is heading to the wide-open plains of the Texas Panhandle! In 2026, we're converging on the stunning campus of West Texas A&M University in Canyon, just a stone's throw from the vibrant city of Amarillo and just adjacent to Palo Duro Canyon (the second-largest Canyon in the Nation). We're talking stories as vast as the Texas sky, where the buffalo roam and the spirit of the frontier ignites our imaginations. Get ready to explore, connect, and let your stories run wild in the heart of the Texas Panhandle! More details will be coming soon!



ANNOUNCEMENT

2025 KATHRYN TUCKER WINDHAM SCHOLARS SELECTED



Margaret Read MacDonald
Chair, Kathryn Tucker Windham Scholarship Committee
National Storytelling Network

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINDHAM SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES! These folks will receive registration, room and board and a year membership in NSN. They will work volunteer hours at the conference and write a report on their experiences there. We had 27 applicants this year for just five spots.



Marisa Luse is a proud Black American woman with deep Southern roots, a rich Northern experience, and a profound appreciation for the diverse cultures that inspire her passion for truth-telling, connection, cultural expression, and social change. A recent graduate of the Rhode Island Black Storytellers' Legacy Academy, she is embarking on her storytelling journey with a clear vision: to leave a legacy of empowerment and healing. Through stories that challenge power, privilege, and resilience—while exploring the complexities of identity and universal human truths—Marisa creates spaces for self-reflection, connection, and transformation, all grounded in truth-telling, humor, and heart. Born and raised in Roxbury, Massachusetts, she now lives in North Providence, Rhode Island, with her two favorite legacy-building creatives, embracing life with wonder, purpose, and authenticity.



Mary Jo Huff is a storyteller, author, songwriter, and Early Childhood Educator. Her work has received NAPPA GOLD, iParenting, Parent's Choice, Dove, Teacher's Choice, Kid's First, and Mom's Choice awards. "Storytelling for Kids!" was awarded CD of the year by Creative Child Magazine. Mary Jo travels nationally, doing workshops with teachers and librarians in 47 states. Pre-K to 5th grade school visits are filled with stories, puppets, and music. Her publications include Story Play, Puppet Play, No, No, Ebenezer; Chicken Fun; Going on a Gator Hunt; and The Predictable Persimmon. www.storytellin.com



Denise Manning Keyes Page began storytelling when a dear friend in her last months of living with ALS urged her to do so. Denise excavated a story she had written about her mother’s family, edited it so that it was an appropriate oral story and shared it at a community story event. She did so to honor two people she loved. Her mother and her friend. She had no intention of telling again. But she has. That was 2019. She tells stories to bring contemplation, joy, insight and healing. She has not only continued to study and perform, she also founded Ubuntu Storytellers who tell stories to heal, challenge, inspire, and inform. They tell stories of being and of being in the skin we’re in. Ubuntu Storytellers received a third place Alliance in Community Media Award. Denise also produces a series of shows, “Women Tell by the Decades” with Jennifer Munro. She serves on the NEST Board and is past president of Connecticut Storytelling Center.

www.denisekeyestells.com



Rachel Briggs is a member of the Rhode Island Black Storytellers, a non-profit based out of Providence, Rhode Island dedicated to promoting the awareness, appreciation, and application of Black storytelling. She considers herself a ‘culture keeper’ and adheres to the African tradition of oral storytelling to pass on wisdom, history, and cultural information to nurture a sense of community. Rachel is an emerging writer and spoken word poet. She is ‘solar powered’ and loves cookouts, gardening, camping and hiking. She is also known for dancing to live bands and eating dessert before dinner!



Thomas Freese is a Kentucky storyteller, author, artist and teaching artist. He performs educational and entertaining programs, playing guitar and other instruments. His programs include stories from his books, which detail encounters with ghosts, spirits and angels. He performed as a Shaker singer at Pleasant Hill Shakertown for ten years, was on storytelling tour in Argentina and works through arts agencies to visit schools, libraries, veterans, children's homes, festivals and corporate and private parties. He also crafts a line of wood jewelry, wands, spoons and animal figures, wood burning Celtic and other designs. His website is www.ThomasLFreese.com.



Loralee Cooley awarded a scholarship, but unable to attend.

The Windham Scholarship Committee was unhappy to learn that Loralee cannot attend the 2025 Atlanta conference. She had written eagerly of her desire to come, but had to decline the scholarship, because of health issues.

Loralee wrote: There might not have been a storytelling group in Atlanta if it were not for me. Actually, yes...someone would have started it; but I'm the one who did, along with about two dozen others who became the "Southern Order of Storytellers" on a hot August afternoon in 1982. It was in the Cup and Chaucer Coffee Shop of Oxford Bookstore in downtown Atlanta (at Peachtree Battle), where we were first the "Georgia Association of Storytellers" until we said "Oops!" upon recognizing what that acronym would be! (Might be appropriate!).

Loralee is a Lifetime Member of NSN.



REMEMBERING

JIMMY NEIL SMITH

Jimmy Neil Smith passed away March 15, 2025 after a lengthy illness. He was 77. Jimmy Neil founded the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee and the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS). In 1998, NAPPS (Now called the National Storytelling Association) became two organizations: The International Storytelling Center and NSA (soon to be called NSN). For many years the two organizations were connected financially and supported one another.

We honor and appreciate Jimmy Neil for the leadership and vision he provided which contributed to the storytelling revival in the United States.

Here, from his obituary, is the remarkable story of the birth of the National Storytelling Festival:

While teaching, Jimmy served as advisor for the high school's newspaper staff. One day while driving students to the Elizabethton Star for production work, comedian Jerry Clower's voice came up on the car radio, telling a tale about raccoon hunting in Mississippi. His storytelling brought mixed reviews from the students, as well as from Jimmy, who noted aloud, "What would you all think about getting people together to tell stories?"

Not long after, Jimmy suggested this very idea to Jonesborough's town leaders. The first festival was held in 1973 in a local high school gymnasium, with Clower taking center stage, along with Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. The next day people returned to downtown and sat on hay bales as various tellers shared tales extemporaneously from the back of a flatbed truck. Jimmy noted later that these were the moments in which the real magic of storytelling had occurred.

Two years after that first event, Jimmy launched the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), with tellers Doc McConnell, Connie Regan-Blake, Barbara Freeman, Lee Pennington, Kathryn Windham, and Ardi St. Clair serving as its first board of directors. Jimmy and his board planned each festival and worked to network storytellers and listeners across the United States. As audiences grew, huge circus tents were used to accommodate the growing number of listeners. Later on, Jimmy and his staff advanced storytelling by holding workshops and conferences, and through publications such as Yarnspinner and The National Storytelling Journal (later named Storytelling Magazine).

For his full obituary, visit storytellingcenter.net.

REMEMBERING

CHERIE TREBON

The translation of Cherie Trebon's last name is 'very good' and she was...very good as a storyteller, teacher of storytelling, director of the Forest Storytelling Festival and member of the Seattle Storytellers Guild and the Story People of Clallam County.

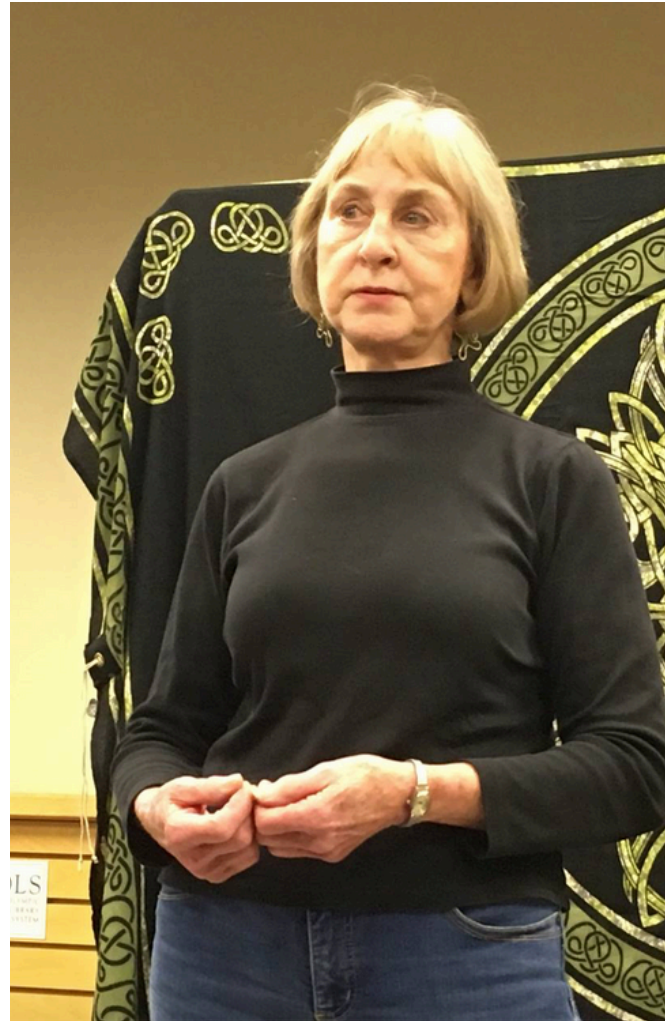
She said if anyone had ever told her that she would one day stand in front of an audience and tell a story, she would say they were crazy. It did happen and beyond telling, her ability to teach gave us new tellers. Cherie's skills as director of the Forest Festival resulted in attracting locals as well as returning listeners from throughout the northwest. Her business sense and attention to detail helped to grow the festival. After she stepped down as director, she continued to volunteer her time and talents.

Cherie's home on the water was a place for storytellers to gather.

Her home was a reflection of all she held dear...storytelling, books and a variety of interesting objects that reflected her love of the familiar and the unusual. The dragon wall hanging symbolized the magic she loved.

Cherie passed away on March 1, 2025.

She was honored with the NSN Oracle Award for Regional Service in 2015.



REMEMBRANCES

NSN would like to honor our tellers who have passed on with a note in this newsletter. Please send brief obits and photos to newsletter@storynet.org.



AWARDEE ESSAY

2025 J.J. RENEUX MENTORSHIP GRANT AWARDEE CHISOM OGOKE'S YEAR OF WONDER

For Chisom Ogoke, her year of intensive practice in storytelling kicked off with preparing for the 40th Annual Texas Storytelling Festival in Denton. There, she gave her first performance as the 2025 J.J. Reneaux Mentorship Grant Awardee.

Chisom is a Nigerian American storyteller who began performing stories in 2023. With the support of the National Cultural Foundation, she was able to explore Nigerian and Caribbean storytelling practices in Barbados as a 2022-2023 U.S. Student Fulbright Scholar. In Barbados, she not only performed her written work for the first time but also learned about the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough. After seeing the 2023 Festival for herself—her first ever storytelling festival—Chisom decided to dive in and join the Dallas Storytelling Guild and the Tejas Storytelling Association in her home state of Texas.



She attended the 2024 National Storytelling Network Conference and, during it, gave her first Fringe performance and learned about the J.J. Reneaux Mentorship Award. Since being awarded the mentorship grant in December of 2024, Chisom sees 2025 as a Year of Wonder. A year of working closely with Diane Macklin, a seasoned teller and teaching artist, understanding her own identity as a storyteller, and cultivating richer performances. This includes expanding on the original work she creates from the intersection of her culture, faith, and penchant for folklore. In preparation for her performance during the Denton Festival, Chisom met bi-weekly with Diane in virtual sessions that guided her to develop a deeper relationship with her story, particularly its characters and scenes. The result was Chisom's first Uchenna Tale, the beginning of a series of adventures between a young girl and her guardian angel.

With her Year of Wonder just beginning, Chisom is beyond excited for what lies ahead.

Bio: Chisom Ogoke holds an M.F.A. in creative writing and is a Creative and Performing Arts Fulbright Scholar. She currently works as an English professor for the Alamo Community College District in San Antonio, Texas. When she's not reading, writing, or teaching, she enjoys venturing outside, finding new places to walk that have beautiful views and tiny birds.



SIG MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

STORYTELLING IN ORGANIZATIONS' MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JAMES WILDEN WHITE PH.D.



Lisa Williams

Director of Storytelling In Organizations Special Interest Group (SIO SIG)
National Storytelling Network

James Wilden White, Ph.D. emailed me seeking information as to how he might share his book *Gilgamesh to Gierach: Four Thousand years of Fishing, Fish, and Water Stories* with the storytelling community. I became curious and wanted to know more about Jim. I perused Jim's website, drjameswildenwhite.com and learned that he is an author, a fly-fisher, a retired ordained minister, and teacher of the United Church of Christ. For over a decade, Jim taught his congregation history and life lessons through storytelling.

Jim is an accomplished travel writer known for his meticulous attention to detail, eloquently describing the scenery, geology, culture, and history of a region. He is the author of *Brief Christian Histories*, *Fly-Fishing the Artic Circle of Tasmania*, and *Round Boys Great*. His most recent publication is *Gilgamesh to Gierach: Four Thousand Years of Fishing, Fish, and Water Stories*. According to Diehl, a *Rocky Mountain Readers* reviewer, the stories in this book are simple folktales, historical stories, biblical and saintly stories, and great tragedies. This book contains classical literary characters, such as the *Odyssey* and *Moby Dick*, the voices of other fine writers, films, mysteries, nursery rhymes, musicals, and poetry. This plethora of stories will reveal the fish' significance to the reader.

Discover these books on Amazon and ThriftBooks.com. Jim is always interested in you sharing your thoughts and answering questions. Feel free to reach out to him at jwildenwhite@gmail.com.

Well, Jim, the story is out!

About the author

Lisa Williams, Ph.D., is the Director of Storytelling In Organizations (SIO), a special interest group of National Storytelling Network (NSN). She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Storytelling Network. Lisa has spent much of her life in Michigan. She enjoys exercising, traveling, reading, writing, and spending quality time with family and friends.



Join NSN PRO-SIG for a
virtual, hands-on:
**Social MEDIA
Workshop**

*This is a follow-up workshop to the first Social Media workshop by
Carol and Jessica last Fall.*

It will focus on the MEDIA aspects of social media promotions.

DATE

Saturday, April 12, 2025

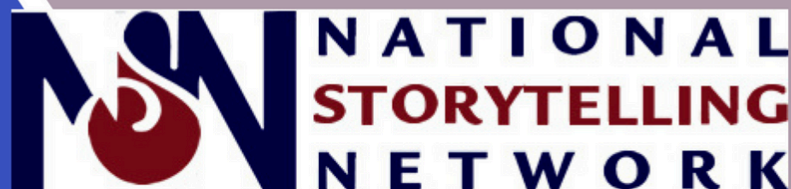
1 -2:30 pm (Central)

\$10 (free for PRO members)

Register [HERE](#)

PRESENTERS

- Carol Moore
- Jessica Robinson





ROCKY MOUNTAIN STORYTELLING AND SPELLBINDERS PRESENT

TOGETHER IN STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

Saturday, April 26

8:00am - 3:30pm

Louisville Senior Center

900 Via Appia Way, Louisville, CO 80027

Saturday, April 26 6:00pm - 8:00pm Concert

Christ the Servant Lutheran Church

506 Via Appia Way, Louisville, CO 80027

Sunday, April 27 10am-1pm Master Class with Margaret Read MacDonald

Featuring Margaret Read MacDonald



Additional workshops by Jen & Nat
Whitman and Susan Marie Frontczak



[CLICK EVENTS FOR LINKS TO REGISTER](#)



Traditions and Truth

A Virtual Open Mic

Online - Saturday
April 5, 2025
7:00-8:30 pm CDT
Free
Donations Welcome



Featuring Chris Bell



Host:
Janice Del Negro

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



DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY







Margaret Burk



Kelly Campos



Janice Del Negro



Jane Dorfman



Rachel Harding



Megan Wells

Sunday, May 18th
7:00-8:30 pm Central
Online - Fee \$15

The Lusty Month of May
A Fundraiser for www.storytelling.org

CLICK EVENTS FOR LINKS TO REGISTER



NATIONAL STORYTELLING CALENDAR

APRIL 2025 EVENTS

Storytelling Beyond Words

Emerson College

Continuing through – May 23, 2025

Venue:

Emerson College

Forest Row

East Sussex, England RH185JX

United Kingdom

11th Annual Georgia Mountain Storytelling Festival

April 4-5, 2025, 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM ET

Online and in person

The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge

3499 US-76 W

Hiawassee, GA 30546

A.C.E. Develop Your Personal Oral Story

April 1, 2025 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

April 8, 2025 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Online

True Tales Live Storytelling Workshop

truetaleslivenh.org

April 1, 2025 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm

Online/Zoom

Traditions and Truth: A Virtual Open Mic

www.Storytelling.org and Dominican University, Chicago

April 5, 2025 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CDT

Online/Zoom

Kind Stories In Concert with Hears Crow

Healing Story Alliance

April 6, 2025 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm CDT

Online/Zoom



NSN-PRO Social Media Virtual Workshop

National Storytelling Network
April 12, 2025 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm CDT
Zoom

Voices in the Glen Story Swap

April 19, 2025 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm CDT
Online/Zoom

EarthWoven: Stories of Connection, Creation, and Wonder

Patchwork Storytelling Guild
April 24, 2025 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm EDT
Venue:
The Ice House
56 River St., Bethlehem, PA

Wisconsin Storytellers' Get Together / WISTGET

Storytelling concert, open to the public, at 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
April 26, 2025 9:00 am – 6:00 pm CDT
Venue:
Columbus Community Center
125 N Dickason Blvd. Columbus, WI 53925
<https://wisconsinstorytelling.org/wistget/>

Granite State Story Swap 2025

New Hampshire Storytelling Alliance
Saturday, May 3, 2025 at 8:00am – 5:00pm EDT
Venue:
Doris L. Benz Community Center
18 Heard Road, Sandwich, NH 03227

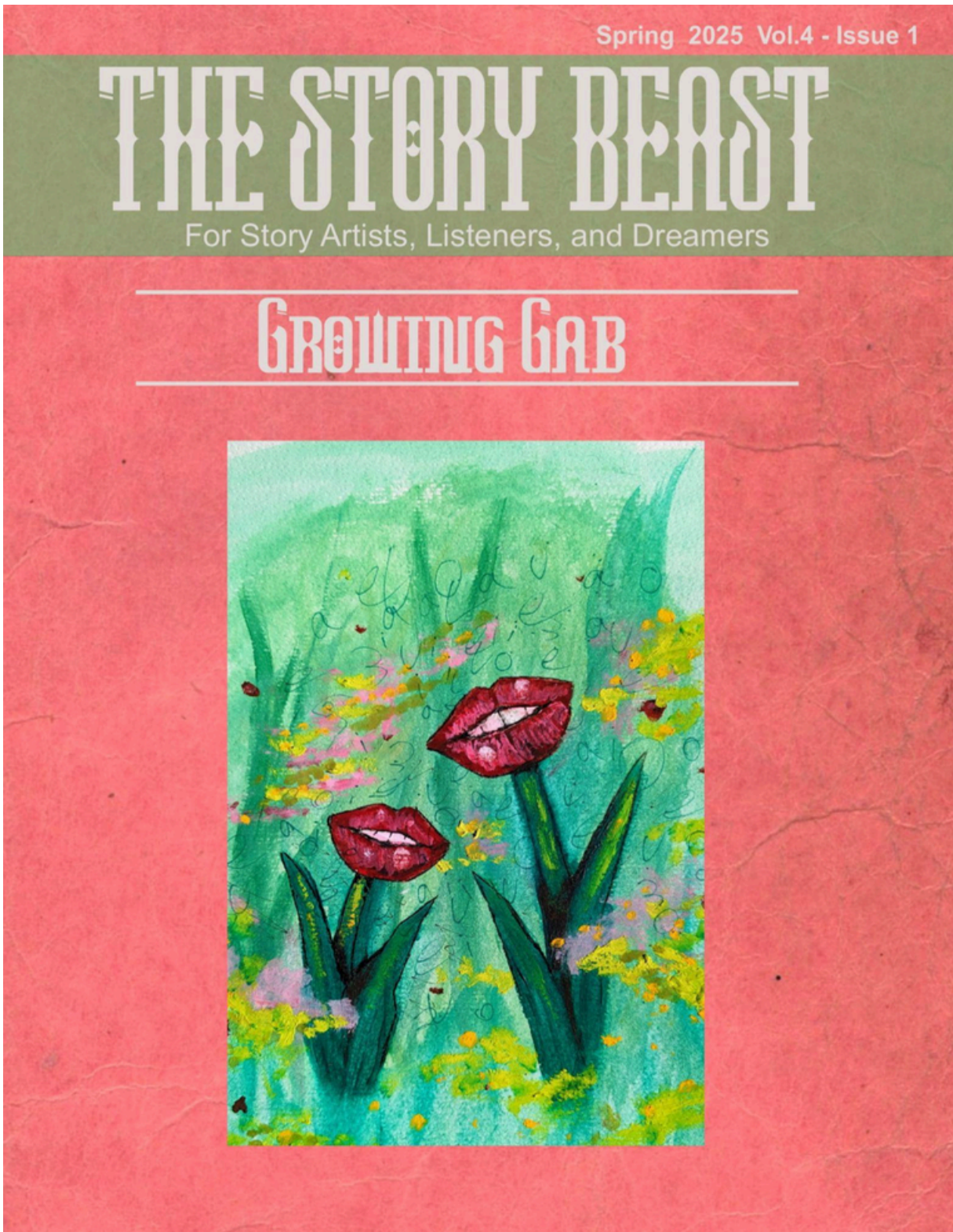
Varta: Storytelling Festival

Cultural and literary festival for children and families
May 10, 2025 10:29 am – 3:00 pm CDT
Venue:
Austin Public Library
5125 Convict Hill, Austin TX 78749



Click below to read the March 2025 Story Beast Issue (Growing Gab) this month!
Story Beast June 2025 Issue (Sizzling Splendor): Articles and Stories due May 15, 2025

Visit storybeast.org for more.





NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

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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.