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[Photos and videos from past performances are available on request.]



Who Tells Our Story

Better Said Than Done Presents the Women's Storytelling Festival, in Northern Virginia

October 29, 2019 -- Fairfax, Virginia -- The Women's Storytelling Festival, hosted by Better Said Than Done, will take place March 13-14, 2020, in Fairfax, Virginia. Though storytelling festivals have been a popular event in the US for over 40 years, this will be the first ever storytelling festival with a lineup composed exclusively of women. For time, location, other details, and tickets, visit bit.ly/2020storytellingfestival.

Megan DuBois, the Cultural Arts Manager for the City of Fairfax, says, "The City of Fairfax is so excited to host the Women's Storytelling Festival this spring. Through the sharing of stories, we learn more about ourselves, our differences and similarities. Through sharing these stories, we build community, which is what making art in Fairfax is all about!"

The Women's Storytelling Festival kicks off Friday, March 13, 2020, with a showcase of local, woman storytellers at The Auld Shebeen, 3971 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax, Virginia 22030. On Saturday, March 14, 2020, featured storytellers Sheila Arnold, Megan Hicks, Vijai Nathan, Jessica Robinson, Donna Washington, and Kim Weitkamp will perform a range of true, folk, and historical stories throughout the day at Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030. In addition, there will be a story swap at Old Town Hall, as well as two show-producer showcase performances at The Auld Shebeen, featuring producers from The Moth, The Stoop, and Story Collider, and more. [Performer bios follow this release.]

Megan Hicks, one of the featured storytellers in the festival, explained her excitement about the new festival. "Explicitly creating a Women's Festival is a tacit indication that a slice of demographic pie that has been historically marginalized is going to be in the spotlight this time -- that 'dominant male culture' is not the default setting for this event. The more I ponder this fact, the more excited I get about participating."

"Though women have a very distinct way of looking at culture, almost everything that is projected about life, ideas, right and wrong, is brought to our culture through the male gaze," adds Donna Washington, another featured performer. "If we continue to see everything through the eyes of only one gender, nothing that needs correcting,

fixing, or addressing will ever be addressed, fixed or corrected. Women's voices are different because women see different things. Our voices matter. Our stories matter. It is time to set them free."

"In April of 2017, Better Said Than Done produced the first of many storytelling shows under the theme of Roar: True Tales of Women Warriors, featuring a lineup exclusively of women," says Jessica Robinson, Founder of Better Said Than Done. "Rather than fill the void of stories by women and for women, Roar started a snowball effect, of more and more people coming forward and saying, 'Thank you for sharing your stories. We want more.' And the best way I could think to open storytelling up to even more women was to host a festival celebrating their voices."

Gayle Turner, President of VASA (Virginia Storytelling Alliance), one of the festival's sponsors, had this to say about the importance of this festival at this time, "Representing more than half the world's population, women's voices are still underrepresented in the public dialog. Providing a forum where women can see themselves on the stage and hear stories that matter to them may encourage others to step up, speak out, and exercise their influence. At the least, it's a step in the right direction." He added, "VASA is privileged to throw our support behind this groundbreaking event. Our culture is richer when everyone's voice is heard."

The festival brings together 19 storytellers from all over the country, and from many different storytelling backgrounds. Vijai Nathan describes her style of storytelling as "Hilarious, true, personal narrative? Comedy storytelling?" Donna Washington is "primarily a traditionalist who specializes in folklore and literary narrative." Megan Hicks claims to "have made peace with the fact that I have no storytelling niche. The stories I tell are stories that have bit me on the butt and won't let go or that have grabbed my heart and demanded I give them voice. Personal narrative, historical fiction, second-hand personal narrative, folklore, parody, literary stories. This is what they all have in common: they are stories I have crafted for spoken word performance." Festival attendees will find a range of stories and storytelling styles featuring diverse experiences and cultures.

Join Better Said Than Done's Jessica Robinson, an additional 5 featured storytellers, and 12 showcase performers for the inaugural Women's Storytelling Festival in the City of Fairfax, Virginia on March 13 and 14, 2020. Festival tickets are on sale now at <http://bit.ly/2020storytellingfestival>. The stories are intended for a mature audience; people of all gender identities are welcome to attend.

"I love stories about women. I love stories about strong women," says Donna Washington. "I love the idea of being part of a festival that celebrates both. I hope the audience comes away with a love for stories, and perhaps a different way of thinking

about some of the things they take for granted. Mostly, I hope they love the tales and want to hear more.”

Better Said Than Done *usually* defines storytelling as the art of performing a true, personal story in front of a live audience. Most importantly, storytelling is a performance, an art, a form of entertainment, and, from our mouths, a reality the audience will not forget. **Better Said Than Done, Inc.**, was launched in May 2011, by **Jessica Piscitelli Robinson**, to bring the art of storytelling to Northern Virginia. For more information on upcoming shows, storytellers, or workshops, please visit <http://bettersaidthandone.com>.

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Featured Storyteller Bios:

Master Storyteller **Sheila Arnold (Hampton, VA)** has been a full-time Storyteller since 2003, sharing a variety of “whatever fits in her mouth” stories. She travels throughout the country providing Stories, Historic Character Presentations, Christian Monologues and Professional Development for Educators to schools, churches, libraries, organizations and Storytelling Festivals. Sheila is often interactive and many times intersperses stories with song. Sheila has been a featured storyteller at several Virginia Storytelling Festivals including: Sounds of the Mountain (Fincastle), Tucker-Arnold Annual Storytelling Concerts (Williamsburg), Hearts Afire (Richmond), Sea to Shore Storytelling Festival (Norfolk) and Colonial Williamsburg Storytelling Festival. She has also participated in Storytelling Festivals in Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Kansas, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Tennessee. Sheila did a variety of jobs prior to full-time Storytelling: a Colonial Williamsburg Manager and Theatrical Interpreter, Social Worker for aggressive adolescents with emotional problems, an in-house Residential Counselor, a tour guide, pizza delivery person, and Receptionist. Read more at MsSheila.org.

Megan Hicks (Media, PA) was born in the Texas oilfields during the Baby Boom to two survivors of the Great Depression -- a fighter pilot and a war bride. She graduated from high school during the Nixon Era -- when the Watts Riots, the Free Speech Movement, the Black Panther Movement, and the Vietnam War were breaking news. While she never had first-hand experience with any of these events, they leave indelible marks on her storytelling. As a self-proclaimed Teller-Without-a-Niche, Megan dives heart-first into every story -- fairy tale, personal narrative, American history, parody, ghost, humor -- and magically, her listeners are happy to follow. She performs throughout North America and has toured in Latin America (twice!), New Zealand, and China (twice!) Her awards include a Parents’ Choice® Silver for the CD, “What Was Civil About That War...” which was named an Audies® finalist in the category of Best Original Work. Her other award-winning recordings include fairy tales, fractured fairy tales, personal stories, and ghost stories. She has several stories that she can’t tell at family festivals. She hopes to tell some of them at the Women’s Storytelling Festival.

Read more at MeganHicks.com.

Ms. **Vijai Nathan (Maryland)** is one of the leading Indian-American comedians - making people laugh across America and internationally too! She's performed stories for NPR's "Snap Judgment" and "Invisibila" live. Her writing is currently featured in *The Washington Post Magazine's* Date Lab. You can catch her on an episode of Netflix's "Lady Dynamite," starring comedy legend Maria Bamford, and in the film "Meet the Patels," an *Oprah Magazine* pick that *Variety* calls "sharp" and "riotously funny." Vijai was honored to be chosen to open for comedy legend Arsenio Hall; she has also opened for international juggernaut Russell Peters and is one of his top "two South Asian comics to watch." Russell featured Vijai in his first nationally-televised Christmas special in Canada. In February 2013, CBS Online called Vijai one of the best comics in DC. Vijai has performed throughout the US and has been featured at festivals in Montreal, Singapore, South Africa, London, and Trinidad. She has the honor of being one of the few South Asian artists to be invited to perform at the Kennedy Center, Smithsonian, Library of Congress, and Constitution Hall in Washington DC. Vijai's humor springs from her experiences of growing up as a "foreigner" in America -- despite the fact she was born and raised in a suburb of Washington DC. She lovingly and hilariously talks about growing up as an Indian in America, dating, cultural clashes with her parents, and the racism she dealt with as a child and now as a comedian. Read more at VijaiComedy.com.

Jessica Robinson (Fairfax, VA) began performing stories in front of audiences in 2007, performing for Better Said Than Done, The Moth, Story District, The Grapevine, Perfect Liars Club and GMU's Fall for the Book Festival, and at such venues as Jammin' Java, Epicure Café, The Auld Shebeen, Atlas Performing Arts Center, The Miracle Theater, the City of Fairfax Library, The National Women's Equality Monument, the National Mall, Dance Place, and Franklin Park Performing Arts Center. Jessica performed at Exchange Place at the International Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee in 2018, and at the Susquehanna Folk Festival Liar's Competition in 2019. Jessica is co-author of the anthology *Roar: True Tales of Women Warriors*, which won Honors in the 2019 Storytelling World Awards. She is the author of the novel *Caged*, published in 2016 under pen name J.P. Robinson. Jessica has led storytelling workshops for individuals as well as INOVA Fairfax Hospital, Marie Stopes International, George Washington University, AHRQ, and the World Bank. Read more at Betersaidthandone.com/storyteller.

Donna Washington (Durham, NC) is an internationally known master storyteller, artist educator, and published author who has been performing for audiences of all ages for over thirty years. She is renowned for her storytelling for both children and adults, from poignant and funny fables about the human condition to racy relationships stories to spine tingling tales of terror. She has performed for groups from intimate house parties to school classrooms to 2000-seat festivals and theaters. Donna's nine storytelling CDs

have garnered twenty-six national awards. She has authored numerous articles about storytelling and education including her very popular blog Language, Literacy & Storytelling. She is also the author of four children's books: *Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa*, *A Pride of African Tales*, *The Story of Kwanzaa*, and *A Big Spooky House*. She travels all over the world performing and giving workshops but she lives with her husband and two cats in Durham, North Carolina. Read more at DLWStoryteller.com.

Kim Weitkamp (Ohio) grew up as the red-headed middle child of exhausted parents. Her childhood adventures with story were shaped by T.V.'s Sanford & Son, All in the Family, and M.A.S.H., plus the old worn-out fairy tale collection she read over and over. Add to that her father's love of Johnny Cash and old-time radio shows being played throughout the house and the dye was cast. The results of these influences show up in her work time and time again. In her work as a humorist, storyteller, singer, and songwriter, she has taken home an armload of awards and recognitions. Kim currently has nine albums, seven of them award-winning audio collections, the latest being "Monkey Bars, Middle Age, and Other Natural Disasters." Her material is played regularly on NPR affiliate stations and on SiriusXM Radio. Kim travels the continent full time performing at theaters and at festivals. She has hosted a successful morning show and has given keynotes for some of Forbes most recognized companies and high-profile national non-profits. She has received the Blue Ridge Excellence in the Arts Award, the Toastmasters International Leadership in Communication Award, and seven Storytelling World Awards. Read more at: KimWeitkamp.com.

Show Producers Showcase Bios

DC-area native, writer, storyteller, and DC Regional Producer of *The Moth*, **Natalie Amini** has storytelling in her blood, circulating the best of her family's abilities to narrate life. She grew up listening to her father share stories of surviving the Islamic revolution in Iran, while her mother shared endless chronicles of what coming to America from La Paz, Bolivia, was like and the challenges she faced as an immigrant. It's no wonder with her rich and diverse cultural background, she comes ready to share life stories. Natalie works as a HUD certified housing counselor at a local non-profit, dedicated to helping DC residents overcome homelessness and the negative effects of gentrification. She produces live comedy and storytelling events at night, including a biweekly Story SLAM event for The Moth. *The Moth* is a non-profit group based in New York City dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling. Founded in 1997, the organization presents a wide range of theme-based storytelling events across the United States and 27 cities around the world. The Moth Story SLAM events are open-mic style story competitions, where anyone is welcome to sign up to share a 5-minute true and personal story around the theme of the night. You can hear stories told at The Moth on The Moth Radio Hour on WAMU 88.5 on Friday nights at 9 PM and Saturdays at 4 P<. For more information please visit themoth.org.

Fanny Crawford spent her childhood absorbing family stories, political history, and cross-cultural perspectives from an extended circle of loquacious urban, rural, and multi-lingual relatives and friends, arriving in western Maryland in early adulthood. Retiring seven years ago from a 50-year career focused on children, health, and education, she parlayed her passion for storytelling into a repertoire of historical narratives, world folk tales, original stories, and tall tales for a wide variety of audiences, including regional historical associations, story festivals, house concerts, libraries, and most recently the Garrett Lakes Mountain Chatauqua. In 2014, Fanny Crawford founded the *Stories In The Round* series in Hagerstown, Maryland, sponsoring more than 55 performances so far by regional and nationally renowned storytellers including humorist Andy Offutt Irwin, environmentalist Jim May, traditional Lakota-Apache teller Dovie Thomason, historical interpreters Anakwale Anansesemfo and Sheila Arnold, Maryland poet Susan Gordon, feminist chronicler Ellouise Schoettler, and the dean of American storytelling Donald Davis.

Jane Dorfman's stories draw from Celtic, traditional, and mythic sources, with a fair number of personal stories thrown in. Originally from New Orleans, her background flavors her stories. She has told at Speak! Storytelling Series, Stone Soup Festival as a new voice, the National Storytelling Conference Fringe, many local festivals and libraries, and, stepping out of her comfort zone, at The Susquehanna Liar's Contest. She has two CDs, *The Man Who Had No Story* -- fresh versions of Celtic tales and the Brothers Grimm, and *Tales From the Arabian Nights* -- lesser known tales, risqué, but fun. *Voices-in-the-Glen* is a Storytelling Guild for the Greater Washington, DC area. Our goal is to promote the art of storytelling in all its forms. Begun in 1984, the group holds story swaps once a month at 7:30 PM on a Saturday evening in a home, generally alternating between Maryland and Virginia, with an occasional swap in DC for variety. Swaps are free, open to tellers and listeners, and feature potluck snacks. We also organize workshops and keep one of the most up-to-date storytelling calendars in the area. See our website <http://voicesintheglen.org/> for the calendar, lists of tellers, articles, and links.

Ellouise Schoettler is a storytelling veteran known for seeking, researching, and writing stories of unknown women by blending personal experiences, memories, and history. "My goal is to bring the characters to life, not just to tell narratives about them." She tells her story programs coast to coast for adult audiences at festivals, colleges, libraries, and genealogical societies. For two years (2017-18), she toured Maryland telling "Ready to Serve," her story of 64 Maryland nurses who served in France with the Johns Hopkins Base Hospital #18 during World War One. Since 2010, Ellouise has written and introduced 6 new one-woman shows at the Capital Fringe in Washington, DC. Ellouise also produces and performs "Stories in Time," every week on Montgomery Municipal Cable TV, Channel 16.

Meghann Shutt is a native Baltimorean and has been telling stories on front porch stoops, around campfires, and in kitchens all of her life. She began telling stories on the stage in 2009 with *The Stoop Storytelling Series* in her native Baltimore. She loves combining stories and improv comedy, making up story songs, and hearing incredibly true tales from strangers. She is a writer, Pisces, ENFP, feminist, and quintessential middle child. *The Stoop Storytelling Series* is a Baltimore-based live show and podcast that features “ordinary” people sharing the extraordinary, true tales of their lives. The mission of The Stoop is to build community through the sharing of personal stories.

Stoop stories are not memorized, performed, or read. They’re shared. Stoop shows are intimate and surprising, wonderful and weird, hilarious and heartbreaking. Since its founding in 2006, The Stoop has featured the tales of more than 2,500 people onstage -- including notable citizens such as Congressman Elijah Cummings, “Wire” creator David Simon, activist DeRay Mckesson, and Senator Barbara Mikulski. The Stoop is led by founders, hosts, and producers: Laura Wexler and Jessica Henkin.

Maryam Zaringhalem is a molecular biologist who traded in her pipettes for the world of science policy and advocacy. She is a Senior Producer for *Story Collider* and a leadership team member of 500 Women Scientists. She comes to DC from the concrete jungles of New York, where she received her PhD from The Rockefeller University. Her words have appeared in *Slate*, *Scientific American*, and *The Washington Post*. Her cat is named Tesla, after Nikola and not Elon Musk's car. [The Story Collider](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to true, personal stories about science through our weekly podcast and our live shows around the world. The Story Collider believes that now, more than ever, science is a part of everyone’s lives. We believe that everyone has a story about how science has impacted them -- whether they’re physicists or comedians, neuroscientists or writers, geologists or cops, doctors or bartenders -- and that those stories, whether heartbreaking or hilarious, have the power to transform the way we think about science and to whom it belongs.