

# The S T O R Y

## Behind the Story

notes from  
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## John Langstaff

**H**ow exciting it was to walk out onto the stage with John Langstaff to the applause of hundreds. After so many years of friendship we were doing a concert together. The crowd was warm and boisterous and joined in to sing the rhythms of "The Herring Shed" and all John's sea chanteys. John's voice rang out clear and strong as an oak tree in summer and bright as red apples in fall.

Long after the concert John and I went to the studio at WGBH in Boston to edit the CD. I delighted in John's editing style. "No, I'm talking too much there. We'll have to cut that. The whole CD should end with "The Herring Shed."

"No," I said. "It's all about the sea. And we want to hear the audience singing with you after 'The Herring Shed.' We want everyone singing as they listen to this CD."

John listened to every note. It had to be just right. What fun we had in the studio that day.

To work with a fellow artist is a rare pleasure for a storyteller. To work with John Langstaff is better than working with Homer and that

would be fun.

John Langstaff, a m e d baritone, is also founder of The Revels. My wife and children first discovered The Revels a quarter century ago at

Harvard University's Sanders Theater. Sanders holds twelve hundred and reminds you of Elizabethan days. Churchill spoke there and it looks a bit like Churchill. It has a three story belly for the audience. The lights went low then John Langstaff stood alone on the stage and began to sing and somehow he had all twelve hundred of us singing. John stood on tiptoes and encouraged us all and we were one.

After the first act, John was doing a Morris Dance and he began to sing Lord of the Dance. Moments later he and the Morris men led hundreds and hundreds of us into the



Jay O'Callahan and John Langstaff. Photo by Chris Bernstein.

great hall in a dance. I had never seen the like. We were not just watching; we were singing and dancing!

We got to know and love John Langstaff. And so did so many others. The Revels spread across the land. The Revels is a solstice celebration of the folk songs, dances, stories and rituals of different cultures. There is always a children's chorus, which always includes one tiny tot who captures everyone's heart.

My daughter Laura and I were part of a Spring Revels years ago, held at the Old South Meeting House in Boston. At intermission we all danced out

onto Washington Street doing the Lord of the Dance. One gentleman who was passing by had evidently had a martini lunch. He stared at us, then threw up his hands, tore off his tie and joined in the dance.

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### HIGHLIGHTS

JOHN LANGSTAFF

CHATEAU NOVEL

SIR ED STIVENDER

It is said John Langstaff's roots go back to Robin Hood. I've no doubt of it. He is magic. I remember one summer night The Revels did a special Boston performance. We saw John afterwards and somehow he knew it was my daughter Laura's birthday. We marched

merrily across Boston Common to Brigham's for a great sundae for Laura. John has a way of making others the star.

All this to say doing a concert with John Langstaff and then having a CD for others to enjoy is one of the very wonderful things about my work.

## A Chateau Novel

Each summer morning at 7 o'clock I walk across the yard to "The Chateau," a fine shed built by my friends Joe Beals and Craig Canning. There is no insulation, electricity or water. It is silent and I write. After an hour I take a break and get some tea. Daisies, sunflowers and a bursting garden greet me. In our tiny pond, the goldfish make me laugh. A frog sits on a lily pad and seems to croak, "This is the life."

Then back to my writing and the world of Harry Hutchison running for Congress in 1950. Minor characters like James Michael Curley, Tip O'Neill and young Jack Kennedy flit like the goldfish in the book. The major char-

acters like Mrs. Lawrence live on Pill Hill where many of my stories are set. I love the work but sometimes think it would be nice to be a frog.

Thirty years ago I left teaching to write a novel. To support myself and my family, I became a caretaker at a YWCA that was situated on a saltwater marsh in Marshfield, Massachusetts. At night I was telling stories to my children and after seven years I took those stories out into the world. The characters in-

trigued me but so did the world of storytelling: the sounds, rhythms, and repetitions. I liked the pacing and the drama of the medium.

I've come full circle in that I'm writing a novel again. I've been reading chapters on the phone to my friend, Marni Gillard. Marni said, "I love hearing you read your book. I'd like to hear the whole thing." I talked to my friend, Doug Lipman, and he suggested that I just record chapters. What an idea!



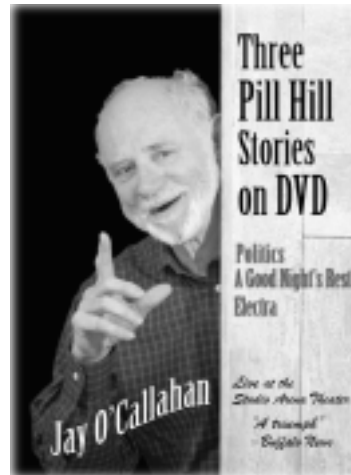
John Langstaff and Jay O'Callahan. Photo by Chris Bernstein.

## DVD! Jay Enters 21st Century

For four weeks last winter, I performed eight shows a week at the 650 seat Studio Arena Theatre in Buffalo, New York. Five minutes before the show began I would get the call "Places. Places please. Thank you." I would walk down the long corridor and Jim Bush would open a door and I would wait in the dark in the wings for the lights to go down and Chopin's Prelude 11

would begin and I would go out on the stage and begin.

I engaged Full Circle Video LLC which has made videos for public TV, to do a three camera shoot. The result was "Three Pill Hill Stories." The camera work is excellent. There is nothing like the sparkle of a live audience. "Electra," "A Good Night's Rest," "Politics." What fun!



On my honor I will try...

## Midsummer Night's Magic

**O**n a lovely June night, Linda and I went to the Arnold Arboretum in Boston to hear Diane Edgecomb tell stories accompanied by Margo Chamberlain on the Celtic harp. We walked and stopped at different trees to hear stories about trees from Japan, Australia, England and Czekoslovakia. It was one of the most moving storytelling nights I've experienced. It reawakened in me and perhaps all of us there, a sense of the spirit in things. This is a deep kind of cour-

tesy; the courtesy of paying attention to whatever is before us, a person, a tree, a flower or a blade of grass.

A magical thing happened. As Diane was telling a story of a Japanese bride we saw not one but two brides a hundred yards away in the Arboretum. As they told another story, there were planes overhead, but a sense of timelessness had come over us and more than that, there was a sense that our accidents of size, sex, shape and color were just that, accidents. We were all one on this summer



*Margo Chamberlain and Diane Edgecombe creating magic*

night. Diane and Margo told, sang and played until dusk, and we all left changed.

## Adventures with Ted & Laura

**T**ed O'Callahan, one of the great adventurers, spent his summer leading a

NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) group in the Wrangell Mountains along the Alaska, Yukon border. Beginning this fall, Ted will spend seven months leading two NOLS groups with Molly Graham in Patagonia. Patagonia is down at the tip of Chili and Argentina. Ted and Molly have shed the ordinary ways in order to wander in the beauty of this planet.

L a u r a O'Callahan has been sign language inter-

preting in Boston and the New England area. She likes the variety of the work. Laura joined a team to interpret at the Boston University graduation. It was held outside on a cold, rainy day. The interpreters were freezing so they all huddled in a sauna for lunch. One day Laura will find herself interpreting socio-linguistic papers at Harvard, the next training a deaf postal worker. And then spending the day with MJ Bienvenu at an American Sign Language conference. She still finds time to create marvelous artwork.



*Ted & Laura don't get to play ball together much anymore...*

## Sir Ed Stivender, Courteous Jongleur

**E**d Stivender, one of the funniest and most delightful storytellers, is a man of great courtesy. His courtesy comes from a deep sense of generosity. Ed calls himself the King of Snap, meaning that when he performs he's present at each moment. When Ed is performing at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, the train will often come by The Railroad Tent. Ed will lift up the flap of the tent and start counting the cars and everyone joins in. Ed welcomes the train and makes it part of the moment.

Like St. Francis, he welcomes all. He is Sir Ed Stivender le Jongleur de Dieu.



*Sir Ed Stivender, Jongleur*

## Snail Mail is Just the Right Speed

*Hello Jay!*

*My family and I live out of town, way out of town. We are completely off the grid, relying on solar for our electricity and wood for our heat. We live at 8500 feet in the beautiful mountains of Northern Arizona. Our cabin is rustic and small, but very cozy. Ever since our daughter was 4, we've looked forward to being together at the end of the day and listening to stories on tape. In her down time, her relaxation time, she listened to Herman and Marguerite, the Gouda, Raspberries, The Island, Petrukian. So did I! Over and over and over and it never got old. Your wonderful voice, and your warmth, was as cozy as the woodstove we gathered round to listen!*

*As she got older, we listened to the Auk on long car trips, and most recently Pouring the Sun. You became a presence in our household, a most welcome guest.*

*If you do decide to go the email route with future newsletters, we'd be unable to come along for the ride. We never want to be out of touch. You mean that much to us.*

*Love,  
Mindy & Marra DeGraff*

## In Memory of John Waldony

John Waldony died July 24, 2004. When I think of John I remember Shakespeare's line, "This was a man."

In April of 1996 while working on a story about the steel-making community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, I met John Waldony. He was 82, handsome and welcoming. John stood up for the workingman. He stood up for justice.

In March of 1941 when there was no union at Bethlehem Steel, John held a picket sign at the Emery Street gate outside of the plant. The Coal and Iron police charged on horseback and clubbed John. Two days later the company gave in and recognized the union for the first time. Lives changed because of that day.

John became President of USAW Local 2599 and later a staff man touring the country for the union. John welcomed me into the Waldony family and thanks to him my story "Pouring the Sun" was born. John is survived by his daughter Joan L. Yelovich, granddaughter Courtney Yelovich and his sister Mary Soltysiak.



Mary Soltysiak, Jay  
and John Waldony

## Raspberries Keep Fresh for Years

Dear Jay,

Several years ago - oh, about 25 - you performed "Raspberries" on a show called "The Spider's Web." At the time, I was a child in Minnesota and as we had no television I was in the habit of listening raptly to each episode. I taped that show (by leaning an old tape deck up against the speaker), and the next one, in which you finished the story.

Over the years, growing up in Minnesota, I listened to that tape so many times it broke. In fact, it broke several times. Each time it did, I carefully opened the cassette and spliced the tape with a tiny bit of scotch tape. This past Christmas, I visited my mother and took the opportunity to dig through some boxes of my things she had packed away in the basement ...where

I found the tape.

I have lovingly copied the recording to a new cassette - and already made two of my friends listen to it. Considering its hard-loved history, it plays with surprisingly little hiss. \*grin\* I've caught one of those friends singing "Raaaaazzzberri-ieees!" as he goes about his work. The other of them gave me some cash to spend as I will for my birthday - coming up on March 13th - and suggested I try to find more of your stories. Thanks to the Internet, I've discovered your website and plan to do exactly that.

I can't begin to thank you enough for the light and joy that one story, "Raspberries," has brought to me over the years. Thanks so much for being a storyteller.

- Vara Lyngklip

## Riki Tiki Tick a Tock! Here We Come!

This summer I had fun discovering an OLD story. I decided I wanted to tell "The Island" at the National Storytelling Festival. I hadn't told it for many years. Imagine my surprise to find that I enjoyed it as much as I did when I wrote it. Originally I had been reading *The Tempest* on vacation and decided to create my own fairies, sprites and magical characters. David Gay created music to add to the story and Catherine Minor's cover put shape to my imagination.



## IN BRIEF

Bernie Libster's CD, *Seven Stories by Gianni Rodari*, is a gift to Americans. Bernie, a brilliant storyteller, translated and tells these seven stories. Libster says, "Rodari is one of the liveliest, most compassionate sensibilities I have ever encountered." Rodari has an amazing imagination. Libster's telling is full of warmth, humor and delight. Email: [bernielibster@optonline.net](mailto:bernielibster@optonline.net)



John Welch's CD, *New England Tales*, is fine. Imagine an uncle who created worlds filled with characters who will begin to walk around your living room and follow you down the street. These stories smell as good as new baked bread. Email: [JWelch2700@aol.com](mailto:JWelch2700@aol.com)



*Portraits From the Pike* is a book of photographs and writing by teens and young adults living in the neighborhood of Columbia Pike in Arlington, VA. These writings and photos reveal the face of the new America. Todd and Paula Endo caused this book to happen. They gather and energize the community in imaginative ways. For information contact Paula Endo at 703-575-8875 or e-mail [tendo@gmu.edu](mailto:tendo@gmu.edu)



Frederick Turner no sooner finished his marvelous novel, *1929*, about Bix Beiderbecke and the jazz age, and then he set off to France. In the wake of the terror of September 11, Turner was drawn to explore the art in the prehistoric caves of France. Turner's book, *In The Land of Temple Caves*, is an artist's extraordinary journey exploring why art is at the heart of the human spirit.

