

# The power of the spoken word still going strong

By Rhonda Van Pelt

Storytelling is as old as the hills and as fresh as spring water, so it's appropriate that the Story Project has taken up residence at SunWater Spa in Manitou Springs.

The programs of 15-minute first-person talks have been drawing appreciative crowds since 2011.

Founder and producer Sharon Friedman sounds like a proud mother as she talks about how it all began.

In the early 1970s, she moved to Colorado Springs from her native Chicago, where she was a teacher.

She found employment doing social work, public relations and various jobs with the CSU Extension Service, and served as managing editor for *The Wellspring*, the region's first women's newspaper. Next came almost 30 years as the associate publisher of *Springs* and *Bon Vivant* magazines, until they folded during the 2008 recession.

Friedman stayed home for a few years designing and selling jewelry "while trying to figure out my next incarnation." One day, she heard local journalist Kathryn Eastburn telling stories on KRCC, Colorado College's public radio station.

"The proverbial lightbulb flickered. I could do that," Friedman said.

She started asking friends what they thought of the idea, and the feedback was positive. The next question: Where to do it?

"One day, while speaking with Don Goede, executive director of the Smokebrush Foundation, he mentioned that he was seeking such an event. I said, 'That's exactly what I'm working on!' A match made in heaven."

The partnership has worked so

well, the Story Project has followed Smokebrush as it has moved to new venues.

"I am so very honored and extraordinarily appreciative of all that they have given to the project: space, PR, interest and stories. With the excellent artistic designing and promotional talent of Nick Baranek, we have succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. I can't thank them enough from the bottom of my heart," Friedman said.

She's also immensely grateful to the people who have told their stories over the years.

Friedman meets with each storyteller for at least two to three hours, helping them shape their stories and prepare for the stage. Sometimes, she'll listen to their stories two or three times.

**We have succeeded beyond my wildest dreams.**

— Sharon Friedman

"I really love hearing individual stories and providing suggestions and helping to craft. These 15-minute stories are very personal and must be true," she said.

"I am honored that people trust me, and they are so proud to get up on stage and share and own their stories. I'm so proud of each person."

She plans the programs two to three months in advance. Usually, she doesn't need to recruit anyone, but she always welcomes new stories and storytellers.

And, of course, the Story Project couldn't have survived without the



Courtesy photo

From left, Michelle Mras, Sharon Friedman, Lyn Harwell, Libby Rittenberg and Nasit Ari participate in a February 2016 Story Project event.

people behind the scenes.

She cited Adam Hawkins, sound engineer, and Patrick McConnell, associate producer, program host and storyteller, for their support. They record a CD of each program, which KRCC (91.5 FM) broadcasts at 7 p.m. first Sundays.

"We are very fortunate to be on our southern Colorado NPR station. We so appreciate (program manager) Jeff Bieri and the new station executive Tammy Terwelp, and the fabulously talented Gregg Bennett who works with Patrick to create our promo on KRCC each month," Friedman said.

She also credited videographer Dave Franklyn for taping each program and sharing them on YouTube. The videos also run on the Pikes Peak Library District's Channel 17 (Comcast) at 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Each Story Project event draws 50 to 100 people and Friedman hopes it will continue to draw storytellers and listeners — with or without her.

She's had dysphonia, a vocal disability, for a few years, and is now dealing with macular degeneration. But she's philosophical about those challenges and remains determined to foster what she calls the "intimate

exchange of learning about each other."

"Stories are who we are, creating memories. Research indicates that stories are being used successfully with people with dementia. After hearing stories, many speak and respond," she said.

"As a species, we have always told stories, verbally, written and drawn on walls. It's our history and our present, and influences our future. They are part of our DNA. The Story Project creates community one story at a time."

## Historical tidbits from Manitou Springs Heritage Center...

**OCT. 9, 1886**

The air compressor for working the drills in the large tunnel above Rainbow Falls has been placed in position and is now in working order. By its use three drills are kept constantly at work at either end of the tunnel and the work of breaking out the rock is made comparatively easy. The length of the tunnel is 580 feet. The contractors expect to have it completed before the first of the year.

**OCT. 26, 1928**

### G.E.S. Sponsors Give Tacky Party

The Girls' Friendly societies were the guests of their sponsors at a tacky party last Friday evening in the St. Andrews crypt.

A large number of invitations had been sent out to the members, and a good crowd was present. Refreshments, consisting of doughnuts, cider and lollypops were handed out to the tramps.

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manitouspringsheritagecenter.org  
or call 719-685-1154.

October is Arts Month, a Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region initiative to celebrate the performing and visual arts. Each week, the Bulletin will publish a story that focuses on a particular art appearing on the Arts Month schedule. The third week highlights poetry, prose and comedy. Information: [www.culturaloffice.org](http://www.culturaloffice.org) or [www.peakradar.com](http://www.peakradar.com).



## IF YOU GO

The Story Project takes place at 7:30 p.m. second Fridays at SunWater Spa, 514 El Paso Blvd. The Oct. 14 program features Electra Johnson, Steve Shapiro, Dr. Tara Alexander and David Prince. Tickets: \$5 (attendees receive a \$5 discount on mineral water soaks before or after the story-telling). Information: [smokebrush.org](http://smokebrush.org) or [thestoryprojectso.wordpress.com](http://thestoryprojectso.wordpress.com).

Patrick McConnell will lead a free storytelling workshop 5:30-7 p.m. Oct. 14, also at SunWater; he plans to continue teaching workshops.

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