

# Performance Nightmares

By Linda Gorham

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My father used to say, “Proper prior planning prevents poor performance.” He was right – in life – and in our work as performers. When we go out to do a show we need to plan and prepare. Of course that means having great stories that are appropriate for our audiences. But that’s not all!

We need to ask the right questions. We need to be clear about what we can and will do. We need to give the hiring venue advance information about our needs. Bottom line, we need to do whatever it takes to help us shine during our shows because, no matter how carefully we plan, things will sometimes go wrong! I know it. You know it!

A few years ago, I gathered a group of storytellers to talk about our performance experiences. Once we sat down and the tape recorder was turned on, the stories erupted. We heard frightening scenarios of woe, hopeless tales of things that went wrong, and fearless feats of performance bravery. Together we laughed, we cried, and we reminisced long into the night.

Joining me were members of the Chicago area Fox Valley Storytelling Guild: Sue Black, Jim Decker, Karen Decker, Donna Dettman, Leanne Johnson, Diane Ladley, Lainie Levin, Becky Potter, Mike Speller, Carolyn Thomas-Davidoff and Ican Seenow. We hope by sharing our true (and sometimes funny) experiences, we can save you from the horrors of “Performance Nightmares.”

## **I wish I had asked . . .**

- Are you sure a storyteller is right for this event?
- Will the seniors be expecting Bingo?
- Will you be collapsing the tables during my first or last story?
- Will the sound system be a battery powered megaphone?
- Will half of the audience be leaving for band practice in the middle of my show?
- Will a helicopter be landing next to me during my show?
- Will there be lights so at least someone can see me in the dark?
- Will there be a sound system so at least someone can hear me in the dark?
- Can I have a sunlamp so at least I can get a tan in the dark?
- Will you be advertising the show?
- Will you put up signs so people know where to find me?
- Does the audience speak English?
- Do the children have special needs?
- Are there any major road closings in your area?
- Is this the first time you are producing an event?
- Which school door will be unlocked?
- Where is the doorbell?
- Where should I park?
- Where is the bathroom?

- Will there be a petting zoo next to my stage? How about an inflatable moonwalk?
- Will anyone be walking behind the stage during the show?

### **I should have realized . . .**

- That when they told me they would pay me nothing, they would treat me like nothing.
- That if there were several contact people, things would go wrong.
- That teenagers who usually sit on chairs would not like my stories if they had to sit on the floor.
- That if I put my CD on display, someone would take it.
- That if I took off my watch and put it down, someone would take it.
- That the audience wasn't bored; they simply did not understand English.
- That when the teachers sat in the back and faced away from me, no one was going to supervise the kids.
- That even if they didn't return the contract or my repeated phone calls, the gig would still be on.
- That when they asked me if I was flexible, that would mean upon arrival I would learn that three shows would become six.
- That it would take a lot longer than I thought to get to the venue.
- That I should have worn a slip under my dress.
- That smoke from a campfire would find my throat no matter where I stood.
- That I was in trouble when they told me that the parking lot was only for the PAID entertainers (i.e., not me).
- That the color of the background curtain would clash with my outfit.
- That I MUST get my contact's cell phone number.
- That preschool students would be attending the eighth grade show.
- That the HUGE campfire would cause a few problems – make that many problems.
- That I should always bring my own bottle of water.
- That my \$#\*&!! shawl would fall off.
- That the fire would not provide enough light at night for anyone to see me.
- That they wouldn't know how I wanted the seats set up unless I told them in advance.
- That I should have brought bug spray for my outdoor show.
- That right in the middle of the most critical part of my story, someone's cell phone would go off.
- That my cell phone would go off.
- That while a teacher can control twenty-five kids, a parent cannot control one.
- That everyone would want to sit at the absolute top of the large grandstand seats, leaving them all of them at least twenty-five feet above and away from me.
- That my butt would look big in those newspaper pictures.
- That all parents would think their children were inherent angels and deserve the freedom to run wild and yell out during inappropriate times during my shows.
- That the school office would be closed at night and no one would hear me calling from the road.
- That rush hour would start early.
- That the bleachers would be noisy . . . and kids would stamp their feet on them.
- That kids would be attracted to sound equipment – and would touch it – a lot!

- That when they said the check would be late, they meant really late.
- That when the school secretary pointed and said, “The gym is down that way,” I would not be getting any help at all.
- That when they said the area near the storytelling space might be a tiny bit “busy,” they meant really loud.

#### **I wish I had stipulated . . .**

- That I would not perform in front of a large picture window.
- That I would not perform in front of a door (that people would be using).
- That a parking space would be reserved for me in advance.
- That the principal would not admonish the children to, “Be quiet! Sit still! And don’t move!” before I was introduced.
- That sending me an aerial view of the library would not be very helpful.
- That I would go on before the children were fed sugary treats.
- That I would not perform near a cappuccino machine.
- That they would provide me with a bottle of room temperature water.
- That the noisy parents in the back of the room would be reminded not to talk and should at least pretend to model good behavior and listen.
- That at least one person would be assigned to monitor the room.
- That the shades would be closed to keep the sun out of everyone’s eyes.
- That Santa, Captain Underpants, Dora the Explorer and a host of other characters would not be allowed to enter the room until after my show.
- That they would not introduce me by saying (on a very hot day), “Ice cream will be served as soon as the storyteller is finished.”
- That the teachers would leave their homework (and laptops) in their classrooms.
- That marshmallows would not be roasted during my ghost story show.
- That the dinner dishes would be removed after, and the tables removed before – not during – my show.
- That someone would call me if the school was closed due to snow.
- That the kids would give their . . . balloons, toys, books, candy, juice boxes etc. to their parents before the show.
- That helium balloons not be distributed before my show.
- I wish the audience had listened when I told them repeatedly: The ghost stories will get more intense. The children should leave now.
- Tell at a birthday party.

#### **I wish I would have:**

- Said, “I’m not the best storyteller for your needs. Let me give you the names and numbers of other tellers you should call.”
- Charged more – a lot more!
- Politely said, “No thank you!”