Unit 2

The ROOTS *of Our* CULTURE

OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 of this unit begins by examining theories which attempt to explain the peopling of Earth. Various groups migrated to, lived in, and disappeared from present-day Newfoundland and Labrador. These groups were the ancestors of the Aboriginal groups who inhabited the area prior to European contact.

In the late fifteenth century, European governments encouraged westward expansion, and the resulting discovery of fish in Newfoundland and Labrador waters led to the development of a migratory fishery conducted by several European nations. Various types of fishing were prosecuted in Newfoundland and Labrador. There were risks involved with the migratory fishery and steps taken to minimize these risks. The migratory fishing created governance issues. Early contact between Europeans and Aboriginal groups will also be examined.

Chapter 3 begins with the change from a transient population to a permanent one. By the mid 1700s, Europeans saw the value of settling here, and became permanent residents of "this place". Residents participated in several fisheries, carried out supplementary subsistence activities, used new technology, and worked in family units to process their fish and sell it to merchants who had set up enterprises along the coast.

Aboriginal groups saw changes in lifestyle as Europeans encroached upon their land, and as each group incorporated some European practices into their way of life. Beothuk may have been the exception and resisted such assimilation, which possibly contributed to their extinction. A new group, the Metis, emerged as European men married Aboriginal women.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, economic diversification became the main thrust. The fishing industry was in decline and could no longer support the growing population. New industries became necessary and were made possible by the building of a railway through the centre of the colony.

A resident population necessitated a change in governance. Naval governors gave way to representative government in 1832, and this in turn changed to responsible government in 1855. In 1934 Newfoundland and Labrador lost its independent status, due in large part to a growing debt.

Fig. 1

Experiencing The Arts

Exploring art forms and artistic techniques

Storytelling

"The art of storytelling was very much alive when I was a child in Newfoundland. We had a whole community of storytellers.

… Not only were their tales entertaining, but they chronicled the lives of our ancestors by way of the spoken word in songs, recitations, poetry, and drama.

… it's only now that I'm older I fully realize how important storytelling is to our heritage, for it helps define who we are as individuals."

– Lucy Fitzpatrick-McFarlane, writer

The History of Storytelling

Fig. 2

Storytelling is one of our oldest art forms. It was a common pastime before the advent of media such as television and computers. Storytelling is the art of using words to convey the elements and images of a story to an audience, stimulating the imagination of the listener. This includes folk tales, local legends, and recitations. Traditionally, stories were recounted from memory rather than being read from a printed page.

In many ways storytellers are considered tradition bearers, although they may not consider themselves as such. Their skills are respected in the community, although what they do is a pastime rather than a profession. Through their stories, storytellers informally transmit both historical information and traditional knowledge.

In Newfoundland and Labrador there have been two distinct but overlapping storytelling traditions. One is the private tradition with stories told in a small group or in a private home. The other is the public tradition of storytelling, which is often part of an evening's entertainment. Throughout the province there are several organizations that promote storytelling. These organizations help create a forum to collect and record stories, as well as provide an opportunity for speakers to share their knowledge of the culture and history of "this place."

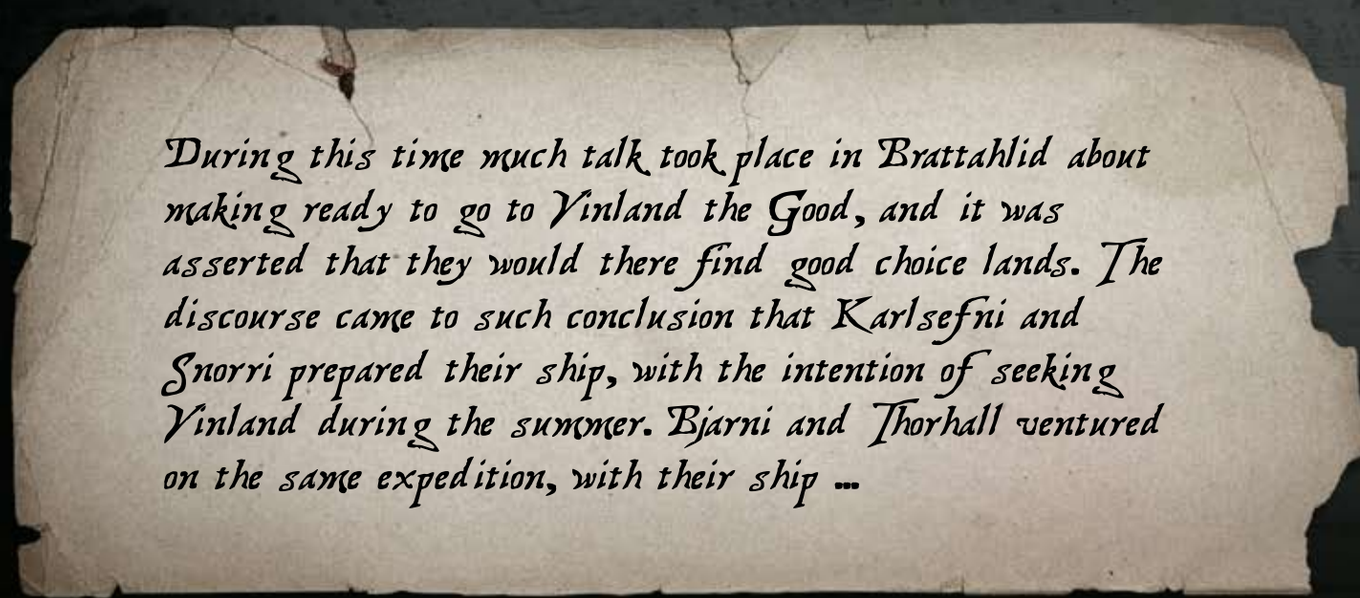


Fig. 3 According to Eiríc's Saga, c. 1000 CE, Leif sailed off course on the return voyage from Norway and landed on the North American continent at a region he called Vinland. Regardless of the accuracy of this saga, it was instrumental in Helge Ingstad's and his wife Anne Stine Ingstad's discovery of L'Anse aux Meadows in 1960.

The First Fog

Once, a man went into the forest to get firewood. While he was working in the forest, he was attacked by a black bear who wounded him badly, so that the man fell to the ground as if dead. The bear sniffed him to determine whether he was still alive, but the man held his breath, so that the bear believed the man to be dead and put him on his back to carry him off into his cave. On the way there, the bear came with his load through thick bushes. Intending, if possible, to escape, the man grasped the twigs of the bushes so that it might appear to the bear that his burden had been caught by the bushes and left behind. The bear, of course, looked around, and the man quickly let go of the twigs and would once almost have fallen from the bear's back. The man could not find any convenient moment to escape and the bear happily brought the prey into his cave. The exertion had made the bear tired. He threw himself on the lair and fell asleep. The little bears that cavorted in the cave thought that their father was still watching, and when they saw that the human, whom father bear had just deposited in the cave, opened his eyes, they called out to the sleeping bear, "Father? Father? Look, the one you just brought us is opening his eyes?" Drowsy, the old bear replied, "Even if he now opens his eyes forever, he has already given me enough trouble today," and continued to sleep. Then the man jumped to his feet, pushed the little playing bears aside and rushed out of the cave. Mother bear was standing outside cooking. The man threw her also to the ground and fled. He came to a river, which he waded across. Now he was safe! In the meantime father bear was awakened by his family and ran angrily after the escapee. He came to the river and saw the hunted man on the other side. "How have you been able to cross the river?" the bear asked the man. "I drank it all up," he answered. The bear immediately started to do the same. He drank and drank and drank, until he burst. Then, for the first time, thick fog covered the land.

Fig. 4 Reverend Albert Martin (1861-1934) published the text of this Labrador folk tale under the title "Inuit Folk Tale about the Origin of Fog (Labrador)," in the October 1901 issue of a Moravian magazine of missions devoted to children. The folk tale that Martin published in German is in one form or another common to Inuit across the Arctic and has been recorded from the Canadian Northwest to East Greenland.

Exercise One:

Find a story from the distant past and retell it to a small group of family or friends as part of the private tradition of storytelling.

Fig. 5

There lay her grandmother with her cap pulled far over her face, and looking very strange.
"Oh! grandmother," she said, "what big ears you have."
"The better to hear you with, my child," was the reply.
"But, grandmother, what big eyes you have!" she said.
"The better to see you with, my dear."
"But, grandmother, what large hands you have!"
"The better to hug you with."
"Oh! but, grandmother, what a terrible big mouth you have!"
"The better to eat you with!"
And scarcely had the wolf said this, then with one bound he was out of bed and swallowed up Red-Cap.
When the wolf had appeased his appetite, he lay down again in the bed, fell asleep and began to snore very loud. The huntsman was just passing the house, and thought to himself, "How the old woman is snoring! I must just see if she wants anything." So he went into the room, and when he came to the bed, he saw that the wolf was lying in it. "Do I find thee here, thou old sinner!" said he. "I have long sought thee!" Then just as he was going to fire at him, it occurred to him that the wolf might have devoured the grandmother, and that she might still be saved, so he did not fire, but took a pair of scissors, and began to cut open the stomach of the sleeping wolf. When he had made two snips, he saw the little Red-Cap shining, and then he made two snips more, and the little girl sprang out, crying, "Ah, how frightened I have been! How dark it was inside the wolf," and after that the aged grandmother came out alive also, but scarcely able to breathe. Red-Cap, however, quickly fetched great stones with which they filled the wolf's body, and when he awoke, he wanted to run away, but the stones were so heavy that he fell down at once, and fell dead.
Then all three were delighted. The huntsman drew off the wolf's skin and went home with it; the grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine which Red-Cap had brought, and revived, but Red-Cap thought to herself, "As long as I live, I will never by myself leave the path, to run into the wood, when my mother has forbidden me to do so."

Exercise Two:

Find a traditional folk tale, such as *Red Cap* or *Cinderella*, and create your own version of the story, adapting the characters, setting, and plot to reflect the history and culture of your community or region of the province. Share your work with a small group of family or friends as part of the private tradition of storytelling.

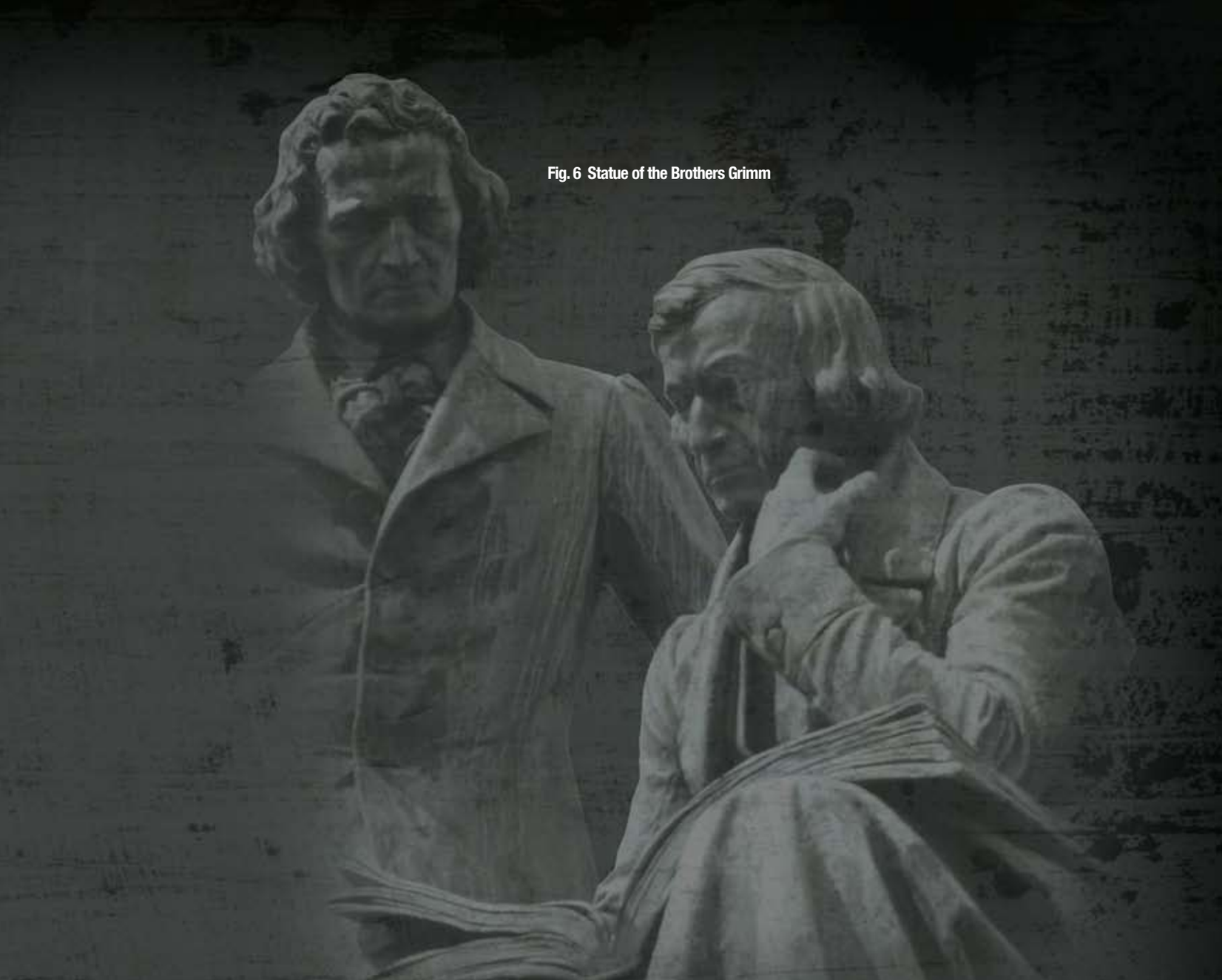


Fig. 6 Statue of the Brothers Grimm

Sound familiar? This is an excerpt from the original folk tale as recorded by the Brothers Grimm in the early 1800s. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were German academics who were best known for publishing collections of folk tales and fairy tales allowing the widespread knowledge of such tales as Rumpelstiltskin, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, and The Frog Prince.

Researchers Herbert Halpert and JDA Widdowson have noted that many of the traditional stories with English, Irish, Scottish, and French origins told in our province have remained relatively unchanged over time. However, many stories have been modified to reflect the Newfoundland and Labrador environment. In some cases there has been a blending of stories as different groups became assimilated. This is especially true of French-speaking communities of the Port au Port Peninsula where stories are now a blend of those from northern France and Nova Scotia. The same holds true of English-Irish oral tradition.

How does the original ending of "Red-Cap" compare with the ending that you heard as a child in "Little Red Riding Hood?" Do you think the differences can be attributed to the evolution of the story over the years?

Fig. 7

How to *tell your* Story

Here is what Isaac Primmer of Fogo Island says about storytelling in his community:

> *There was a certain way to tell a story you know. Some had a knack for tellin' stories, jokes, one thing and another. They'd make a good story out of nothing … One would try to outdo the other you know … Skipper Chris might tell a story about a man … counted to be a good shot. Well that would start it off. Every man then would have to tell a story that he heard. Some, you know, would add a bit here and there to make the story good.*
>
> *A good storyteller knew how to tell a story, keep everybody interested. When Horman Cobb went to tell a story all hands want to hear it. He love to tellin' 'em; certainly he was always at it.*

There are as many ways to tell stories as there are stories. And everyone has a story to tell. Storytelling evolves out of informal conversation. It could be a friend telling you an anecdote on the way to school. It could also be a family member telling a story at a family gathering. It could be a performer giving a recitation at a community concert. Here are some points to consider when telling a story:

1. Know the plot of your story really well.
2. Speak clearly.
3. Use gestures and body language to convey ideas. This is important to engage the listener who will use his or her imagination to visualize the images the storyteller is describing.
4. Use different voices to portray different characters if possible.
5. Practise, practise, practise. The better you know your story, the better you will be able to tell it.

Exercise Three:

Talk to an older family member or friend to find a folk tale from your community or region. Retell it to a small group of family or friends as part of the private tradition of storytelling.

The Boarding House Ghost (Abridged)

My Great-Aunt Sara kept a boarding house in St. John's for many years. It was a very popular boarding house, and Aunt Sara was very particular as to the type of boarder she accommodated. Besides transients Aunt Sara had a few permanent boarders who had lived with her for many years. The permanent boarders included several college students, a Salvation Army teacher, a customs officer and a spinster lady of uncertain age, who was one of my aunt's first boarders. Miss Minnie, as she was called, was a very prim and proper maiden lady and was respected by all my aunt's family of paying guests.

One winter, Miss Minnie decided to take a trip to visit her brother in Halifax. She arrived back at the boarding house after a year. First thing she had to make sure of was that her room and the things she had left behind were intact and in good condition. So after supper Miss Minnie went off to her room.

My father said he was more than half asleep behind his evening paper when suddenly an ear-splitting scream broke the stillness and the white figure of Miss Minnie literally fell into the room. She straightened out on the floor in a dead faint. Someone ran for a pan of water. Someone else laid the poor old lady on the sofa. After a few minutes her eyes opened. "Miss Minnie, whatever happened?" asked my aunt, but all Miss Minnie could say was "the ghost, the ghost." After about half an hour Miss Minnie rallied enough to tell the anxious crowd around her that she had indeed seen a ghost in her clothes closet at the foot of her bed.

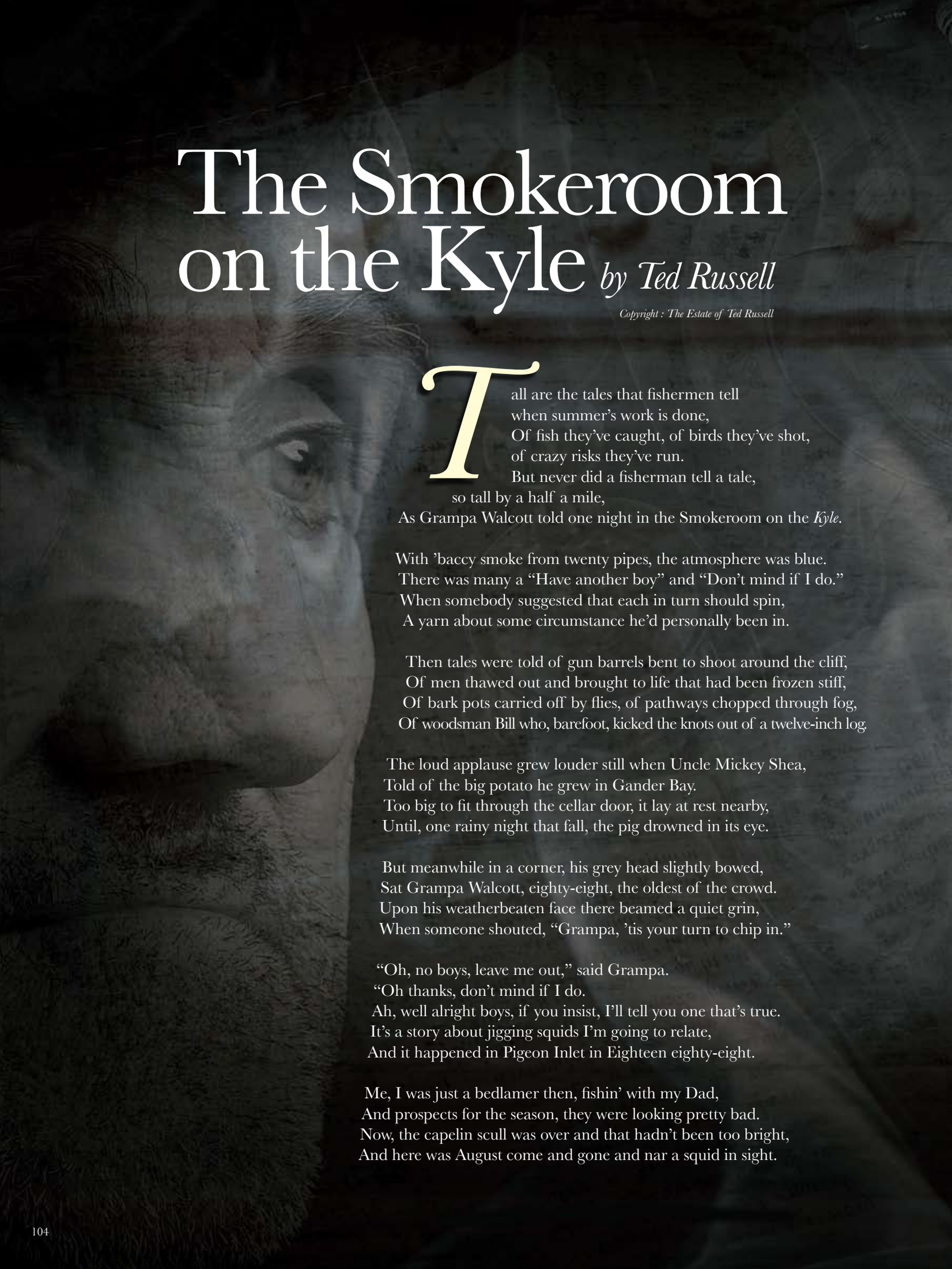
All of the boarders went into the room, opened the door and saw nothing but a few boxes belonging to Miss Minnie on a high top shelf. However, poor frightened Miss Minnie could not be persuaded to occupy the room any more that night. My good father, who stoutly declared that he never did believe in such nonsense, offered to give his couch in the kitchen to Miss Minnie.

It wasn't much more than an hour later when a loud and more ear-splitting yell came from Miss Minnie's room, and out ran my father. "The ghost! He's in there all right!" said my father. "After I had been in bed for a while I decided to get up and have a look at the closet, so I opened the door and there it was - an awful thing, a big white skeleton standing up in the cupboard. No wonder poor Miss Minnie passed out. I don't feel so good myself." All the boarders visited the room again, and as before saw no signs of an unearthly apparition. "We are not going to see a ghost with the lights on," said my father. "Turn out the lights and see what happens." So with some trepidation and much apprehension, the little band of boarders crowded together in Miss Minnie's room. While one of the boys turned out the light, another opened the fateful door.

There in full view of the astonished men and women was a full-tsized skeleton with an unearthly bluish light. A gasp went through the room. But one young student boldly stepped into the closet. "Well, well, if that's not a joke, I never saw one," he laughed. "This ghost is painted on the wall of the closet with luminous or phosphorescent paint," said the young student. "That's why it didn't show up when the lights were on. Ask Jim - I bet him and that White Bay fellow that had this room last winter can tell you all about this ghost."

Well, to make a long story short, that was the end of the boarding house ghost.

Fig. 8 An example of a traditional story passed on orally in Newfoundland and Labrador



The Smokeroom on the Kyle *by Ted Russell*

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Tall are the tales that fishermen tell
when summer's work is done,
Of fish they've caught, of birds they've shot,
of crazy risks they've run.
But never did a fisherman tell a tale,
so tall by a half a mile,
As Grampa Walcott told one night in the Smokeroom on the *Kyle*.

With 'baccy smoke from twenty pipes, the atmosphere was blue.
There was many a "Have another boy" and "Don't mind if I do."
When somebody suggested that each in turn should spin,
A yarn about some circumstance he'd personally been in.

Then tales were told of gun barrels bent to shoot around the cliff,
Of men thawed out and brought to life that had been frozen stiff,
Of bark pots carried off by flies, of pathways chopped through fog,
Of woodsman Bill who, barefoot, kicked the knots out of a twelve-inch log.

The loud applause grew louder still when Uncle Mickey Shea,
Told of the big potato he grew in Gander Bay.
Too big to fit through the cellar door, it lay at rest nearby,
Until, one rainy night that fall, the pig drowned in its eye.

But meanwhile in a corner, his grey head slightly bowed,
Sat Grampa Walcott, eighty-eight, the oldest of the crowd.
Upon his weatherbeaten face there beamed a quiet grin,
When someone shouted, "Grampa, 'tis your turn to chip in."

"Oh, no boys, leave me out," said Grampa.
"Oh thanks, don't mind if I do.
Ah, well alright boys, if you insist, I'll tell you one that's true.
It's a story about jigging squids I'm going to relate,
And it happened in Pigeon Inlet in Eighteen eighty-eight.

Me, I was just a bedlamer then, fishin' with my Dad,
And prospects for the season, they were looking pretty bad.
Now, the capelin scull was over and that hadn't been too bright,
And here was August come and gone and nar a squid in sight.

Day after day we searched for squid, 'til dark from the crack of dawn.
We dug up clams and cocks n' hens 'til even these were gone.
And still no squids so, in despair, we give it up for good,
Took our gear ashore and went cutting firewood.

Now, one morning, while out in the woods with all the other men,
And wondering if we'd ever see another squid again.
Father broke his axe that day so we were the first ones out,
And as we neared the landwash, we heard the women shout.

"Come hurry boys, the squids are in." Well, we jumped aboard our boat,
And started out the harbour, the only crew afloat.
But soon our keel began to scrunch like scrapin' over skids.
"Father," says I, "we've run aground." "Me son," says he, "that's squids."

Said he, "The jigger, heave it out," and quick as a flash I did,
And soon as it struck the water, 'twas grappled by a squid.
I hauled it in and what do you think? As soon as he crossed the rail,
I'll be darned if there wasn't a second squid clung on to the first one's tail.

And another clung to that one and so on in a string.
I tried to shake 'em loose but Father said, "You foolish thing.
You've got something was never seen before in Newfoundland.
Drop the jigger, grab the string and haul hand over hand."

I hauled that string of squids aboard 'til the boat could hold no more,
And then we hitched it in the risings and rowed for the shore.
Now the men were coming from the woods, they'd heard the women bawl,
But Father said, "Don't hurry boys, we've squids enough for all."

So Uncle Jimmy, he took the string until he had enough,
And, neighbour-like, he handed it on to Skipper Levi Cuff.
Well, from stage to stage that string was passed throughout the whole night long,
'Til daylight found it on Eastern Point with Uncle Billy Strong.

Now Uncle Bill, quite thoughtfully, before he went to bed,
Took two half-hitches of that string 'round the grump on his stagehead.
Next morning Hartley's Harbour heard the news and up they come,
In a trap skiff with three pair of oars to tow the string down home.

And when Hartley's Harbour had enough, the following afternoon,
That string went on from place to place until it reached Quirpon.
Now, what happened to it after that, well I don't exactly know.
But some folks say that it crossed the Straits and ended in Forteau."

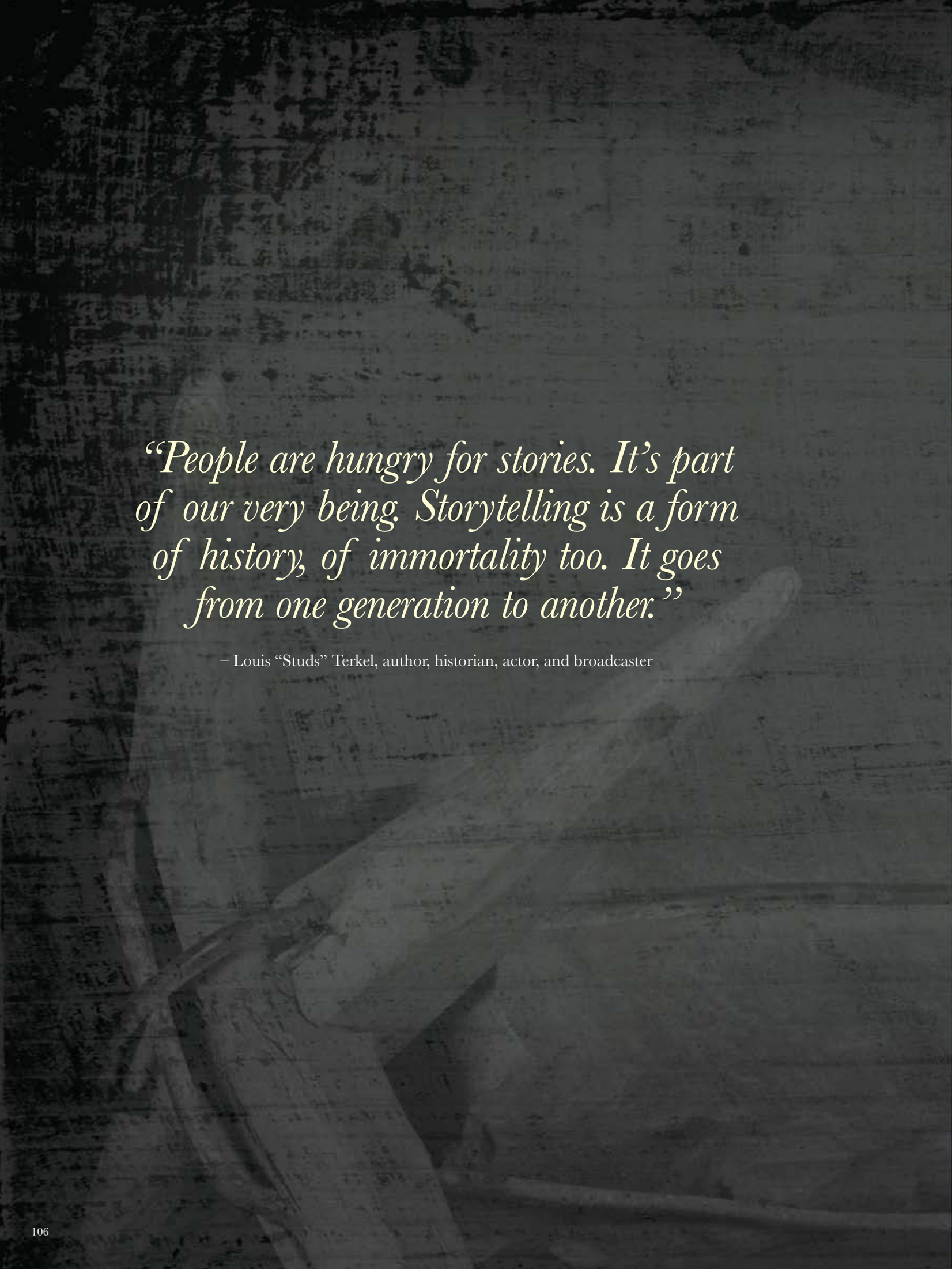
Yes, tall are the tales that fishermen tell when summer's work is done,
Of fish they've caught and birds they've shot and crazy risks they've run.
But never did a fisherman tell a tale, so tall by a half a mile,
As Grampa Walcott told that night in the Smokeroom on the *Kyle*.

Experiencing The Arts
Learn about other stories that are part of our tradition on page 650 as you read the stories written by storyteller Ted Russell.

Fig. 9

Exercise Four:

Find a traditional work, such as a poem or short piece of prose, and share it in a large group setting as part of the public tradition of storytelling.



"People are hungry for stories. It's part of our very being. Storytelling is a form of history, of immortality too. It goes from one generation to another."

– Louis "Studs" Terkel, author, historian, actor, and broadcaster