

Finding Stories

Story Starters

Wherever we live there are stories. We just have to know where to look for them. There might be a stream where a friend accidentally fell in and got drenched. When we're telling somebody about it, that becomes a story. (We may not even have been there when it happened, so the whole event will be taking place in our imagination. This is storytelling.)

Some of the most common stories that we love to tell each other are about haunted places. Woods, dark alleyways, graveyards, abandoned buildings, castles, old houses, lonely beaches are all favourite places for ghosts to lurk. One of the most common ghosts to haunt castles, for example, is a Green or White Lady. In fact, Tulloch Castle in Dingwall, very close to where I live in the Highlands, is said to be haunted by a Green Lady. Are there any haunted places near you?

Sometimes places have quite old stories connected to them. These stories are called "local legends". They can be based on historical incidents, or be entirely fictional. Often they have characters like the ones in well-known fairy tales – giants, witches, heroic warriors, clever girls. In my own little village of Strathpeffer there is a huge standing stone in the drive of a big house. The tale I have heard is that it was thrown there by a giant from a nearby hill. Not far away, on the beach at Munloch, is a cave where the Irish hero Finn MacCool and his warriors are said to be sleeping, waiting for someone to wake them by blowing three blasts on Finn's hunting horn. Do any places near you have legends like this attached to them?

Families can have their own stories which are passed down through generations. My Dad, who is 89, has lots of them. He really enjoys telling them, and I have passed them on to my own children. Some are humorous, some strange, some sad. For instance, there's the tale of an old uncle who used to keep a pet sheep which had to be brought home one night in a wheelbarrow. Another story is about my Grandmother, who used to see "angels" before something important happened in the family. And there is the great-great-grandfather who was an engineer, building many of the railway bridges in Derbyshire, until he was accidentally struck on the head by a truck and lost his sight. Do you have any stories like this in your family?

Bob Pegg, 2007