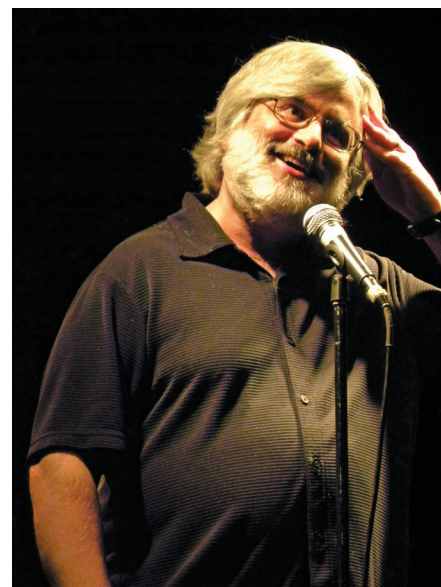


A new kind of "Show and Tell" in Virginia



Better Said Than Done founder Jessica Piscitelli in action at the mic. Photo by Alexander Morozov



Len Kruger tells his first story at July's Jammin' Java show. Photo by David Supley-Foxworth

Q and A with Better Said Than Done

By Lisa Rowan

Somewhere between theater and stand-up comedy lies the ancient folk art of storytelling. It may have gotten a little lost with the advent of technology and our beloved Internet, but several groups have sprung up in the DC area to revive storytelling as a social, interactive event. Determined to get in on the fun, Better Said Than Done has set up shop in Virginia to share stories—always true and always personal.

Better Said Than Done enjoyed its first show in July at Vienna's Jammin' Java, and is prepping for an October charity performance (the group has pledged to do two charity shows a year) at Franklin Park Performing Arts Center in Purcellville. On Tap caught up with founder Jessica Piscitelli and fellow storytellers Adam Ruben and Len Kruger to learn more about the joys of storytelling.

OT: What inspired you to start Better Said Than Done (BSTD)? How did you get involved?

JESSICA PISCITELLI: I have been performing stories myself now for a little over four years. I love it, and I love storytelling in general. My main inspiration comes from the fact that I live and work in Virginia, and there aren't any storytelling shows in VA. So I decided rather than wait for that to happen, I would make it happen.

ADAM RUBEN: I'd been telling stories with a few other groups for a while, and I realized that Jessica was right when she mentioned that Northern VA didn't have an equivalent group. My first experience in Better Said Than Done was similar to my experience in the DC-based storytelling shows, which is good—those provided a really good model for BSTD.

LEN KRUGER: Jessica was looking for a first-time storyteller to put on the bill along with the experienced veterans that she had lined up for the July show. The theme of the show was "Summer Lovin'" and I had a good story about my disastrous attempt to meet women at an anti-pornography workshop in the 1980s. I agreed to do it.

OT: What makes a good storyteller?

JESSICA: I think there are two important aspects to storytelling. One is writing and the other is performing. A good storyteller will understand structure, and how to turn even a little event into a great story. But he or she will also know how to make it relatable to a live audience, which is partly through the writing but also very much through the way it is delivered or performed.

ADAM: A good storyteller can transmit to the audience that sense of "You're totally not going to believe what happened next." It's a natural skill that people all have when telling stories about our lives to our friends at lunch, and the trick is to replicate that in a performance setting.

LEN: I like it when the storyteller tells the story in an informal way, as if he/she is sitting across from you at a table and you're hanging on every word.

OT: What kinds of stories get the best reception?

JESSICA: I don't know if there is a rule of thumb for this. I can say



The tellers of Better Said Than Done after their inaugural show in July.
Photo by David Supley-Foxworth

that when I was new to storytelling, I stuck with humorous stories. As I have gotten more experienced, I have started to perform more personal and sometimes even sad stories. They are much harder to pull off because people like to laugh, but some of the best feedback I have gotten has been on my heavier stories. I think the most important element to a good story is that it be somewhat universal...even if the details are different, the best stories seem to be the ones where people walk away saying "I know exactly what she meant."

OT: How does the Better Said Than Done team work together?

JESSICA: Each show has its own theme. Each performer for each show writes a story around that show's theme. So, although our stories are individualized and separate, they tie together based on the theme of the show.

LEN: We had a rehearsal the week before [the July show]—we ran through our stories and gave each other feedback. As a first-timer, I got some great tips from the others who had all done this many times before.

OT: Does storytelling come with embarrassing moments?

JESSICA: I will say that many of the stories we tell stem from embarrassing moments. That feeling, the feeling of being embarrassed, is a very strong emotion and something everyone has experienced, so it makes for a great center of a good story.

LEN: Obviously, if you're trying to be funny and nobody laughs, that would be about as embarrassing as it gets.

OT: What can the audience look forward to at your October 23rd show?

JESSICA: We are actually putting this show on to benefit two non profits – the Community Coalition for Haiti as well as the Integrative Family Medicine Foundation. Our nonprofits requested a theme based around health so we came up with "What's Up Doc? – Stories about Feeling Bad, Getting Better and Everything in Between." Some tellers have stories about being sick, or dealing with sick family members, and some tellers have stories about the road to recovery—mental, spiritual or physical. But it's all in good fun.

ADAM: These fundraiser shows are sometimes the best ones, because you have an audience that hasn't necessarily seen a storytelling show before, so you might get some people interested in live storytelling who might never have considered it otherwise. I'm looking forward, as always, to seeing the audience's reactions to our stories.

Check out Better Said Than Done at the Franklin Park Performing Arts Center on October 23rd. For more information and to buy tickets visit: www.bettersaidthandone.com

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