

Inland Valley Storytellers May 10, 2011

Patricia Snow emceed and Rhoda Huffman treated us to delicious homemade gingerbread, 2 other homemade cookie-type delicacies, along with drinks and good cheer. The business meeting got started late, due to hanging around the food table.

We were 16 members: Chris & John St. Clair, Jayne Hayes and John Sjodin (or Jayne and John Sjodin?), Paul Bublin, Patricia Snow, Rhoda Huffman, Virginia Stark, Marlene Carter, Glen Garry, Karen Rae Kraut, Janice Baskin, Adrien Lowery, Ron Evans, Andrew Bakhit, Lady Zaja and myself, Barbara Rugeley. We heard 5 tales, told by 6 people.

Zaja and I started off by reprising our Monrovia Historic Preservation Group tour stories. Zaja took on the persona of Birdie Monroe, and I her sister Edna, both nieces to the founder William Monroe. With Monrovia celebrating 125 years since it was incorporated as a city in 1886, the Monroe sisters reminisced about the early days of the city when they first came out to California in 1884. As well as that, Birdie was in the kitchen with new gadgets of the day: a new-fangled object called an 'egg beater', Gold Medal Flour, Coca Cola, and a recipe book from the 1880s. I was up in the master bedroom talking about being a child growing up during such times: schooling, orange groves, horse & buggy, being school teachers and never marrying. Zaja and I hope that others will join us next year, always on Mother's Day. Our "House Captain" was very supportive and hopes to designate one house as a storytelling house, with 8 story tellers throughout. Join us!

John St. Clair told "The Devil's Portrait: A Russian Folk Tale," which he first heard the previous weekend at the Ojai Storytelling Festival. An old painter took on an apprentice, who grew in talent. A dreaded summons arrived to appear before the czar; this could mean death! The painter went alone. The czar demanded a painting that "would take his breath away...or die." Together with the apprentice, the painter determined to create a hawk that seemed to fly off the canvas. When the painter presented his masterpiece, the apprentice insisted on coming along. The czar gasped when the painting was unveiled, but refused to admit it and sent the painter to the dungeon to await his death. Only the apprentice could save him, by creating a stunning portrait of the czar's father. The apprentice was helped by a stranger who turned out to be the devil himself and who expected payment of a soul for his work.

Adrien told an Irish Cinderella story, "Fair, Brown & Trembling," that was "all about the clothes." The Hen Wife is analogous to the Fairy Godmother, minus the wand. The details on the clothing and horses' livery: ah. Adrien shared this story at the International Festival in April; enjoyed by all.

Karen Kraut shared a story from the Han Dynasty, in China. The barbarians from the north were invading. To placate them, the leader must choose one of the prettiest concubines from among his 3000 for their leader. How to choose?

Ron Evans, back from China, told a personal story (I think) of his time when he was with the International YMCA working with refugees in East Africa in 1962. In Uganda, he proposed an engineering solution that would alleviate the burden of the women who had to carry clay pots on their heads down an 80 foot trail to get water, and then carry them back up: a good solution for some other village, perhaps, but not for this village.

Patricia Snow shared “The Story NOT to Tell,” about the true story of an arduous Amazon trek with bugs, starvation, desperate capsizing, and disease. With starvation and death imminent, should Andrew kill and eat his devoted and faithful dog? Fearing death, he ends up killing his dog only to realize that civilization is just around the corner and the act was not necessary. Patricia's lesson to storytellers, is that we as tellers, should be intuitive enough to know when a heavy tale is appropriate to the audience and not leave the audience with a heavy burden.