

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Hear Her Stories event brings Minnesotan women together through storytelling 01GWM5ARHA4Q004EG58MRA21XZ**

CATHY WURZER: You know that March is Women's History Month. And for the second year in a row, Mill City Museum in Minneapolis is honoring the month with stories by and about women. Jen Scott is hosting a storytelling event called Hear Her Stories. It's happening at the Minneapolis museum this Friday. Jen Scott sat down and talked with our producer, Britt Aamodt.

**BRITT AAMODT:** Welcome to *Minnesota Now*, Jen.

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh my goodness, thank you so much.

**BRITT AAMODT:** Well, thanks for coming on. I want to hear about this event you've got. What is Hear Her Stories? What's going to happen there?

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh, we have a lineup at Mill City Museum of eight different storytellers with a lot of experience and brand-new storytellers coming to share their stories in celebration of Women's History month. And they're stories that are basically Minnesota-based, looking for personal, familial, maybe historic, or maybe how that history impacts you. It should be just a wonderful night.

**BRITT AAMODT:** This is the second year of Hear Her Stories?

**JEN SCOTT:** That's correct. Our first one, of course, was last year. We heard stories of the Root Beer Lady. We heard how these storytellers got to Minnesota, stories of being a Korean adoptee and the history behind that and how that affects her today. Oh, we had this beautiful story about Rondo.

**BRITT AAMODT:** Well, I'm wondering if you could give us a little preview of the storytellers you're going to have at this year's event and maybe some of the stories.

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh, I would love to. Jan Borofka, she's telling her story of working in the Land O'Lakes factory in the early '60s in the butter room when she was a brand-new mom and she worked a night shift. It is funny yet oddly harrowing. We have Hillary Lor, who is a Hmong musician here in the Twin Cities, not only sharing the story of her family, but also, she'll be playing some music on her own during the storytelling.

We have Nothando Zulu giving the story of when she moved to Minnesota in 1961 from Virginia. Of course, she came by train without a coat. She came in the winter. We have the storyteller Tseganesh Selameab telling the story about going through the cancer hair loss of her mother and her aunties and the lessons she will pass on to her daughters.

We had a couple dress rehearsals. And it's been so cool how themes are starting to pop up between the stories. So not only do we have the theme of butter with Jan's story but followed right up by Tseganesh's story, where a certain type of butter was used in the braiding of her hair when she was a little kid and how that was used as a conditioner. It was amazing when that popped up. It was like, oh, we have a theme.

**BRITT AAMODT:** Right. You always need a theme for an event.

**JEN SCOTT:** [LAUGHS]

**BRITT AAMODT:** It created itself.

**JEN SCOTT:** It really did.

**BRITT AAMODT:** So I heard you lost one of your returning storytellers from last year's event.

**JEN SCOTT:** We did. Actually, a huge loss to the entire Twin Cities, Beverly Cottman, who was this incredible force of nature, force of life here in Minneapolis, a storyteller, a dancer. She was formerly a teacher. We were lucky enough to have her for last year, where she told an amazing story of her aunts down in Saint Louis and how their lifestyle contrasted with her life here in the Twin Cities. And we had absolutely scheduled her.

Her husband passed away a number of months ago. And she messaged me and saying, Jen, I may not be real quick on the email because I'll be traveling. She was traveling in Egypt with some dear, dear friends. And she passed away in her sleep.

So much love to her daughter and her family. Yeah, it just doesn't seem possible. She was everywhere. And everywhere she went, she was loved. She was so generous with her time and her energy and her talents. We miss her so.

**BRITT AAMODT:**Do you know what story she was planning on telling?

**JEN SCOTT:** I do. The blurb she gave me-- "A lighthearted tale of love-struck newlyweds embarking on a week-long adventure into the Minnesota Boundary Waters Canoe Area with very limited camping experience and so little strength that it takes both of them to portage the canoe."

**BRITT AAMODT:**I want to hear that story.

[LAUGHTER]

Are you planning on commemorating Beverly somehow at the event?

**JEN SCOTT:** I will be saying a few words. I might not be the exact right person to say a few words, but I will say a few words, absolutely. And there will be something in the program, too.

**BRITT AAMODT:**Yeah, you'll feel her presence there.

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh my gosh, yes.

**BRITT AAMODT:**So humans are storytelling creatures, and we give meaning to events and people by creating stories around them. But storytelling is an art form in and of itself. It's not improv or a certain author reading a story that appeared in print. So what is storytelling?

**JEN SCOTT:** I love that question so much because you would take 10 people, you'd get a different definition from all of them. There's so many different traditions around it. We have kind of a mix. We will hear at this event their own stories. This sort of storytelling resonates the most when it's just you.

It's you speaking as yourself. You're not trying-- you're not throwing in words that you wouldn't use. Maybe taking your time. You're giving space for the audience to connect. You're listening to the audience just as much as they are listening to you. It's really a wonderful and intimate moment that can be shared with, oh gosh, an audience of like 80.

**BRITT AAMODT:**You said that you have some newbie storytellers. And I was thinking as you were just talking that if I were a newbie storyteller in front of an audience for the first time, I don't know if I could slow down.

**JEN SCOTT:** [LAUGHS]

**BRITT AAMODT:**I'd probably just want to race through it. Did you give these newbie storytellers an opportunity to get some coaching? Or what did you do for them?

**JEN SCOTT:** We were so lucky. Story Arts of Minnesota, which is this amazing organization focused on, of course, storytelling here in Minnesota, so generously offered coaching for free for any storyteller, experienced or not so experienced, who wanted just an extra eye and an extra ear on making sure the timing's right. [LAUGHS] We gave all of our storytellers a limit of seven minutes.

**BRITT AAMODT:**That's a great opportunity.

**JEN SCOTT:** Gosh, yeah.

**BRITT AAMODT:**So in your own lifetime, have you seen opportunities for women to tell their stories the way they want to tell them opening up?

**JEN SCOTT:** I so adore that TikTok, and our phones, and the web, and social media being what it is-- I so adore that people are also using these mediums to present their story how they want it. It's incredible the amount of, oh gosh, storytelling, monologues, sketch comedy that suddenly you don't need a theater to do.

You don't even need another performer with you. You can present it how you want it presented, as much as you can in the social media box, of course. Makes my heart so happy to see more opportunities created for women by women just by themselves.

**BRITT AAMODT:**Well, you're an improv artist. And I guess you're a storyteller, too.

**JEN SCOTT:** I have done storytelling, yes.

**BRITT AAMODT:**But you're not going to be telling a story at Hear Her Stories?

**JEN SCOTT:** No, I will just be-- I got to help curate the night. And then I will also be hosting the night. So I am the Kermit the Frog of the evening. I will host it, say a few words, wave my hands a lot.

**BRITT AAMODT:**OK. So you don't have an opportunity to tell your story that night. But I'm wondering, is there someone in your own family, perhaps, whose story intrigues or inspires you?

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh, thank you for asking. My mom is the nicest woman in the world. [LAUGHS] But then she will also drop little bits of her own history. Like, she actually went to school for math. And she's talked about, oh, I should have gotten into computer programming, because she did a little bit of it in college. And I think somewhere in the house there's still these boxes of computer cards, because that's how you would program. And they're just 3 by 5 cards with little rectangle punches in them. And that's how you would program these giant computers.

She is fully herself. Like, she never had any qualms about studying math even though it probably was a pretty gendered time for a, quote unquote, "hard science." She also went to college during that funny time where, when she started college, women were expected to wear skirts, and by the end of the four years, jeans everywhere. So just hearing even little bits of her story and the change of times in that little segment of her lifetime is just fascinating.

**BRITT AAMODT:**Well, that's awesome. Thank you so much for sharing your story.

**JEN SCOTT:** Oh, thank you for letting me.

**CATHY** That was producer Britt Aamodt talking with Jen Scott. Jen is the host of Hear Her Stories, a Celebration of

**WURZER:** Women's History Month Through Storytelling. It's happening at the Minneapolis Mill City Museum this Friday.