

WOMEN'S WEEKLY B

SECTION

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The art of storytelling

Anne Jennison announces release of 'Hummingbird'

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For many beyond the age of elementary school, it may be hard to remember the last time you were able to relax and listen to someone tell you a story. Yet, storytelling is an important part of the daily lives of people around the world.

"Many of the stories we are told as children help in the shaping of our attitudes and beliefs about who we are and who we will become as a people," said Anne Jennison, a professional storyteller, writer, and cultural educator of European and Abenaki heritage.

Jennison has announced the release of her first professionally produced audiocassette storytelling tape, "Hummingbird: Native American Stories of the Wind Dancer." The tape has been recorded in conjunction with Jennison's independent graduate studies program in Storytelling at Lesley College in Cambridge.

"Still very prevalent in many regions of the world as a form of communication, storytelling in America seems to have found itself pushed to the kids' section of entertainment," said Jennison. With many schools, libraries, playhouses and coffee houses offering professional storytellers, there does, however, seem to be a revival of storytelling in the United States.

Storytelling as an oral tradition is as much a part of history as history itself. "Cultures have been able to maintain themselves through the passing on of stories that have not been bound to one time or place," said Jennison. "Storytelling is the most essential form of conversation we have as a people — humans think in concepts of stories."

Jennison first began telling

Northeast Woodlands stories to teach her daughters about their Abenaki heritage. She has since expanded her repertoire to include stories from all over Turtle Island.

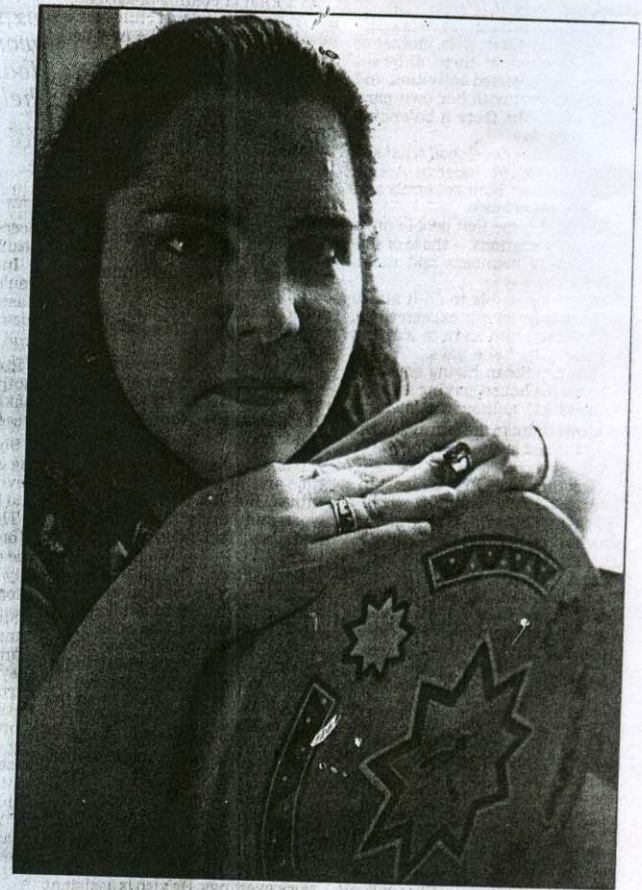
"Telling Native American stories has given me the opportunity to understand my own heritage and pass it on to my children and even my mother; it's really enlightened us all," said Jennison.

Jennison and her husband were called upon to book some storytellers in conjunction with their entertainment agency in the early '80s. Finding the experience very pleasing, Jennison began exploring her own possibilities as a storyteller. "It seemed to combine all of my interests: religion, anthropology, education, entertainment — storytelling became an answer for me to do it all." Jennison wondered aloud if storytelling found her more than she found it.

Needing a "voice" for her graduate work, Jennison looked for what seemed natural. Jennison and her husband, both members of the Baha'i International Community, believers in a relationship between a man and a woman that is like the two wings of a bird — both wings need to be even for the bird to fly straight, together own Hummingbird Farm in Lee. For them, the hummingbird has desirable attributes. "The hummingbird is fearless and bold, and in most cases, sacred and a doer of magic, a peacemaker and symbol of unity," explained Jennison.

"Hummingbird: Native American Stories of the Little Wind Dancer," is a project that has been close to Anne's heart for many years.

"The stories of Hummingbird are as elusive and magical as Hummingbird itself, but when Hummingbird shows up in a story, something wonderful is about to happen. It is safe for me to say that there is something just wonderful about each of the six stories that I finally chose to in-



Staff photo by Ryan Mercer

Anne Jennison talks about the release of her audiocassette "Hummingbird: Native American Stories of the Wind Dancer." The tape has been recorded in conjunction with Jennison's independent graduate studies program in Storytelling at Lesley College in Cambridge.

clude. The stories are from North American and Central American Native cultures," said Jennison.

So far, Jennison has been met with a great response to her work and she is very optimistic about the future. "Kids already know how to listen to stories. It's the adults I really enjoy sharing with and seeing how nurturing they

find the experience. I really feel that in the fast-paced world we live in, people are willing to relax and learn how to listen to a story again."

Copies of Anne Jennison's tapes are available at Stroudwater Books and by contacting her business line at 659-3868.