

Biographies of the Featured Storytellers

Carmen Deedy

A Cuban-American storyteller known for her funny and bittersweet immigrant tales, Carmen Deedy has told stories in multiple venues, including the Kennedy Center, New Victory Theater on Broadway, and the First National Book Festival in Washington D.C. As Carmen reveals her memories, audiences are drawn to the innocent wonder of a young girl's heart, thrown into the comedy of marital conflict, and soothed by the comfort of lessons learned.

In addition to her personal stories, Carmen tells a variety of new and exciting tales to audiences young and old. She has written six children's books and has won a Parent's Choice Gold Award for her audio, *Growing Up Cuban in Decatur, Georgia*. Carmen serves as a weekend National Public Radio commentator on *All Things Considered* and *Latino USA*.

Syd Lieberman

Syd Lieberman told stories long before he began performing professionally. While teaching high school English, he told anecdotes in the classroom, explaining, "I liked to share moments in my life when they were relevant. Kids are thirsty to know who you are. Adults don't talk to them enough."

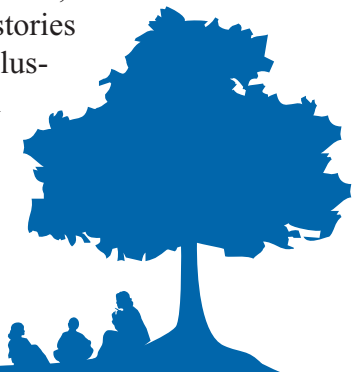
Syd found his art form in a week-long storytelling course and first performed in a town library. Since then, Syd has visited local and national festivals and has been featured as far away as New Zealand. He has also served as guest storyteller and host on American Public Radio's *Good Evening*.

In addition to writing his own stories, Syd instructs teachers around the country on how to use storytelling in the classroom. He directs an annual institute at the Chicago Historical Society and has taught storytelling to teachers at both the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center.

He says, "Certainly connecting people is one of the great values of storytelling. Stories that contain universals teach us we are not alone. It's wonderful to laugh and cry together. ... It's such an intimate art form. ... The story is created somewhere between my words and the audience's imagination. In a way, we are working together."

Dovie Thomason-Sickles

Dovie Thomason-Sickles, an award-winning storyteller and cultural educator, brings the richness of her Lakota and Kiowa Apache heritage to her work. Her stories teach listeners of all ages about the values and beliefs of Native Americans as illustrated by the hilarious antics of animals and tricksters. These tales hold children spellbound, make them laugh, and help them imagine as they gain insights into native culture and life lessons.



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A winner of the Parent's Choice Gold Award and the ALA/Booklist Editor's Choice Award for her recordings, Dovie has shared stories throughout the world. She has performed at places such as the National Storytelling Festival, NPR's *Living on Earth*, the BBC's *My Century*, and conflict resolution programs in Northern Ireland.

Donald Davis

Donald Davis was born in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and grew up hearing gentle fairy tales, scary mountain lore, ancient Welsh and Scottish folktales, and wholesome, true-to-life stories of his own neighbors and kin.

Donald's Uncle Frank—a man who “talked in stories”—helped him capture the real and daily adventures of life and gave him the creative courage to tell about them. Donald remembers, “I discovered that in a story I could safely dream any dream, hope any hope, go anywhere I pleased, fight any foe, win or lose, live or die. My stories created a safe, experimental learning place.”

With this outlook, Donald has approached learning experiences throughout his life as a graduate of Duke University Divinity School, as a retired Methodist minister, and as a storyteller for various national associations and institutions. He has graced festivals and concerts throughout the United States and the world, has produced books and tapes of his works, and has taught workshops and storytelling courses.

For Donald, storytelling “is not what I do for a living, ... it is how I do all that I do while I am living.”

Waddie Mitchell

Living as a working cowboy on some of the most desolate spreads in Nevada for 25 years gave Waddie Mitchell time to develop his common-sense approach to life and to perfect his cowboy poetry, which has delighted and inspired audiences across the United States. He says, “All the time I was growing up we had these old cowboys around. When you live in close proximity like that with the same folks month after month, one of your duties is to entertain each other, and I suppose that's where the whole tradition of cowboy poetry started.”

When *The Tonight Show* first called to ask Waddie to share his stories with a national audience, the talent coordinator reached a neighbor who subsequently drove 40 miles to the remotely based cowboy with the good news. Waddie said no to the offer; it was calving time, and he'd never heard of Johnny Carson.

In addition to helping dispel the stereotypical image of the cowboy created by Hollywood, Waddie has found that sharing his poetry across the country has opened his eyes to the good in people and broadened his own horizons.

Rex Ellis

Rex Ellis is a teacher, historian, and storyteller who believes that storytelling brings hope of improving communities and bringing people together. Rex says, “I have seen bridges built with storytelling that invite listeners and tellers to unite in ways that are more potent than

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a town meeting and more healing than a therapy session. It's pretty hard to hate someone whose story you know." Director of the Center for Museum Studies at the Smithsonian Institute, Rex knows his facts and brings them to the stage with a profoundly straightforward approach that leaves audiences dramatically changed for the better.

Prior to his work with the Smithsonian, Rex directed the Department of African-American Interpretation and Presentations at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, Va. He is also the author of *Beneath the Blazing Sun: Stories from the African-American Journey* and *The Ups and Downs of Being Brown*.