

A story that spans generations

Women find common ground in their tales

By Jacqueline M. Domin

Kate Dudding and Betty McCanty have countless stories between them. There are the personal stories, the stories about their travels and adventures. There are the stories about people who inspire them. There are the stories about legends and folktales.

There's also a story about the two of them, one whose first chapter was written in the Adirondack Mountains, where both women were attending a workshop by Jeanine Laverty. There's a generation between them – McCanty is 89, and Dudding, at 62, could easily be one of her eight children – but they formed a fast friendship built on common interests and mutual respect.

"We found we're very compatible even though we have many years between us," McCanty said.

"She's a model of the little old lady I want to be," Dudding said with a laugh. "She's lively and funny and nurturing. She always shares very positive remarks about my stories and what I do."

Maybe it should be no surprise that two storytellers are kindred

spirits. As Dudding says, they never lack for conversation on their car trips together. But McCanty, it turns out, is something of an accidental storyteller.

A retired Ballston Spa High School teacher, McCanty decided some 25 years ago to take a class about using humor in the classroom. When it was canceled, McCanty called the organizer and told him to tear up her check or send it back. Instead, he persuaded her to try another class, one about storytelling.

"By the end of the week, I was hooked," she said.

McCanty, who lives in Woodlawn Commons in Saratoga Springs, loves that storytelling takes out the middleman – the book or the television or, in this day and age, the computer screen. It's just the storyteller and the audience.

"It lets you really communicate with people," she said. "When people smile or laugh or shudder, you've made it. You've made that connection."

McCanty used to travel extensively, and her storytelling tended to center on folklore from the regions she visited. She'd try to work a foreign word into her tales, the teacher in her delighting on passing on that new knowledge.



Kate Dudding has been telling stories to Capital District audiences for more than a decade.

Nowadays, though, McCanty finds audience are more interested in hearing about silly things she did as a kid, "dumb stuff" she got away with. Stories about her large family are also a hit. She has eight kids and 10 grandchildren – all boys.

"They give me a lot of fodder," she said.

Dudding, of Clifton Park, has tackled a variety of subjects over the years but she's most drawn to stories of inspirational people. The Clinton 12, for example, captivated her. Following the historical Brown v. Board of Education decision in

1954, a judge ordered Clinton High School in Clinton, Tenn., to desegregate. Twelve African-American students attended the school beginning in 1956, ushering in an era of unrest that included three massive explosions at Clinton High School in 1958.

Another story with civil rights roots that Dudding likes to tell centers on the Greensboro Four, four black college freshmen who sat at a lunch counter at Woolworth's in Greensboro, N.C., in 1960. Refused service, the four stayed at the counter until the store closed. They came back the next day, and soon sit-ins were being held across the state.

McCanty said she and Dudding are fans of both each other's stories and their storytelling styles. Dudding loves how animated McCanty is when speaking to an audience: "Her eyes sparkle. She really wants to share these stories with you."

Dudding gets more than her share of McCanty's stories when the two set off for nearby art museums. They like to go to the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass., and the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown. If Dudding is struggling with a story or a way to tell it, she bounces it off McCanty.

And McCanty, more likely than not, has something to say about it.

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