

Story tellers share tradition

By LORAIN McCLISH

A Farmington woman has been elected president of the Detroit Story League, a group that celebrated its golden anniversary this year, dedicated to those who love to tell a story and those who love to listen.

Ruth Kroepel, of 36639 Vicary Lane, described the aim of the league as "encouraging the creation and the appreciation of the good and the beautiful in life and in literature through the art of storytelling."

Mrs. Kroepel's vice president will be Ann Ewaszko of Southfield for the coming term and her membership chairman will be Paula Method of Beverly Hills.

Lucille Lenz, the group's historian who holds a record for most stories told to date, said of her art, "In each generation that small company of people called storytellers have known that deeply hidden in every good book there is a good story just waiting for the oral storyteller to take and pass on to others."

"It has been going on throughout the ages and it has shed light, understanding and joy."

"THE WOMEN (membership stands at about 25 now) tell stories to school and church groups, in children's and old folks' homes, hospitals, playgrounds, libraries, camps, "just about wherever and whenever we're asked," Mrs. Method said.

They do no advertising and don't seek publicity so most of the invitations they receive come by word of mouth.

Ms. Method volunteers her services to fourth graders in Parker School in Oak Park one day a week where she teaches expression, the art of storytelling and creative writing.

Ms. Lenz is kept busy for the most part as a guest at women's club meetings.

Mrs. Kroepel does a lot of story telling and some training with the youth in her church, though some unusual requests can come to any of the women. This spring Mrs. Kroepel recited a Shakespearean sonnet as part of a wedding ceremony.

Ms. Ewaszko, who has been a member of the group for only two years, had some qualms about being able to tell a story before a group, "but took to it immediately."

She had just had an original story she wrote about her mother rejected by a publisher. So when she was asked to tell a story at one of the league meetings, "I told them that one, spontaneously, and I knew my work was not for naught. Someone enjoyed it."

STORYTELLING is a part of every monthly meeting of the league; the group has never brought in outside talent. Members also work toward creating original stories to tell orally, and also write original stories. District and national competitions are held every year for creative writing and original stories are passed among the members through a regularly published bulletin.

As to their public appearances, each member is on his own for choosing a story appropriate for the time and place. Some stories may be complimented with a background of music. Some storytellers may wear a costume appropriate for the story. Ms. Lenz tells one story where she incorporates some harmonica playing to better tell the tale.

Each keeps her own repertoire to be ready for the next engagement and there are no cue cards allowed.

The women are of two minds as to how to go about creating the art. The advocates of memorizing a story theorize that the author spent long hours finding just the right language to use and it behooves the storyteller to use that language.

The other method involves just knowing the story well, loving it, and relating it with that love so it flows easily and freely. The advocates of this method argue that it is too easy "to suddenly go blank and then you have to start all over again."

BUT TO A WOMAN they are always on the lookout for another good story. Mrs. Kroepel said "none of the members read a thing without the thought going through their minds that it might be something we can save or use to pass on."

For the first time that any of the women can recall the Detroit League is opening up a membership drive "with a total limit of 40 set because we meet in one another's homes," Mrs. Kroepel said.

A good many of the members are "librarians, English teachers or the like," but the women stressed that no educational background or experience was necessary to become a good storyteller.

"My background is one of an avid reader," Ms. Ewaszko said.

"We have an active social afternoon," Ms. Method said, "but we are not there to socialize. We want members there, active members, who are interested in learning and wanting to tell stories. Our purpose is to keep alive the art of storytelling."

The league furnishes workshops to all of its members on both storytelling and story writing. It also sponsors a junior league for those not yet out of college.

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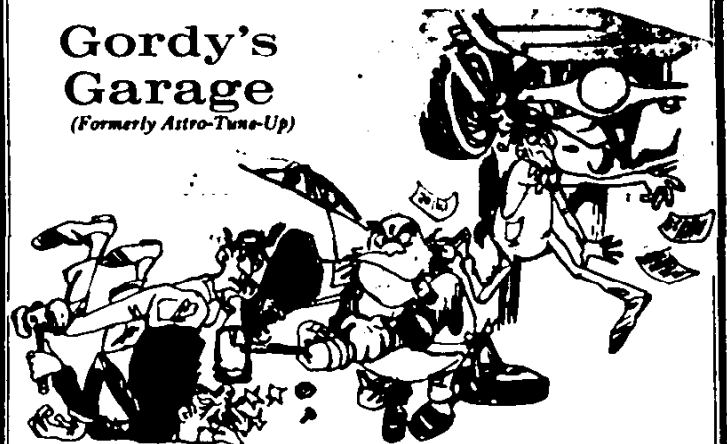
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