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Follow Glenda Bonin's lead: Opine less, and tell more stories

By [IRENE MESSINA](#) 

Glenda Bonin looks at me across the table at Rincon Market, her bright, blue eyes moistening as she recalls an experience she had as a professional storyteller in Yerington, Nev., six years ago.

Commissioned to direct a third-grade class in a staged performance, Bonin was immediately warned by the teacher about a shy boy named Bayoodsin who always kept his head down and didn't talk with others.

When the teacher was absent one day, Bonin gently asked Bayoodsin if he wanted to take part in the story. He said yes.

Days later, before the public performance, the skeptical teacher balked at Bonin's plan to include Bayoodsin. But it worked: The boy did well on stage.

Bayoodsin later wrote Bonin a thank-you note that she says she remembers word for word: "Dear Mrs. B.: Thank you for coming to our class. Thank you for your stories. I liked them a lot. Please come back again. Oh yes, I liked being in the story and on the stage. Love, Bayoodsin."

Bonin smiles. "The little boy I thought never listened: That's why I do what I do. ... Stories will reach kids that might otherwise be lost."

As a full-time storyteller since 1996, Bonin travels the country telling stories to children, families and adults. She performs at schools, libraries and festivals, and for social groups.

She doesn't memorize or read from books. Her stories are either personal or her own renditions of folk tales and fairytales. She didn't start off as a storyteller; she decided to follow her true love after she was downsized out of a marketing-director job in the nonprofit field.

Bonin looks and acts like your favorite childhood teacher. With a warm smile, bright eyes and a calm voice, she tells great stories with verve and animation. She's been a clown, a magician and a puppeteer. She's a mother of five grown children.

Bonin says storytelling is not just for kids. She stops for a moment to tell me a tale about her pet lamb, Sweetie, from her childhood in 1940s Wyoming. (The story is told in its entirety on Bonin's *Family Gazette* CD.)

Everyone in the neighborhood loved the baby lamb--except for Bonin's next-door neighbor Mr. Clooney. He wanted the lamb removed and even called the police, to no avail.

One day, Bonin found Sweetie under a tree, with blood dripping from her mouth. Bonin brought the lamb inside, and the lamb ran behind the stove to hide, where she died. The local vet later determined that Sweetie had been poisoned. All evidence pointed to Mr. Clooney.

Bonin's father calmly took her in her arms, sang "You Are My Sunshine" and encouraged her to forgive. He told her something she never forgot: "Mr. Clooney knows what he did, honey. That is punishment enough."

As I listen, I'm captivated by this story that touches on universal themes of love, compassion and forgiveness.

Bonin makes the argument for stories in our lives: "It seems frivolous (at first) to tell stories, to take the time to read a story when you have other things to do. But a storyteller will remind people of what is out there and the humanity of it all. ... Why do you think stories have gone from culture to culture with minor changes? Because they are universal. ...They're not the values of one religion or one group of people. ... So if we take these stories to heart, we can communicate with people all over the world."

Stories don't need to be complicated, and Bonin says we are all storytellers. We tell each other about our days; we tell stories about ourselves during job interviews; we tell family stories.

Furthermore, Bonin says that there is a quiet resurgence of storytelling taking place across the country. More cities are establishing festivals to bring storytelling to the community. Tucson has the Odyssey Storytelling group, and Prescott hosts the Arizona Cowboy Poets Gathering.

With the surge of overheated opinions overshadowing good stories--whether on cable TV, in blogs, on talk radio or in print--it's refreshing to hear about Bonin traveling mile after mile to tell tales that touch the hearts and minds of others.

It's time for us to take a cue from Bonin. Taking the time to listen to or tell a story can tweak our imaginations, open our minds and allow us to draw our own conclusions. A story can enhance our ability to see the world--and each other--in a new light.

For more information about Glenda Bonin, visit [her Web site](#).