

Couple feels

Jan Andrews and Jennifer Cayley on Ontario tour telling tales for adults

Posted By GREG BURLIUK, WHIG-STANDARD STAFF WRITER

Posted February 21, 2009

When you think of storytellers, usually what springs to mind is a group of pre-schoolers listening raptly on the floor of a library to a lively tale of dragons or other fanciful creatures.

However Jan Andrews and Jennifer Cayley believe in story-telling for adults and to prove it, they're touring their show, *A Book of Spells*, in various cities across Ontario.

They will be in Kingston for two performances at the Wellington Street Theatre on Sunday.

The pair have a lot of experience as storytellers with more than 40 years experience between them. Andrews is also an author of children's books but became exposed to storytelling when she was asked to create a storytelling program for Vancouver's Expo 1986.

"I was amazed by the real power of it," she says. "It was one of those art forms that had dropped off the map but people have begun to reclaim it and reshape it."

Now she is a fervent disciple of it. "Storytelling is a very simple and direct form of communication between the teller and the audience," Andrews says.

"A good storyteller should appear to be conjuring the tale so that it comes alive in the room, as if it's really happening right there in front of the listener. "

The backbone of the show is made up of two stories from *A Book of Spells*, a short story collection by British author Sara Maitland.

"The stories reflected the difference between Jen and I and helped us with our relationship," says Andrews. "This show is really our love story."

Each of the women were married with children when they met.

"At first we'd go out and eat cheap meals and talk about books," says Andrews. "And then we realized we were falling in love."

Families aside, there were problems with the relationship. Andrews was born in Great Britain during the Second World War, and had a fierce survivors' let's-get-on-with-it attitude which worried Cayley. And the latter had been abandoned as a child by her mother, which created a whole other set of issues.

The Maitland stories in the show, reflects the storytellers' personalities. Andrews tells one about a remaking of the witch in Hansel and Gretel.

"She survived and is still out there in the forest," Andrews says. "She's grumpy but a benign presence.

"Over the years, she has been giving women abortions and lately she has been giving artificial insemination.

"Witches have had a pretty bad rap over the years. A lot of women were burned at the stake as witches just because they had strong personalities.

"The witch is a fierce old woman and there's a fierceness in me having been born during the war. And for our relationship, we needed some of that fierceness."

The second story told by Cayley also involves witches.

"A woman is about to give birth," says Andrews.

"She was all alone but she was befriended by these two old women who lived at the end of the road.

"They were witches and really good to her. They treated her like someone important. They told her she too could be a witch and fly, she just had to believe in it.

"And so in the end she flies out over London."

And how did the story relate to the storytellers?

"We're two old women now who are living at the end of the road," Andrews says. "And the story is about the power of being able to do things that you believe in."

The couple hatched the idea of doing the show while on a long drive to St. Louis for a storyteller's convention.

The show consists of two 45- minute sets. At the end of the first one the couple are on the verge of separating because of the clash in personalities.

Andrews says she hopes that the show will give inspiration to same-sex couples -or anyone in a relationship.

"Same-sex couples have the same kind of relationship problems that other people do," she says. "We're just people."T

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ESSENTIALS

Who:Ottawa storytellers Jan Andrews and Jennifer Cayley present A Book of Spells based on short stories by Sara Maitland and their own experiences.

When:Sunday, February 22 at 2 and 7:30 p. m.

Where:The Wellington Street Theatre, 126 Wellington Street. Tickets:\$20.