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# Story Swap For Adults in Orinda

*By Sophie Braccini*

Storyteller Jeff Bayers telling tales at the Orinda library Photo Sophie Braccini

It takes a particular set of abilities to make a good storyteller. Storytelling is an art that has much in common with stand-up comedy, but with a touch of poetry. Tellers of tales don't always tell funny stories; in fact the audience often seems to be longing more for semi-sweet tales with a philosophical bent. But what makes a good story is definitely the punch line, that final sentence that summarizes the whole tale, gives it a slightly different twist, brings an unexpected ending, or is the prelude to yet another story to come. At the Orinda Library on Thursday, August 28, there were plenty of great endings delivered by excellent raconteurs, who had assembled to keep alive the ancient tradition of telling stories. Every fourth Thursday of the month, adults are invited to meet at the Orinda Library, in a side room in the hallway, for two hours (7-9pm) and share their tales. There is a whole community of story swaps in the Bay Area, and according to Jeff Bayers, that night's featured teller, Orinda has the best swap in the region. The twenty or so people present last week all seemed to know each other. One might have felt, upon arrival, the self-conciousness embarrassment of having inadvertently crashed a private party. It soon became clear that there were many new comers, including people from out of the area, and that the group was very friendly and inclusive. Sally Holzman and two friends started this group, which is supported by the Orinda Library, six years ago. As the evening began, she proposed a theme. All in

attendance were invited to tell a brief story to illustrate the theme: a "Wow" moment. Some were clearly experienced storytellers, and every story had its own charm and flair of authenticity. There were a few Yosemite moments, trips abroad, Grand Canyon, and wild animal tales. No comments were made; it was just for the pleasure of sharing. Then Bayers started to spin his tales. There is something very specific in the enjoyment of story telling. Maybe it reminds us of times gone by, when our parents read to us, and like children we do not resist being taken away to the world that is opened to us. Renown storytellers have a gift that is not given to everyone, the ability to create mental images and feelings in the minds of others. Bayers made the listener hope his mother would find her true love again, fly with the parrot Viskovitz, fight with young Hamed in Egypt, and struggle with grief alongside widower Jonathan. Bayers is a modest story teller, he does not use a lot of body language, but his expression is animated, his voice smooth and there is always a twinkle in his eye that tells you the story might be true, but maybe not. Or as another storyteller, Jim, put it, "This is a true story, with embellishment." Jim told a funny childhood story. He was one of six tellers who are regulars in Orinda and the community of storytelling. Some are consummate actors and literally play their story, like Eileen, who took us on a hunting trip in the mountains of Virginia. Others were more sober, nonetheless charming, like cowboy Billy who tells humorous poems about ranchers and wild life. At the end of the evening, announcements were made of coming events from San Francisco to Pleasanton. In Orinda, the next free event will be on September 25, with the theme "remember when." All listeners are welcome. The Storytelling Association of Alta California has a web site: www.storySAAC.org

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com



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