

The **Story Bridge** Method

Community Transformation and Peace
Building through story arts

By
Community Performance International





I. Introduction

The Story Bridge Method combines art and science to establish the practice of social transformation and peace within and across communities. Developed by Dr. Richard Owen Geer with a team of distinguished artists, scholars and scientists, the Story Bridge Method is based on the social synergy of people sharing and performing each other’s diverse stories. It generates an organic process of *Story, Performance, Relationship, Conversation and Action* to engage the community in sharing, co-learning, conflict transformation, and service. It weaves the community into a more generative and resilient web that enables self and collective transcendence.

Three-years of social science research conducted by Dr. Qinghong Wei reveals that the Story Bridge Method has profound effects. Compared to other 3 communities in Georgia and Florida, the research found residents in Colquitt, a community with on-going Story Bridge program for over two decades, had **highest degrees of social and psychological wellness, and highest level of community engagement**. When evaluating a 2016 Story Bridge program in Beijing, China,

statistical analysis shows as much as a **20%** increase in individual ability for conflict resolution, **30%** increase in self-confidence, and **41%** increase in community engagement among participants.

By engaging participants in this sophisticated social, cultural and creative process, the Story Bridge Method has empowered individuals and transformed communities. *It encourages peace building wherever in the world it is practiced.*

“Because of having to go out and bring in stories from different members of the community, it gives the sense of how important each person is to **the story of LIFE**...if you moved that individual from that grand piece, you'd see the effect. So I think it provides a great appreciation for individuals that are there....And I think that provides a greater understanding of individuals, and provides for opportunities to want to learn and to help other people.”

A Story Bridge participant from Georgia, US.

The Story Bridge Method can be adapted to diverse local contexts and organizational needs with flexibility and effectiveness. A Story Bridge program can be as short as workshops of two hours, or as long an on-going process spanning decades. A typical Story Bridge program begins with a 6-month initial demonstration project by senior Story Bridge artists and scholars. They will provide training in story gathering, crafting, and presenting. The artists will create with citizens a presentation of the many cultures of your community performed by an intergenerational cast. After the initial demonstration project has energized community interest, the process continues and branches out in the forms of after school classes, community events, multimedia projects, apps, and other forms co-created through the process.



II. Goals & Benefits



Cultural story gathering, collaborative creativity, presentation of self, and multi-media community performance are activities which turn peace into ongoing action. *The culture of peace spreads as it becomes a way of life.*

On the individual level, the Story Bridge Method teaches communications, creativity, tolerance, empathy, passion, and self-presentation skills. It also teaches critical consciousness, an awareness of the forces acting on individuals and society, and conflict transformation. Participants become more confident, open, enthusiastic, optimistic, and enjoy

better performance at home, at school, and at work. On the community level, Story Bridge builds community pride, bridges gaps between different groups, promotes diversity, develops community tolerance, builds leadership and capacity, and positively transforms the community.

The process will integrate multi-media and social information technology. Therefore it will communicate the process to a much wider audience, stay with the community and enable sustainable development of the program. Through a deepened understanding of the interdependence of their stories, and enriched elder wisdom passed along in timeless ways, the Story Bridge program establishes youth as the shaping force in the community's evolution.

III. Key Programmatic Concepts

The program follows four key programmatic concepts.

3.1 Co-production

All successful programs are co-produced. The program sees every participant—child, teacher, artist, parent, grandparents, community—as equally vital and equally responsible for the success of the program.

3.2 Communicative Agency

The ability to fully tell one's story and to fully hear the stories of others creates equality in the room. Once created, everything is possible. A six-year-old child can co-produce with a sixty-year-old adult. True co-production depends on communicative agency.

3.3 The Performance Model

Focus on performance charges work with purpose and urgency. The performance model embodies a useful contradiction: the more we focus on performance, the deeper the commitment to process. Based on two decades of experience, program directors know that deepening the process—stopping the work as necessary to assure that no one is being left out—deepens the performance.

3.4 The Empowerment Model

The program aims to enhance the degree of empowerment through increasing individual agency/capacity in three major assets: psychological, social and essential skills. Scientifically proven empowerment pathways are incorporated in the programming, including self-validation, social support, engagement in diversity, and completion of challenging tasks.

IV. Featured Projects

Swamp Gravy

As the first Story Bridge play, Swamp Gravy started in 1992 and has thrived for over 20 years in Colquitt, GA. The play has transformed Colquitt from one of the most impoverished areas in the country. Now it has been named one of “the most extraordinary small towns in America” for its successful community and economic revitalization effort through art and culture.

It has performed at the Kennedy Center, been designated as the Georgia’s Official Folklife Play, and was a featured event of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.





The Intergenerative Project (TIP)

From 2015 to 2016, CPI partnered with nationally and internationally acclaimed Intergenerational Schools based in Cleveland, Ohio. TIP utilized multiage storytelling across multiple platforms to convene a global conversation around education and health.

Monkey Dumplins

Labelled by NY Times as “the worst place to live in America”, residents in Manchester, Kentucky have used the Story Bridge method to rebuild their community since 2013. Monkey Dumplins, the name of the performance troupe, is a key catalyst for the positive changes happening in Manchester.





Songs of Tang Hulu

In 2015, CPI partnered with Vibrant Communities, the largest NGO serving migrants in China to bring empowering art education and Story Bridge to migrant communities in Beijing. The highly acclaimed performance by the cast of migrant families was heralded in major news media.



Un Caminho Sobre O Muro

In 2006, CPI went to Rio de Janeiro to work with *favela* residents to the practice of peace to their challenged community.





Jonesborough Story Town App

This app is released in 2016 and developed by Jules Corriere, Co-Artistic Director of CPI. The app takes you through Jonesborough's Historic Downtown Main Street, sharing stories of the people who once walked down this centuries-old road, and the secrets held in these historic buildings.

"I never knew it was going to be so deep..
I realized.. I was them, and they were me.
We are ONE."
A Story Bridge participant from Netherland.

Story

V. Key Members

Richard Owen Geer, Ph.D.



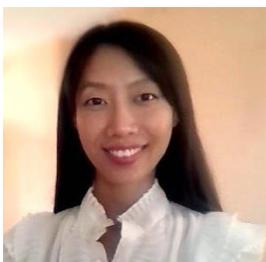
Dr. Geer received his doctoral degree in performance studies from Northwestern University. He is an esteemed director and scholar in community performance and the co-founder of Community Performance, International (CPI). Dr. Geer developed Community Performance, a theater genre that celebrates ordinary people and their communities. His Story Bridge Method uses theater as a catalyst for peace building and community change. Dr. Geer founded more than 40 Community Performance projects worldwide, one of which is Swamp Gravy, the official Georgia Folklife Play and a participant in the Cultural Olympiad of the Atlanta Olympics. Dr. Geer co-hosts the annual Building Creative Community Conference. His recent keynote at the Brushy Fork Institute presented his vision for the arts-transformation of challenged communities. With Qinghong Wei he regularly directs here and in China. His publications include *Story Bridge: From Alienation to Community Action*.

Jules Corriere



Jules Corriere has written thirty-eight plays, edited a book of oral histories, and recently completed her fifth season writing and directing a monthly NPR radio-variety show. Her production of Scrap Mettle SOUL's *The Whole World Gets Well* won the Presidential Points of Light Award and toured in London and Edinburgh. Other playwright credits include *Let My People Go! A Spiritual Journey* which performed at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall; and *Turn the Wash Pot Down* in Union, SC, featured in People Magazine and named by the state legislature as the First Official Folk Life Play of the state. American Theatre magazine said of this play, "Even if *Turn the Washpot Down* doesn't save Union 's life, it has already saved its soul." She appears in the 2010-2011 edition of Who's Who for her work in the field on Theater Arts and Social Activism.

Qinghong Wei, Ph.D



Dr. Wei is a leading scholar in community development through the arts. Her original research on empowerment pathways and creative programs is a significant contribution to the field. Dr. Wei has been invited to speak at the 2014 Annual Conference of American Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), and the 2013 Euro-Asia Economic Forum, an international summit of international leaders on economic and social development. Dr. Wei has over a decade of diverse development planning experience working

with local governments, international corporations and communities. She has crafted scores of community development plans for many municipalities and communities in Florida. From 2011 to 2013, Dr. Wei had an exceptional opportunity to serve as the President & CEO of Overseas China Education Foundation (OCEF), one of the most influential nonprofit organizations in the Chinese American community with assets of over \$1 million and over 5,000 registered volunteers worldwide. She is the producer, co-director, and author of *Songs of Tang Hulu*.

Kevin Iega Jeff



Iega is an accomplished choreographer, director, teacher and performer. In 1982, Iega founded the internationally acclaimed JUBILATION! Dance Company in New York . In 1994, he served as Artistic Director of Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theater and presently is Co-Founder/Artistic Director of Deeply Rooted Productions in Chicago , IL . Iega's choreography and direction is familiar to audiences worldwide from an international tour of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* to Spike Lee's film *She's Gotta Have It*. His intricate and explosive work *Walls*, premiered during the 1996 Summer Olympics Festival in Atlanta . His seminal work *Church of Nations* received the award for Best Choreography from the 1996 Black Theater Alliance committee. Iega made his professional debut in the Broadway musical *The Wiz*. He was the principal dancer in the Broadway production, *Com'in Uptown* starring Gregory Hines. With America 's premier ballerina Cynthia Gregory, he performed as The Beast in "Beauty and the Beast" in the 1994 Academy Awards Broadcast.

Peter J. Whitehouse, MD. PhD



Peter J. Whitehouse, MD, PhD is Professor of Neurology at Case Western Reserve University and President of Intergenerational Schools International. He received his undergraduate degree from Brown University and MD-PhD (Psychology) from The Johns Hopkins University (with field work at Harvard and Boston Universities), followed by a Fellowship in Neuroscience and Psychiatry and a faculty appointment at Hopkins. In 1999 he founded with his wife, Catherine, The Intergenerational School, a unique public multiage, community school (www.tisonline.org). He is active as a geriatric neurologist, cognitive scientist, environmental ethicist, and photographer. He is active in visual arts, dance and music organizations globally. He is coauthor of *The Myth of Alzheimer's: What You Aren't Being Told About Today's Most Dreaded Diagnosis*. (www.themythofalzheimers.com) and hundreds of academic papers and book chapters. Dr. Whitehouse is a key figure in the international movement of holistic health and education with an emphasis on art and community.

Ron Pate, PhD



As a narrative sociologist Ron has researched community oral histories featuring prominent works of Community Performance International. Ron is currently working on a multi-partner project in Portland, OR. He has also directed such narrative projects as: Woodlawn Stories and consulted on narrative projects in the historically significant African American communities of: College Hills in Birmingham; and Rosedale in Homewood, Alabama. Ron's academic work is an interdisciplinary blend of applied theology, social geography and urban studies.

Rebecca Rhapsody Narowe



Rebecca Rhapsody is a story weaver, visionary, permaculturalist & social artist whose work evokes resourceful authenticity and solutionary thinking in individuals and groups. Rebecca is the co-creator of The Story Connective Program and helps lead the way on non-profit ELLSSA'S board in establishing new world changing ways to THRIVE. Rhapsody is a champion of creativity, connectivity, & holistic wisdom. Deeply influenced by her place of birth & upbringing, the island of Maui, Hawai'i, Rhapsody innately cherishes our sacred connection to nature & the spirit of Aloha. She has a degree in theater from Northwestern University, & has over 10 years of teaching/facilitating experience. She lives part time in Ashland, Oregon, & Maui, where she is developing participatory permaculture curriculum, and experimenting with using story performance as an awesome and effective community foundation building tool.

Community Performance International (CPI)

CPI is a nonprofit and the leading organization in community performance in the U.S. CPI has collaborated with numerous communities and organizations in the U.S. and worldwide to produce performances that use storytelling and theater to build community rapport, aid conflict resolution, and promote collective peace building actions. Featured productions including *Swamp Gravy* of Colquitt, Georgia, *The Intergenerativity Project* of Cleveland, Ohio, *Songs of Tang Hulu* of Beijing, China, and *Un Caminho Sobre O Muro* of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, etc.