

Lower Elwah S’Klallam storyteller, Roger Fernandes will share tribal stories at Festival

"The stories are the message and I am just the messenger. Never confuse the two. The stories were here before me and they will be after me. It is my duty to pass them on to the next generation."
-Roger Fernandes

Eight master tribal storytellers will share traditional stories at the Fourth Annual Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival being celebrated in Portland Friday and Saturday evenings November 13-14 at 7:30 PM, along with a Tribal Storytelling Symposium Sunday afternoon, November 15 at 1:30 PM at Lewis and Clark College’s Agnes Flanagan Chapel, 0615 SW Palatine Hill Road, Portland, OR (97219).

S’Klallam storyteller from the Lower Elwah reservation, Roger Fernandes, an educator and artist from this Coastal Salish group on the Olympic Peninsula will be one of the featured storytellers. Roger moved with his S’Klallam mother and her sister to Seattle when she was a young woman looking for work. Living in the city, he became disconnected from the reservation culture. Despite that, he became dedicated to Indian Education and has been an educator for 30 years. He stepped back into his culture, it was through traditional art. Roger then became involved in storytelling as a traditional Northwest Coastal artist. “I was an artist first doing the native designs. I discovered that to learn the native designs, you had to learn the stories that lead to designs.”

Roger uses Heroes Journey stories to teach people, young and old, through storytelling. He tells them to take their own journey to find their hero who will help them “make sense of the world, because the world is a chaotic place – it is chaos.” In the process they learn how to take that journey between the head and the heart and find their identity and the hero within.

He especially acknowledges elders as that primary source of guidance. “It’s a very important aspect of the journey. You need an elder to guide you – to help you to figure things out. In the story, Elder appears to help you. And so that’s the hero’s journey of transformation – of transforming from one person who’s alone and confused and wandering to a person who has a place in their culture and has an understanding of who they are.”

Roger relates to audiences from all cultures of the world. “These stories remind us of what it means to be a human being. And, not just the native American stories, but the traditional stories from all around the world. So, while I love to learn new native stories, if I can learn an Irish story, I’m going to do that. If I can learn a Bantu story from Africa, I’m going to do that. A Mexican story – I’m going to learn that, too. Because they all speak to us about what it means to be a human being.”

Guest storytellers from Alaska and the Northern Plains will also be sharing inspirational stories from their own rich cultural heritage over the weekend. Events will open with tribal drumming and singing. A Silent Charity Auction will be held during the Friday and Saturday evening festival. You can also attend the Storytellers Symposium on Sunday,

November 15 at 1:30 PM where storytellers from Northwest tribes will share their rich perspectives and colorful experiences about the essential role of storytelling that is contributing to today's cultural renaissance in Indian Country.

Tribal members can request information about Northwest Indian Storytellers Association membership and about the emerging storytellers' workshop being held all day Saturday, November 14 and Sunday, November 15. NISA and workshop registration forms are at www.wisdomoftheelders.org or you can e-mail NISA@wisdomoftheelders.org or call (503) 768-6155. The all day workshop starts at 8 AM on both Saturday and Sunday with breakfast. Saturday events include dinner at 5 PM followed by the festival at 7:30 PM. Sunday events start at 8 AM and go through the Symposium from 1:30 to 4:00 PM. No one will be turned away for lack of funds, but you need to register in advance.

NISA was formed in October 2005 to encourage, preserve and strengthen traditional storytelling among Northwest tribes and to share these gifts with public audiences. NISA was organized by Wisdom of the Elders, Inc., a Portland area non-profit committed to Native American cultural preservation, education, and race reconciliation.

Festival and workshop funding has been provided in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, Regional Arts and Culture Council, & Multnomah County Cultural Coalition. Festival hosts include the Indigenous Ways of Knowing Program at Lewis and Clark College and Wisdom of the Elders, Inc.

Tickets will be available at the door on a sliding scale at Lewis and Clark College's Agnes Flanagan Chapel, 0615 SW Palatine Hill Road, Portland, OR (97219). Driving directions are at <http://www.lclark.edu/visit/directions/>