

MAINE WELL-BEING
1 FORE ST.,
PORTLAND ME 04101
(207) 874-6434
Fax: (207) 772-4736
Email: mwellbeing@ime.net

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Joseph Campbell Folklore Festival

By Rose Mary Denman

Ever since Bill Moyers produced a six hour series of inter-views with him, Joseph Campbell has come to be known widely for his contributions to the world of mythology. I can still

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Storyteller Genevieve Aichele

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remember the first time I went to see "Star Wars" with my son. It was in the late 70's, and I left the theater feeling like I had just come away from one of the most spiritual movies I had ever seen, including "The Ten Commandments"! A freshman seminary student at the time, I was very disappointed when my classmates hadn't seen any spiritual symbolism in the movie at all. ("Not unless you want to count the illusive 'May the Force be with you' reference" they smirked.) Their comments left me feeling a bit wobbly about my ability to read a movie. Secretly, however, I stuck to my opinion.

Ten years later, I was set free of my self-doubt — my original impression vindicated as I watched Joseph Campbell talk about the "Power of Myth" with Moyers, and how the "Star Wars" trilogy was a good example of our need to explore new ways to express that which is common to all humankind. This trilogy "has to do with the powers of life and their reflection through man," Campbell explained.

Before his death in 1987, Joseph Campbell was one of the world's leading mythologists. He spent his life studying the great myths of human cultures throughout recorded history, and found a common thread running throughout — our deep desire to understand our universe, ourselves and our relationship to that universe, and our need to interpret our universe through the telling of story.

Keepers of the Lore is about story, and was founded by a small handful of people living in the Milford, NH area. Paul and Marguy Nelson, along with Medicine Story, Odds Bodkin, Molly Scott and Patrick Gillam started the group in 1993. They met every Wednesday evening to share personal stories, seeking to understand their universe and themselves. That very

same year, they held the first Keepers of the Lore, Joseph Campbell Festival of Myth, Folklore and Story.

This past June 21st, they hosted their fifth annual festival, and over 1,300 were in attendance. Because they are a non-profit organization they were able to keep the cost of tickets for adults at an affordable \$8 for the



Storyteller Randy Armstrong

entire day's festivities. And because it was Father's Day, dads who accompanied their children to the festival were given free admission. The celebration began at 1 p.m. at Union Square in Milford. Six venues close to and surrounding the square were chosen to accommodate the storytellers. Each venue offered five, one-hour opportunities for audience members to listen to, watch and, at times, even be involved in the telling of stories.

Nearly everything about the festival

was well planned and managed. Each new offering began on the hour and ended between 45 and 50 minutes later. This gave audience members an opportunity to walk to another nearby venue if the next event they wanted to attend was in another location. Deciding which events to go to was the most difficult part of the day! There were more than 16 storytellers and groups performing over the afternoon. I found myself needing to choose a maximum of five from among them!

There were the famous among the storytellers — performers like Odds Bodkin, Randy Armstrong and Genevieve Aichele. There were the more local "Keepers of the Lore" like Medicine Story, a Native American elder, teacher, author and tradition bearer of the Wampanoag nation who lives in New Hampshire. There were children telling the story of their Hindu tradition through dance, and a troupe of six Japanese festival drummers — from, of all places, Burlington, Vermont — performing "Taiko" drumming.

My next delight was to listen to Randy Armstrong and Genevieve Aichele, just back the night before from performing in England. Armstrong stood among a myriad of instruments, all used for effect, as he and Aichele told wondrous tales — most asking for audience participation — all about respect, wonder, courage and compassion.