

Foreword

NANCY MELLON

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL the paths of storytellers and healers have tangled together. As we face our immensely challenging new century, it is not surprising that much attention is being given to the fact that even a one-minute story can change both tellers and listeners for the better.

Perhaps you who are reading this book are part of the growing throng of individuals and groups who are telling stories with a healing intention. A few years ago Allison Cox, a creative health educator and storyteller, and David Albert, a public health planner and author, recognized that people in a multitude of different professions were experimenting with this mode of purposeful storytelling. They sensed with sturdy compassion and an ear to the wind that the time was right for creating a set of books that shared the many ways that stories can open doors for individuals, families, and communities.

They summoned storytellers involved in this work. Back came a ripple of response, followed by wave upon wave of confirmation from around the United States and abroad that storytelling can be healing medicine for a huge range of troubles.

The book you have in your hands was created through Allison and David's inspired vision and leadership. *The Healing Heart ~ Families: Storytelling to Encourage Caring and Healthy Families* and its companion volume, *The Healing Heart ~ Communities: Storytelling to Build Strong and Healthy*

Communities, pay tribute to the growing number of pioneers, many as yet unacclaimed, who have listened for a good story to illuminate perplexing dilemmas. Having once successfully trailed a mysterious narrative through to new light, they have celebrated with humble wonder — and then tried again. At home or in school, hospital, or treatment center, whether addressing a minor or major problem, these experimenters often have taken time to attend to the results of their storytelling sessions.

Why such growing attention in recent years to healing through the spoken word? One reason is the difficulty we have retaining the nuances and multisensory experiences that happen during direct contact between people, but not through computer communiqués or television or movies. As our powers of listening have clouded over and our speech has been spirited into an array of mechanical devices, we have become increasingly awakened to the need for more gratifying and direct communication. Beyond generating information, storytellers provide a sense of soul exchange as they share reliably coherent narratives. Listening to well-turned phrases spoken with wonder and affection by a storyteller primes the natural poetry in our souls and ignites our creative courage for life.

As health professionals and families cultivate storytelling, individual and communal immune

response are enhanced. Storytellers can choose their intent for delivering any sort of story. They can find opportunities to share their passion with an audience — or to deliver thoughts and moral perspective with intellectual fervor. They can engage personality and heart through sharing stories of many cultures to fascinate and entrance. Whether a folktale, a personal story, an invented tale, a grand myth, or a good joke, stories can be styled and delivered with loving care in the intimate service of another.

The story offerings and commentaries contained in the two volumes of *The Healing Heart* are generally of this sort. Selfless and devoted attention to the needs of others can lead beyond intellectual understanding to a feeling of being rooted in the cosmos. Through such storytelling, as these books demonstrate, the restorative wisdom

that creates words and imaginations can be felt with complete humility. As words and movement inherent in the words flow together, they can offer ingeniously creative perspectives on depressing and alarming conditions. As story lines dart and flash, they can dive into bogs between the rocks and hard places and leap to celestial resonances — all in the same breath. They can stir creative juices for the joyously abundant life that brings about healthier perspectives and attitudes.

The two volumes of *The Healing Heart* represent a lively, robust leap forward. They are a generous and encouraging contribution to the growing art and science of storytelling. They indicate that, in answer to the needs of our time, a very healthy body of work and methodology is now evolving.