

# 2025 RECIPIENTS





### CLINTON ATWATER - REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Have you ever wondered how separate lives intertwine? Imagine a vast, intricate puzzle—each moment of laughter, reflection, and shared truth a unique piece waiting to find its place. Clinton Atwater isn't just revealing this puzzle; he's guiding the pieces together, showing us how our stories connect in ways we never expected. Through mesmerizing performances, transformative mentorship, and the deeply connective energy of Let Me Tell Ya!—both a thriving storytelling community and dynamic storytelling events—Clinton brings his mission, Connecting Stories and People, to life. He doesn't just tell stories; he awakens them in others, empowering voices, fostering understanding, and turning individual experiences into shared moments of meaning. Because your story isn't just yours—it's a vital piece of something greater. And with Clinton Atwater leading the way, we don't just listen to stories—we become part of them, witnessing the extraordinary beauty of the human experience, woven together, one story at a time.



### MEGHNA BHAT - REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Dr. Meghna Bhat (she/her) is an award-winning creative disruptor and consultant based in California, committed to creating safe, healthy, and thriving communities. As a first-generation South Asian immigrant, she is a passionate multidisciplinary storyteller, feminist scholar-practitioner, and educator. Meghna has led interactive and trauma-informed sessions at national conferences, using personal storytelling to ignite conversations, shift cultural norms, promote collective care, encourage intergenerational healing, and drive meaningful change. In 2022, she received the Seeding Creativity Artist Grant and founded Gulabi Stories: A South Asian Healing Initiative, which is focused on storytelling that highlights healing within the South Asian diaspora. Her work has been featured on ABC News and Solving Sacramento. Meghna has shared her stories at various events, including Capital Storytelling's Immigrant Stories, Intercultural Reflections: A Festival of the Arts, and the Sacramento Storyteller Guild. Her story, "Metamorphosis," was published in the 2024 anthology of South Asian survivor stories "SANCTUARIES" by South Asian SOAR. She works part-time at Capital Storytelling and coaches fellow storytellers in their creative journeys.



### JIM BRULÉ - REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Jim Brulé is a transformational storyteller, death doula, teacher, and mentor, drawing on a unique background that encompasses advanced degrees in both clinical psychology and artificial intelligence. For the past seven years, he has directed Transformational Storytelling, an online school accredited by the National Storytelling Network. This global community trains spiritual storytellers from diverse traditions to craft narratives that inspire healing and foster spiritual growth. Beyond his school, Jim serves as a multifaith chaplain and spiritual storyteller for hospitals, Omega homes, and correctional facilities. Deeply committed to interfaith dialogue, he co-founded *The Brothers Three* over two decades ago with a Muslim scholar and Baptist minister, continuing their impactful work in schools, faith communities, and organizations to cultivate understanding and healing. Jim's classes, workshops, and communities embody his dedication to multicultural wisdom, grounded in the belief that true abundance arises from interconnected generosity and gratitude.



### JO ANN DADISMAN - REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

As a storyteller and career educator, Jo Ann Dadisman interwove the two practices in her home state of West Virginia. She taught in public schools and higher education for more than 40 years, while continuing to develop her own love of the tale. For 20 years, she and a partner told tandem tales under the name of Mountain Echoes, as they worked in schools, parks, libraries and with groups to promote an understanding of the mountain heritage and the importance of preserving stories. She retired from West Virginia University after 21 years of teaching and co-directing the National Writing Project at WVU for several years with the coveted Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Teacher of the Year Award for 2011. She has worked to promote storytelling through partnership with the Gabor WV Folklife Center at Fairmont State University, and she founded and co-directed the Youth Storytelling Camp at Glenville State University for the past 3 years. She is an active member of the WV Storytelling Guild.



### JENNIFER PAHL OTTO - REGIONAL SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Jennifer Pahl Otto creates and tells original stories. Her personal narratives and contemporary tales hit the universal themes we all relate to – love, death, humor, grief, family, growth. She has told at numerous festivals and events in Michigan, where she lives. She has been on stage at North East Storytelling's Sharing the Fire Conference, and was a frequent teller at the Northlands Annual Conference. Her children's stories, which she tells at schools, parks, libraries and other locations, are fun and quirky, and any life lessons come with a light touch. Mead Hill has published four books of her children's stories which are available on Amazon. She is currently President of the Michigan Bright Water Storytelling Festival which produces an annual festival and supports other storytelling opportunities in Michigan. She is a past president of Northlands Storytelling Network and has sat on the National Storytelling Network Board.



### SHERRY NORFOLK - TALKING LEAVES

Sherry Norfolk is an award-winning storyteller, author and teaching artist, performing and leading residencies and professional development workshops nationally and internationally. A dynamic storyteller, Sherry has appeared in the Manitoba International Storytelling Festival, Taiwan International Storytelling Carnival, International Art of Storytelling Festival (Miami, FL), International Storytelling Center (Jonesborough, TN), Singapore International Storytelling Festival, Manila International Storytelling Festival, and many more festivals, schools, libraries, museums and universities nationwide. A Kennedy Center National Teaching Artist, Wolf Trap Teaching Artist, Young Audiences Teaching Artist, and an Arts Integration Teaching Artist on the rosters of several state arts commissions, she leads residencies in pre-K through high school classrooms across the country and southeast Asia. As co-editor and/or co-author of five books that explore rigorous, standards-based storytelling strategies for learning across the curriculum and a former Adjunct Professor at Lesley University, Sherry is a recognized leader in integrating learning through storytelling.



### **SARA ARMSTRONG - DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE**

From telling stories to her elementary school students to making connections with stories in her teacher professional development workshops, Sara Armstrong, PhD, developed her passion for the importance of storytelling to make connections and build bridges over many years. Sara serves as the Board chair for Storytelling Association of California (SAC – [storysaac.org](http://storysaac.org)) and Board chair for Artists Standing Strong Together (ASST – [asst.art](http://asst.art)). It's by telling each other our stories and listening deeply to those stories that we can bring peace to our world.



### **TRUDY HANSON - DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE**

Trudy L. Hanson (BS, MA Speech, Louisiana State University; EdD, Higher Education, Texas Tech University) retired from the position of department head of the Department of Communication at West Texas A&M University in 2021. Hanson has served as President of the Texas Speech Communication Association, as editor of the Texas Speech Communication Journal, and as President of the Southern States Communication Association. She has received recognition for outstanding service in the discipline from the Texas Speech Communication Association, the Tejas Storytelling Association and the Southern States Communication Association. She has presented over 40 papers at state, regional and national academic conferences, published 4 chapters in academic monographs, 30 journal articles, compiled 4 public speaking textbooks and written an anthology of fractured fairy tales. Her academic research has been concentrated in rhetorical criticism of popular culture, gender communication, department head leadership, scholarship of teaching and learning, and storytelling. She directed the WTAMU Storytelling Festival for 28 years, bringing nationally known tellers to campus to perform with graduate students. She has served as an NSN Board member and as Chair of the NSN Board during the organization's transition to its current SIG-centered governance. She continues to spin tales for her 11 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.





### **ROBERT C. JOHNSON - DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL SERVICE**

Bob was born in Knoxville, TN. His early childhood was spent in Greeneville, TN about 30 miles from the seat of Storytelling in Jonesborough. He has a BA from the College of Wooster and considerable graduate accounting courses at ETSU, earning a CPA designation in 1974. He worked at Arthur Andersen & Co. in the accounting division for a few years before moving into administration and eventually managing technology for the Northeast region, retiring in 1999. Bob became involved with NSN in 2008 when Nancy Kavanaugh called wanting to convert the NSN accounting system from Peachtree to QuickBooks. After brief stints on the Board and as Finance Chair, he has held the position of Corporate Treasurer ever since. Bob currently lives in Greeneville and has a small accounting practice, is married with 3 grown children living in Texas and North Carolina.



### **SUSAN O'CONNOR - LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT**

Susan O'Connor holds Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science degrees from the University of Tennessee. After teaching English for a community college, she came to work part-time in marketing for what was then the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling. Later, it became the National Storytelling Association, and ultimately, the International Storytelling Center. Shortly after being hired, Susan moved into the full-time role of Director of Programs, where she was responsible for the operation and artistic direction of the National Storytelling Festival and all programmatic events. Accomplishments during her tenure included initiating new features of the National Storytelling Festival; developing Storytelling Live (ISC's six-month, annual teller-in-residence program); establishing the weeklong Kids Storytelling Institute for 5th graders; and inaugurating ISC's foray into online programming. Although Susan retired from her job in early 2025, she continues to work for ISC as a consultant on special projects. Her priority has always been the success of the artists with whom she works.