

## In the Beginning... of Stories and Strings ...

Janene Ping



**I want to tell you the story of The World Association of Puppetry and Storytelling Arts.**

It is a new and evolving tale ~ one of hope and wonder.

Once upon a time, when was it... When was it not? It began the summer of 2019. The west coast Collaborative Puppetry and Storytelling Arts Conference (held in America) was rounding out its closing plenum after 4 days of exciting work, and Marjorie Rehbach sounded the dream of forming an association that would shepherd Waldorf puppetry and storytelling arts. There was an excited buzz in the large circle and many folks enthusiastically raised their hands to offer support for such an organization to be created. Now almost 2 years later, the core group of WAPASA initiators are trying to catch their breath as world-wide interest emerges.

Like all stories, this beginning is an open portal through which we step into an infinite land of potential. The world that unfolds through the weaving of words and imaginal pictures can offer us deep insight into what it means to be human. In a time when increasing technical mechanization and artificial intelligence holds sway, what it means to be truly human is an essential exploration. Working out of Waldorf inspiration, our human inquiry is one of the body, soul, and spirit. It is also, most importantly, collaborative. When we step beyond our personal confines to listen into the stories of others, we gain an ever widening understanding of our shared reality. The weft of the individual - needs to be woven with the warp of the universal in this cloth that is meant to hold the truth, beauty, and goodness of what we can share.

The art of puppetry offers multi-dimensional opportunities to highlight the many worlds that exist within our one world. Within a puppet play - storytelling, music, movement, and visual arts of colour, sculptural form, and lighting are only some of the creative directions that artists engage in. This brings us into educational and therapeutic realms. We learn through our ability to build living pictures that hold



meaningful relationship to our time, place, and community. When we identify with the stories of humanity - as the stories we also each own - then we begin to heal the rift of separation, isolation, and "othering". Whether we are bringing stories of rich cultural tradition, or highlighting the here and now, our stories need to be told. When we share a story with others, a deeply felt - but little understood phenomena occurs... our minds unite on the imaginal journey we share. There is, even if only for a moment, a synchronization of our soul-felt experience in which we meet on a universal plane.

So, I cannot tell you the ending of the story since we are still at the beginning. But I can relate that our work in forming our association is grounded in the beliefs that:

- Diversity on our planet earth is a sign of health and resilience. In forming this association, it is our goal that richly diverse cultural stories from around the globe will be protected, celebrated and shared.
- The spiritual teachings that live within our universal consciousness support moral/ethical intelligence... this is intrinsic within the values of Waldorf education that we share.
- Our full humanity is honoured through the discovery and preservation of traditional stories of origin, and fairy/folk tales born out of culture, place, and time. We wish to support projects that bring this about through world-wide collaboration.
- Puppetry skills hone abilities of intention and attention; these are important at any age. Puppetry methodologies are valuable tools for the educator, supportive of creative intelligence.

We hope the next chapter of our story allows our associative arts collaboration to be available to all who desire to explore this work on a world-wide level. This means financial sponsorship for the building our networking capabilities - these include language translation, scholarship membership - so that educators may utilize resources without economic constraint, and project support for world story research and community festival performances. We hope to build an archive of Waldorf inspired world-wide puppetry performances from this collaboration!



Our upcoming World Puppetry and Storytelling Collaborative Conference ***Periphery within Center*** is taking place from July 29th - August 1st. We are highlighting world stories and plays that represent the fullness of our humanity, honouring diversity, inclusion, and the sacredness of all life.

The next chapter is a very exciting one... it entails courage and commitment to living in the realm of the possible.

To join the conference, or find out more, please email [worldpuppetry@gmail.com](mailto:worldpuppetry@gmail.com).

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*In recent years, Janene has begun sharing out her knowledge and experience of early childhood and puppetry. She is the Associate Director at Sophia's Hearth in Keene, NH. She also teaches classes in the Early Childhood program of Hawthorne Valley's Alkion Center for Adult Education, and leads workshops at the annual WECAN conference for early childhood educators.*

*Estelle Bryer, master puppeteer and one of the founding members of the association and author of the Rainbow Puppet Theatre book published by WECAN.*