

Kiran Rana

My EPIC project had two parts:

1. Supporting and promoting storytelling in the Bay Area
2. Bringing Indian and Middle Eastern stories to different audiences

To help promote storytelling in the Bay Area, I served on the Board of the Storytelling Association of California (SAC); and to bring Indian and Middle Eastern stories to different audiences I told Sufi stories of Mulla Nasruddin, stories of the beautiful Indian deity, Krishna, and personal stories from my life in different venues.

SAC

I joined the SAC Board through the invitation/sponsorship of Ann Riley and Terry Coles, who are active in different areas at Stagebridge. SAC is a volunteer-staffed and dynamic membership organization that serves storytellers in the Bay Area in different ways. Membership is \$30 per year and benefits include:

1. Discounts on SAC storytelling events and workshops
2. A monthly message called SAC epulse, with announcements of upcoming storytelling events (members can include their story events)
3. Subscription to *Storyline*, a quarterly newsletter with storytelling articles and news
4. Free performance space as part of the Third Fridays series at the Silk Road House in Berkeley
5. Members can include fliers for their events at the Coming Events page of the website, www.storysac.org. There is also a listing of storytellers for people looking for someone to tell at their event
6. SAC annually honors a Regional Gem, a well-known California storyteller who contributes significantly to the field through their telling and other work.
7. Finally, SAC has a good relationship with the National Storytelling Network and members get discounts on NSN programs.

2016 was the last year of the highly regarded Bay Area Storytelling Festival (BASF) of which SAC was the non-profit sponsor of BASF. Different members of SAC and the Board as a whole are looking at different options to fill the hole that has been left by the closing of the festival.

For more information about SAC membership and activities, visit www.storysac.org.

My role on the Board was to assist in the activities of the Membership Committee and also strategize with the whole Board on developing some of the activities mentioned above. My participation was limited by travel, illness and an unexpected workload, but is ongoing and I hope to contribute more in the remaining year of my Board membership. I invite – actually, urge – all the amazing storytellers at Stagebridge to join SAC and support the organization and explore its benefits and networking possibilities.

Telling Indian and Middle Eastern stories

As a practicing Sufi, it surprises me that Mulla (Hodja, Uncle) Nasruddin stories are not better known. And then again, it doesn't. Nasruddin stories, which appear to be just humorous “Wise Fool” and “Trickster” tales, are hidden lessons in deep listening and watching how the mind works — poorly. Telling the tales so they register and stay in people's minds, at the same time inviting them to look at the deeper levels of meaning, which include showing some of what are called Cognitive Biases, is a sort of mission with me. And, not to be holy about it, I love getting dressed up, telling the stories, getting a laugh and trying to expand my range in terms of style, experiment, surrealism, and learning from audiences how to tell better.

“The Hindu God of Love” (really a poor description of the depth – width – range and revolutionary philosophy within the mythology) called Krishna is a deity like no other. His stories range from early, very naughty childhood through a completely raunchy teenagerhood to mature adult warrior- and kingship. There is delight, shock and profundity of all kinds in his life stories; comparisons with Pan or Dionysus don't do justice to the complexity of Krishna's life and resonance. My goal in telling Krishna stories was to be able to share some of the devotional aspects of love and some subtler, heart-centered erotic aspects of human soul and expression that are missing in many Western myths and stories. At the same time, to also bring Krishna out of the literalistic and chauvinistic traps – and censorship – that conventional Hinduism has created around this very free spirit. I was delighted to share some stories with my class and even one of the most powerful stories at the Marsh. I still hope I get a chance to share Krishna baby and childhood stories with young people in the schools here.

I also told personal stories – mostly about my life but also in Olga's class about my father – to share a taste of the culture I was born and grew up in, to share how we humans are so similar in heart and spirit, even as our cultures develop in different directions in response to the circumstances in which we

land. True not just from country to country but for the many cultures and mini-cultures within our country, something so important for us to hear and recognize in story, and remember again and again so our storytelling comes from a place of generosity and humaneness.

Here is a link to a version of the Persian story of Sohrab and Rustam that I told at Stagebridge workshop

[//www.dropbox.com//sohrab_rustam_story.mov](https://www.dropbox.com//sohrab_rustam_story.mov)

and a link to an audio version of a Krishna story

[//www.dropbox.com/Yashoda_telling Mud-Mouth Story .mp3](https://www.dropbox.com/Yashoda_telling_Mud-Mouth_Story.mp3)