

# Myth master swallows audience

**Matt Tamnik**  
The Clackamas Print

Excited students watched in anticipation in RR 220 last Wednesday, when professional storyteller Will Hornyak surprised the crowd: "Since today we are looking at Indian mythology, why don't we start with a folktale from Japan." Hornyak is neither Native American, nor Japanese, but he continues to remind his audiences of the importance of oral tradition, which is the foundation, or "bones" we put it, of any culture. "The last thing to disappear in a culture is their myths," said Hornyak. "From just a few stories, you can tell a lot about how people thought." At a time before television and American Idol, people told stories. Of course, the most tempting and debatable question is, how old can

a myth be? Clackamas Mythology Instructor Jan Anderson said the answer is, "a myth can be as old as language itself." This idea becomes especially interesting when drawing connections between the recurring mystery of the sacred direction north, in Indian myths, and their migration approximately 25 thousand years ago. People like Hornyak continue this tradition today. At first, it might seem a little out of place for a storyteller to be at a business conference, the state penitentiary, or the American Cancer Society, but when one comes to understand myth as Hornyak does, it becomes clear. Hornyak explained that myth is practical, "always in touch with what's timeless in our experience." He continued to explain that there are no lies or "myths" in myth. "It's so true it keeps happening again and again and again," he said.

"Myth comes from the edge of our experiences, from the highest of the high, from the lowest of the low; myth comes from the bizarre." "This world takes on great meaning with the spiritual ... the kind of relationship we have with the spiritual world is what creates quality here." After telling the story of a "great swallowing monster," Hornyak quizzed his audience, asking, "Who is swallowing monster?" "There's no right answer," he said. "Swallowing monster could be the boss you asked for a raise from last weekend. Swallowing monster could be alcohol, depression, or the U.S. government. It could be Wal-Mart; it just wants more and more." "I could be swallowing monster," he continued. "You got to get inside, to deal with the beast, and its dark inside ... Most importantly, swallowing monster will be back."



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theatres and festivals, as well as in the less likely places mentioned earlier. The requirements of a good storyteller are numerous; it is not simply the ability to retell information. Rather, a storyteller is an actor, a philosopher, an improviser and a teacher. Hornyak himself becomes the characters in his stories by creating imagery and sound out of the empty space around him, and changing his voice and posture to fit the coyote or the swallowing monster. Comedy is often entangled within the stories, and myth can suddenly surprise the listener with twists and turns, moving quickly from tragedy to comedy.

These teachings can be seen as medicine, which explains why storytelling has been used to help Vietnam veterans, and even prison inmates recover. Above all, though, Hornyak is an entertainer and a teacher. After receiving his Bachelor's Degree in journalism and history in 1976, Hornyak traveled widely across Latin America, working for the Inter-American Press Association. Immersed with the culture, he grew an interest in local traditions of poetry, music and folktales. In 1994, he became a full-time professional storyteller, and ever since has been working at schools,

A good storyteller must be able to "edit" the story to fit the specific situation, as mysteries unravel—but good storytelling also needs a good audience. "There was a warrior," Hornyak began, "and he had a horse. They galloped across the land"—and the entire room echoed with the rumbling of feet beating against the floor. Hornyak explained that there is no such thing as the end in myth. "What's going to end?" he asked. "When it's all over, there's always something in place for a beginning."

## Popular card game threatens the innocence of a nation



Holy crap, there are some twisted people on the Internet. I know a phrase like that is usually followed with an enthusiastic "duh," but I recently downloaded a game on my X-Box 360 that proved just how far some people will go for a reaction. In fact, I would go so far as to say this particular game, I left to its devices, could single-handedly ruin the innocence of our nation's children. A couple months ago, Microsoft made an X-Box Live camera available to the masses. "Live" players can now see and interact with each other for just \$39.95 plus service fees (yeah ... cameras

are always such a good idea). Anyway, some online friends and I downloaded this game to help us wind down after hours of tense Rainbow Six online competition. The game is supposed to be a vehicle for people to get used to their spiffy new X-Box cameras, and serves that function extremely well. Players can wave to their friends, flip off their enemies, and even show off prized possessions or family members to friends in different corners of the world in real-time and with impressive picture quality. Within the first day, however, I started to hear stories. One of the guys I met online from Idaho goes by the name "Toby." Toby was playing the game recently, getting a bit of use out of his camera and enjoying video feeds from other players, when a man in a bear suit logged into the room. The man, without removing his suit, proceeded to pleasure himself openly to the horror and disgust

of the other three in the room. Then, a few hours later, Toby, another friend of ours and myself had a nice, friendly game going, when a player logged into our open fourth spot and flipped on his camera. Nothing was visible in the frame but what looked like a small bookshelf. Into the frame walked a robot, which I immediately commanded to dance ... and it did! Then its owner began beating it with what looked like a broom handle and the player logged out. At the time of this writing, I'd had the game less than 48 hours. I'd asked what looked like a 15-year-old to put her clothes back on, watched a 13-year-old cuss out his mother, and asked a man in a ski mask if he, by some chance, owned a bear suit. I used to play "Uno" with my babysitter when I was five. I don't want to play anymore.

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