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# Women's Storytelling Festival Returns to Fairfax

**Live performers, March 19-22, at the Sherwood Center.**

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

**H**osted by Better Said Than Done, the annual Women's Storytelling Festival returns Friday-Sunday, March 20-22, to Fairfax City. It's the first and only storytelling festival in the country exclusively devoted to women performers.

Stories will be presented live at the Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd. in Fairfax. A special, online-only showcase will premiere Thursday, March 19, and the festival will also be live-streamed. And all ticket holders will be able to watch the festival videos for one month after the festival concludes.

Featuring a wide range of storytelling styles, the festival will spotlight 20 performers of spoken-word stories and is intended for mature audiences. In addition, the emcees include two locals, Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read and Del. Holly Seibold (D-12th).

The storytellers will share personal stories, folktales, stories of adventure and magic, plus historical stories — some, marking the United States' 250th anniversary. Performers are coming here from across the nation, from California to Connecticut, Georgia to Ohio —



Jessica Robinson

and even from as far as Ireland — and represent some of today's best-known storytellers.

Among them are authors, content creators, TV stars, podcasters, theater performers and contributors to Risk!, Stories from the Stage, the National Storytelling Festival and the Moth storytelling shows. This festival not only showcases women storytellers — often underrepresented in other national festivals — but also features a variety of stories centering around women's lives and highlighting diverse experiences, cultures and points of view.

Festival founder and producer Jessica Robinson of Fairfax launched Better Said Than Done Inc. in May 2011 to bring the art of storytelling to Northern Virginia, and 2026 is its seventh year hosting this event. "I don't want to say that each year it gets better, because 2020 was fabulous, as was each year since," she said. "But the festival has grown a following of both audience members and storytellers, including this year's lineup."

"Something special happens when storytellers and listeners



Bonnie Gardner

truly connect," continued Robinson. "Because the performers have also had the chance to absorb the previous six years of storytelling, they have a stronger sense of the types of stories that work well with our audience. As a national festival, we've developed a voice of our own."

Some of those voices belong to area residents such as returning storyteller Bonnie Gardner of Vienna. "A festival that centers women's stories, women's perspectives, and women's lived experiences promotes empathy and understanding," she said. "It's a much-needed balm in these fractured times. Listening changes us. When women tell their stories fully, honestly and from their own perspective, audiences leave understanding the world differently."

Besides that, she added, "The sheer diversity of storytelling styles and content you'll find at the festival sets it apart from other performance-based events. Prepare to be surprised, moved and a little awestruck. The storytellers will present their works crafted over months and performed live without scripts. You'll hear from

investigative reporters, business founders, policy experts, immigrants, artists and award-winning storytellers. These history shapers span [the realms of] journalism, entrepreneurship, public service and the arts."

As the U.S. marks 250 years, said Gardner, "This festival asks a simple but powerful question, 'What would our understanding of history look like if we listened to it through women's voices?' For centuries, the nation's story has centered on battlefield victories and political power. But history also unfolds in hospitals, classrooms, communities, churches and factories."

"Mothers give birth to every generation yet rarely hold ownership over how that generation's history is told. In this milestone year, the Women's Storytelling Festival expands that lens through a special showcase that reexamines the United States at 250."

For example, storyteller Denise Page will share her solo show, "Legacy of a Wealthy Slave," about the 2024 discovery by Yale University archivists of her ancestors and their places in history.

"When women tell history, something shifts," explained Robinson. "We begin to see greatness not only in victory, but in resilience. Not only in power, but in empathy. Not only in dominance, but in survival. That shift is tangible. Men often approach storytellers afterward to say, 'I had no idea.' Women leave feeling seen, having finally heard parts of their own lives spoken aloud in a powerful, artful form."

"The festival provides a space where female artists can tell the stories that other venues are frequently too timid to host, and it does so in an atmosphere of celebration and appreciation," said veteran storyteller Jennifer Munro. "It's refreshing to see women take center stage and own it."

"More magic happens in live performance without that fourth wall of theater," added storyteller Kristin Pedemonti. "There's a deep connection between the teller and listener which is palpable and long lasting. When we hear each other's stories, we hear each other's humanity."

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The Women's Storytelling Festival kicks off Thursday, March 19, at 8 p.m., with its virtual showcase. The in-person and live-streaming performances begin Friday, March 20, at 7 p.m. Ticket prices are \$50 for virtual performances and \$70 for in-person. One-day, in-person passes will be available at the door for \$35/day. People of all gender identities are welcome to attend.

For more information, schedules and to purchase tickets, go to <https://betersaidthandone.org/womens-festival/>.

\*To learn more about the festival's storytellers, visit <https://betersaidthandone.org/womens-festival/2026-festival-storytellers/>

\*For more information about the emcees, go to <https://betersaidthandone.org/womens-festival/emcees-and-volunteers/>.

— BONNIE GARDNER

CONTRIBUTED TO THIS STORY.

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