

Story spinners



SARAH REINGEWIRTZ / STAFF

STORY LAND: Carl Weintraub is the founder of "We Tell Stories" and owner of Firefly Bistro in South Pasadena. "We Tell Stories" is a theater troupe that travels and tells stories and folktales in schools and libraries.

Troupe shares tales with community youth

WE TELL STORIES

3 to 8 p.m. Tuesday

The Haunted Festival
Old Los Angeles Farmers Market
Avenue 58 and North Figueroa Street
Los Angeles

By Amanda Baumfeld

Staff Writer

Carl Weintraub of South Pasadena began telling stories as soon as he was able to talk.

The 64-year-old carried his love for words and acting throughout his life. It led to the start of "We Tell Stories," a non-profit acting group based in Los Angeles.

The group of artists work to connect young audiences with storytelling and the theater. The stories are classic myths, legends, fairy tales, and literature. They perform at schools, parks, museums and libraries, among other locations.

"We really want to exercise our craft as well as tell stories to kids," Weintraub said. "And we want to find good stories to tell to the kids."

The idea for the company was prompted during Weintraub's days as a probation officer in the 1970s. Living in Warwick, New York, he worked with juvenile delinquent boys.

"We were living in this community and there was nothing for the kids to do," Weintraub said. "I got together a bunch of people . . . We took some folk tales, worked them up and performed them for kids in the community."

Seven years later, Weintraub was living in Venice. A school that his daughter was attending wanted to put on productions for children. Weintraub mentioned his performances in New York to a faculty member at the school.

The plans for the shows fell through, but the faculty member remembered Weintraub. He asked him to go to an interview with him at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to discuss theater for children.



Weintraub brings audience volunteers into his story while performing.

Weintraub agreed but said the guy never showed up. So he had to wing it through the whole interview. He made up the name "We Tell Stories" on the spot and referenced his days in New York.

"I hadn't even thought about it before I walked in the room," Weintraub said. "I reached back seven years and I told them one of the stories we performed. And they asked if I could give them a show in two weeks."

And, "We Tell Stories" began.

In business for more than 25 years, the Weintraub group evolved and grew into a success. For the first nine years, the company doubled its performances every year, Weintraub said.

Today the company averages more than 5,000 shows a year. It employs a staff of eight and has about 30 actors. "We Tell Stories" also performs workshops for teachers and students.

The group's next performance is on Tuesday at the old Los Angeles Farmers Market's Haunted Festival.

They will be performing three shows that relate to Halloween, according to Marketing Director Lisa Grissom.

Those at "We Tell Stories" are part of a big family. They credit Weintraub with being a natural leader and love being part of the success of the company.

"We inspire kids to just create; see a show and see us in our makeshift costumes and props and say 'I can do that,'" said Diana Tanaka, artistic director. "We talk directly to them. We demystify theater."

Weintraub has made guest appearances on shows such as "Days of our Lives" and "ER." He owns the Firefly Bistro in South Pasadena with his daughter.

But his real love is the magic of storytelling and watching words come to life.

"You know the story you're going to tell — you just don't exactly know how you're going to do it," Weintraub said. "In a way you have to absolutely trust in the magic and at the same time you realize if you don't work the magic isn't going to happen."