

Tales that stand tall

Local storytelling group celebrates landmark

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Kate Dudding's first storytelling experience was with a group of fourth-graders. She started out with a typical "Once upon a time, when animals could talk ..."

But she quickly realized something extraordinary was happening. The room was totally silent.

"They were all waiting for what I was going to say next," she said.

That powerful connection with her audience has fueled Dudding's storytelling for more than a decade. A mainstay on the Capital District storytelling circuit, Dudding has complemented her frequent appearances with CDs, noting that there's a mindset that serious storytellers put their work out on disc.

Her latest offering, "Young People Who Made a Difference," will be released Sunday, Nov. 18, at the 101th Story Sunday at the Glen Sanders Mansion in Scotia. Dudding and Betty McCanty of Saratoga Springs will also present a program, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game and Other Stories to be Thankful For."

Dudding, from Clifton Park, was turned on to storytelling



Kate Dudding

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when she took her young son to the state museum, where several programs featured storytelling. A voracious reader, Dudding loves the intimate nature of storytelling, the way the storyteller makes eye contact with the audience, "inviting them in."

Dudding started attending storytelling workshops in the Adirondacks put on by renowned storyteller Jeannine Laverty. It was through one of these workshops she met McCanty, 89, who has been telling stories for 25 years. They became fast friends. Among other things, McCanty said, "We liked the kind of stories we each told."

Dudding's stories tend to focus on people who've made a difference — some well known, some lesser so. She's always on the lookout for potential story subjects, scouring her Facebook news feed for interesting links and filing away magazine stories that catch her attention. Once when she was at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago she saw two displays that would eventually make their way into her work. One was about Eddie O'Hare, the World War II fighter pilot for whom the airport was named. The other was an exhibition on women aviators.

She enjoys doing research on her subjects

almost as much as she likes sharing them with the audience.

"I love it because courage and compassion are contagious," she said. "I feel like I'm giving people role models. I'm giving them hope."

Her first CD was, "Lighting the Way Home: Stories of Lighthouses and Their Keepers." Dudding followed that up with "People Who Made a Difference: Volume 1." Calling it Volume 1, Dudding says, was kind of a promise that there would be more to come.

This summer, she finished "Young People who Make a Difference." She needed a couple of more stories to round out the CD, so she mentioned the project to a local librarian, who handed her a stack of books on potential subjects. One of them was written by a girl from Long Island who'd been heartbroken by the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. She had written to the Audubon Society and mentioned she was a "good drawer." Maybe, she said, she could create watercolors for people who donated. To date, she has raised more than \$200,000.

The CD also has a local flavor. Dudding includes a story about Children at the Well, an Albany-based group of youth storytellers who promote peace and understanding. She won the storytelling slam at the National Storytelling Conference in Los Angeles by talking about Children

at the Well.

The CD's release comes at the 101st performance of Story Sundays at the Glen Sanders Mansion. Now in its 14th season, the series has seen more than 6,700 people enjoy storytelling and dinner. Sunday's program draws on Dudding's and McCanty's lifelong love of baseball and the people who play it. Dudding is particularly drawn to stories such as those of Jackie Robinson, the first black player in the major leagues, and Wendell Smith, a black sportswriter. McCanty grew up in Buffalo next door to Lou Boudreau, who went on to play for and manage the Cleveland Indians.

McCanty said many of her eight children and 10 grandchildren are coming in for the weekend to celebrate an early Thanksgiving. It's a chance to be together that they will all cherish, particularly because as the years go on, "The opportunities for hearing my stories will be few and far between," McCanty said.

Storytelling Sundays at the Glen Sanders Mansion cost \$32 per person, which includes entertainment, a three-course dinner, coffee/tea, tax and tip. For reservations or information, call 384-1700 or visit www.story-circle.org.

Dudding's latest CD is available through her website, www.katedudding.com. It's also sold at The Bookhouse in Stuyvesant Plaza.