

Sunday Currents

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Wife hangs onto
place settings
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FILM
Documentary reveals
photographer's legacy
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The Free Press, B7, Sunday, November 24, 2024



Photos by Robb Murray

Tell Me a Story events take place in the lower level of the Arts Center of Saint Peter.

TELLING TALES

St. Peter event spins yarns, five minutes at a time



Ben Findley is the MC for Tell Me a Story events.

By Robb Murray
rmurray@mankatofreepress.com

They say the first storyteller lived between 200,000 and 700,000 years ago among the species of human known as homo heidelbergensis.

A resourceful and social lot, the homo heidelbergensis people hunted elephants with spears, built homes in eastern Europe and western Asia out of rocks and wood, and occasionally they gathered around fire hearths.

It's not hard to imagine that, whomever it was who told that first story, may have been looking at an eager collection of onlookers, each on the edge of their seat listening to details of, given the high stakes of life and death, a compelling story of survival.

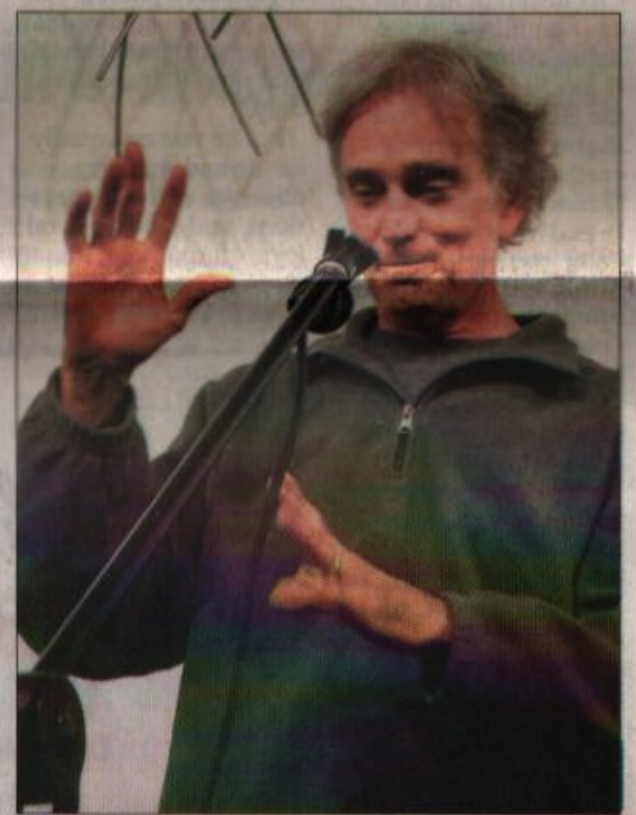
If only that guy could see his creation today.

It's been said that humans are hardwired to best absorb and share information through stories. And nowhere is that truism more on display than in the myriad storytelling podcasts and open-mic events taking place all over the country.

One of them took place this month in St. Peter.

Tell Me a Story, the 6-year-old project from the minds of Marne Stover and Lindsay Prunty, has attracted a solid following of folks who, like the homo heidelbergensis around that hearth eons ago, become rapt in midst of good storytelling.

Stover and Prunty say the idea for Tell Me a Story came from hearing other successful versions, such as the uber popular "Moth Radio." That program, which can be heard anywhere you get podcasts, has brought the idea of open-mic storytelling



Steve Firkins was among the storytellers at the most recent Tell Me a Story.

to the masses and spawned countless other efforts, including this one.

"Something that I particularly love about this event is that it's people in the community that we know or have the opportunity to get to know," Stover says. "Going to an event like Moth Radio lab, you have this privilege of hearing their stories, but you don't have the privilege like you do with Tell Me a Story, to be able to talk to the

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Anti-apartheid photographer's work resurrected by film

By Jake Coyle
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK — When the photographer Ernest Cole died in 1990 at the age of 49 from pancreatic cancer at a Manhattan hospital, his death was little noted.

Cole, one of the most important chroniclers of apartheid-era South Africa, was by then mostly forgotten and penniless. Banned by his native country after the publication of his pioneering photography book "House of Bondage," Cole had emigrated in 1966 to the United States. But his life in exile gradually disintegrated into intermittent homelessness. A six-paragraph obituary in The New York Times ran alongside a list of death notices.

But Cole receives a vibrant and stirring resurrection in Raoul Peck's new film "Ernest Cole: Lost and Found," narrated in Cole's own words and voiced by LaKeith Stanfield. The film, which opened in theaters Friday, is laced throughout with Cole's photographs, many of them not before seen publicly.

As he did in his Oscar-nominated James Baldwin documentary "I Am Not Your Negro," the Haitian-born Peck shares screenwriting credit with his subject. "Ernest Cole: Lost and Found" is drawn from Cole's own writings. In words and images, Peck brings the tragic story of

U.S., Cole was given a Ford Foundation grant to capture Black life in rural and urban areas, but he struggled to find a foothold professionally. Some editors said his images lacked "edge."

In 2017, more than 60,000 of Cole's 35mm film negatives were discovered in a bank vault in Stockholm, Sweden. Much of that material, including thousands of photographs Cole took in the U.S., was believed lost. Answers for how they had gotten there, and why they hadn't been known about earlier were hard to come by. "Lost and Found" portrays the struggle of Cole's estate to acquire the collection. Only on the eve of the film's Cannes Film Festival premiere in May did the bank finally announce the handover of most materials to the estate.

What those photographs reveal is an artist who made much more than indelible images of apartheid life.

Cole's early photographs, published in 1967, offered one of the most illustrative and damning portraits of apartheid to Western eyes, including a widely reproduced photograph of a middle-aged woman sitting on a park bench that read "European's only."

But he was an equally astute and sensitive observer of the segregations, and multicultural joys, of American life.



Robb Murray

The final Tell Me a Story event of the year took place last week at the Arts Center of Saint Peter.

STORIES: The audience is 'there to support and it's a friendly crowd'

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speakers after the fact. And there's a number of times that I've walked up to people after hearing their story and asked for more details or got to tell them that the story connected with me personally."

At the recent event, Steve Firkins crafted a story from a seemingly simple moment in his day. But he says it's not so much what happened; it's more important what meaning you can pull out of a moment and how compellingly you can share it with others.

"We are the stories we tell, and so we have to tell stories, listen to stories, be heard and be seen, have conversations. I think that's happening in the world and in the United States following the election. Everybody is looking at issues now

and asking, 'Can we talk? Can we communicate? Can we get together? Can we have fun telling stories? Can we hear people's differences?'" he says.

"So much of life is kind of boring and bland and forgettable, so it's nice when things happen that are awesome," he says. "Even little things can be awesome. My story was about an ordinary thing every day — seeing sunlight come inside my house unexpectedly. In a weird way, sometimes it's the little things in life that are incredible."

Author Cindy Wilson speaks regularly about her writing and life as an author. But she said she's never done something like Tell Me a Story.

Wilson was one of a handful of so-called

"ringers," or people asked to tell stories in an effort to encourage others. She says she was surprised by her own reaction after she agreed to do it.

"When I was asked to participate, at first I said, 'Sure, I can do that.' And then I thought, 'Oh, what have I done?'" Wilson says. "Talking about books is very different than true story telling. And so I agreed to do it because I thought it would be fun and a new thing. And then I spent a couple of weeks absolutely terrified."

Those nerves, she says, melted away after a few minutes. The vibe in the room was welcoming and warm.

"They're not usually there with the intent of throwing rotten tomatoes at you," she says.

"They're there to support and are excited, and it's a friendly crowd. I really liked the group at St. Peter. Some of them are repeats, and they're growing in their storytelling. So I was learning as I was listening, as well."

Prunty says they understand it can be stressful for people not accustomed to public speaking. By way of tips, she suggests people practice, but not so much that you've memorized it.

Better to have a spontaneous feel rather than a scripted one.

"People come up to me and say, 'I might tell a story, I might not.' And I encourage them to try it. It doesn't have to be 5 minutes long. You can do a short story. There's no pressure," she says.

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