

CCBC Book Tour 2017 Mini Report

By Karen Gummo

How fortunate I was to journey through a corner of Ontario in early May of 2017. I give great thanks to the clever and thoughtful Shannon Howe Barnes for carefully arranging all the details and to the many librarians and storytellers who hosted and transported me to each wonderful place. Thank you to Selina Eisenburg for connecting me to Marion Gruner and Brenda Byers who made me feel at home and who I had the chance to bond with on my journey. I was so grateful to be cared for by kind Bed and Breakfast hosts in Elora, to explore the history of Sault Ste. Marie, to find the most inspiring Children's Library and natural history museum at Richard's Landing and get to know Megan Parr, the wise young woman who lovingly brings it to life. I have a new appreciation for the beauty, expanse and history of Ontario.

So many memories linger for me. There were wide-eyed listeners who loved Story Man and his mother, (my wee story mascots who live in my story basket). There were my helpers who chose treasured items from the basket to help select what tale to tell and who played roles of some of the characters in my stories. There were the Old Order Mennonite children dressed alike from boots to hat parading to the library in their purple, blue and black shiny outfits, straw hats and spring bonnets. I gazed at them to see faces riveted, holding on to every word.

"Is that story true?" The wise ones wondered. "It must have been invented to warn children of dangers." I found myself near to tears when I told some of my family tales. Librarians told me they were right there with me.

"Could you tell us another? Can I show you a string trick? Will you come back? When?" Runny nosed faces, babies squealing, boys gleefully hiding, playing shy, came out of their shells and into story making. They shone in front of their peers. I won't forget the women and children who came to see me at the Women's Shelter in Hamilton and who shared their lunch time with me, some of them coming forward to tell me of their plans to develop their storytelling and literary skills.

I remember teachers wanting to stretch themselves and take on skills as storytellers, kind souls who invited me to their son's Ukrainian dance concert, strangers who took me out for dinner and new friends who taught me phrases in Ojibwe. I give thanks to all the generous people who made this wonderful tour possible. I believe there is a great need for more of this kind of liaison in the world. Listeners and storytellers might say as they do in Ojibwe "Gi noondawin" - I hear you.