

Media for Children

A visit to the US looking at audio for children with a focus on digital storytelling

Supported by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust

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Prue Langbein

2016

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Executive Summary

I applied for my Churchill Fellowship in 2015 whilst still employed at Radio New Zealand as a programme producer. It was a time of some uncertainty in terms of the ongoing support and development of children's programming material there, as well as change in many other areas. Since then the drama department I worked for has been severely cut back, there is no more new production of children's material, and I, along with others, am no longer working there.

However I am still passionate about the listening experience and the importance of story.

Over the past few years a major change has happened in public broadcasting and media in general across the world. There's no going back from this digital revolution, and it brings its own complexities, advantages, problems and excitements. Coupled with a free market consumer economy, it can make it challenging to provide quality, non-commercial media for children.

I arrived in the US in late October on the eve of an election, another time of change. Being mainly in democrat strongholds, I spent a lot of my time with people reeling from the outcome. The Trump success seems like another sort of revolution and I have to say in many ways it overshadowed much of my visit.

I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Trust for enabling me to travel to the United States for three weeks. My time there made me aware of how much others were grappling with new circumstances and showed me some of the creative and collaborative ways people were dealing with them. I returned from my trip aware of the difficult path ahead but heartened by the opportunities for and interest in quality listening experiences, my belief in the power and importance of story reaffirmed.

Introduction

Purpose

Children are our greatest resource as Russell Wills said in his support letter for my funding application and he continued 'It goes without saying that nurturing the creative potential and imaginations of our children should be a national priority.'

The purpose of my trip was to investigate the production and use of creative audio for children. It included digital storytelling with a focus on the benefits of listening in an age of highly visual media, partnerships and podcasting.

I'd been a public broadcaster working in New Zealand children's radio for over 26 years and wanted to find out what sort of broadcasting was available for children in the United States and what sort of initiatives were being made in the wake of the uptake of digital media.

I was also keen to make contact with like-minded people involved with audio and children's media in general.

Significance

Storytelling connects us to our humanity. It links us to our past, and provides a glimpse into our future. Since humans first walked the earth, we have told stories as a way to shape our existence, make sense of our world, feel less alone. Listening to stories taps directly into our imagination in a way that visual media can not.

The study has significance at a time where our children are exposed to an ever widening array of media stimulus and storytelling with potential high gains for commercial providers. In this fast seductive predominantly visual digital environment there is more to choose from but the content is not always appropriate. The worlds depicted are often mass produced, ready-made and without much range of cultural perspective. They do not necessarily expand imagination, creativity, tolerance as best they can. They rely on the eye a lot more than the ear and the personal imaginative world is left untapped.

New Zealand has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, rights which include children being given a voice and to the right to express themselves. How much do we uphold these principles?

According to the 2013 census New Zealand children under 15 make up over 20% of our population. Annually New Zealand on Air spend around \$13 million on children's and young people's programmes from the general contestable fund of around \$130 million. Children's programming in New Zealand is almost entirely dependent on public investment and this funding has not kept up with inflation or population growth.

Key Questions

- How do you encourage the production and use of quality listening experiences for children?
- How do you let parents and children know there's audio content for them?
- What are the trends in media for children?
- What methods are used for recording and editing?
- What equipment do you use?
- What is your process for making regular programmes?
- How do you ensure a range of voices when making material for children?
- How do you fund your work?
- If you use advertising to support your work how do you monitor this?
- What audience research do you do?
- What research on the benefits of audio has been done?
- What contacts have proved useful?

- Which broadcasting networks are interested in children's audio?
- Do you use podcast publishers and if so which ones?
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Methods

I spent considerable time researching and connecting with a range of organisations and individuals before my trip. Most of this was done on-line through emails and LinkedIn. I also spoke with New Zealanders who had received Winston Churchill Fellowships and had good advice.

Some of the planned meet ups did not eventuate due to a variety of circumstances. However there were other unplanned visits stemming from connections made as I travelled or just before my departure from NZ. Some of these proved most useful. The visit to Honesdale and the Highlights Foundation was not part of my initial planning but a real bonus.

I got in touch with Nick Quah and have found his weekly Hotpod blogs very useful both in my pre trip planning and since my return - <https://www.hotpodnews.com/about-hot-pod/>

Dr Ruth Zanker, Associate researcher at the New Zealand Broadcasting School in Christchurch, recommended David Kleeman to me. David gave me many useful pre trip pointers and I met him in NYC. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/dkleeman-474>

I took a Zoom H4 audio recorder and recorded interviews with Kent Brown, Patti Gauch, Christine Cully, David Kleeman, Bill Schribman and Courteny Eickman. They proved useful memory joggers. I wrote notes during and after meet ups, events and workshops.

Key Learnings and Conclusions

Having the opportunity to spend time with like-minded people in another part of the world gave me a wider perspective which has long term benefits on my work and my life in general. The effects of the trip are still sinking in and will continue to resonate for quite some time.

I discovered that cutbacks in public broadcasting, the loss of creative employment for producers, and the ever growing use of new technology by children were common themes. The speed of change can be overwhelming and to have others to share ideas, problems and information with was invaluable. Some of the connections I made will be long lasting and, I hope, beneficial in developing quality storytelling for children here and in other parts of the world.

According to Bridge Media 2017 holds great promise as a breakout year for podcasting - <http://www.bridgeratings.com/2017-podcastings-breakthrough-year>.

'This may be the year when a confluence of technology, advertising and consumer interest boost momentum for the platform which offers content for just about every taste and interest. However much of the growth in podcasting we are projecting for this year rests on the

shoulders of the content creators because ultimately a flood of audio consumers will be short-lived if the presentation, production and focus of the content cannot hold listener interest.'

The ability for anyone to make their own podcasts has opened up the range of content and voices. It's great to have individual styles among the more corporate mass-produced media available. However it can make it harder to find quality material amongst the burgeoning array of podcasts!

Meeting up with the KidsListen members, <http://www.kidslisten.org/> was probably the single most useful part of my trip. This group is dedicated to making quality audio for children and families, I've joined up and we continue to stay in touch through 'Slack' and there are regular on line meet ups. Having that initial face-to-face encounter made the on-line relationships with other members personal and much more meaningful.

The formation of KidsListen has enabled collective strength, support and impact, crucial to building audiences and realising a profit for small organisations.

Non fiction audio about science and discovery have proven popular, as shown by the recent top 10 listing on iTunes of NPR's new 'Wow in the World', described as 'a new way for families to connect, look up and discover the wonders in the world around them.'
2017<http://www.npr.org/podcasts/510321/wow-in-the-world>

The print media has also recently included children. A special print-only section with children as journalists came out on 14th May called The New York Times for Kids.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/13/insider/kids-take-over-the-times-opinion-special-section.html>

Two huge media organisations I visited are providing quality material for children, though I didn't discover any purely audio content.

WGBH <http://www.wgbh.org/> in Boston are making amazing public media free content for children. Described as a 'Public media powerhouse' WGBH serves New England, the US, and the world with inspiring and entertaining educational content. The children's section <http://www.wgbh.org/kids/> broadcasts WGBH's original content for parents and children. Shows range from Sesame Street, to Curious George, High School Quiz to Kids Classic Hour.

Highlights for Children <https://www.highlights.com/> began in 1946 as a children's magazine with the motto 'Fun with a Purpose' and is now is a highly successful global commercial enterprise with a large national audience and a variety of storytelling methods. Its non-profit off shoot The Highlights Foundation <https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/> is dedicated to improving the quality of writing and illustrating children's books

Opportunities for Application of Learnings

In 2015 NZOA commissioned a study on Children's Media Use.

<http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/document-library/may-2015-childrens-content-funding-discussion-paper>

In response to this, NZOA has put out a proposal calling for tenders for a new on-line space for children. Since then they've announced they will adopt a new single strategy and single media fund from July 1 2017. We're waiting to hear what this will mean in terms of a specific children's platform and the possibilities for more audio content.

In New Zealand listening is one of the core curriculum requirements and has been proven to enhance learning. Many teachers here and in the US use podcasts with their pupils. I'm keen to work at developing audio for classroom and family use.

There is less fiction podcasting for children than I expected to find, though audio books still have a large appeal. Long form drama is becoming more popular, both for children and adults. These are possible areas I'd like to investigate and develop.

I have a series of Joy Cowley audio stories, The Wild West Gang, to produce and following up on my Honesdale visit I am hoping to produce more of her material in audio form.

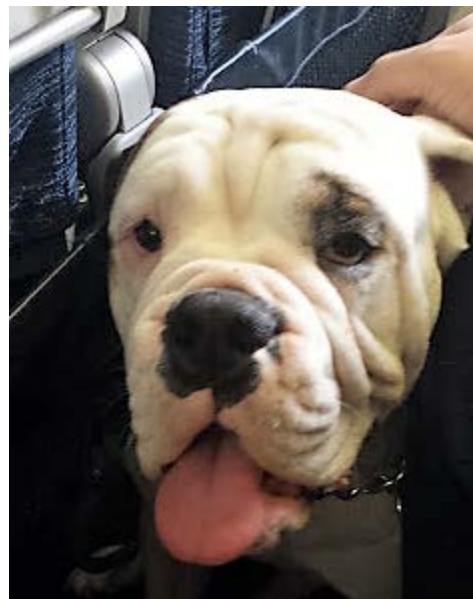
On my return got in touch with fellow New Zealander Sarah Forster who went to Valencia 826 in 2011 on a Churchill Fellowship. I've also been in touch with Catherine Robertson who organised series of writing workshops for children, Storycave, in Wellington last year. This is a project I'm looking to work further on.

I am most grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for enabling me to have this trip and am happy to talk further about it with any interested people. Thank you reader for your time and consideration.

Travel Notes and Observations

I arrived in my first US destination the evening before Halloween after a stormy flight to Newark. An auspicious start! We circled the airport for several hours, stopped to refuel in Albany and then finally landed in Newark late on a very wet night.

It was my first time in New Jersey and my first flight with an **English bull dog** at my feet. Dogs are allowed on flights if they're registered as companions and on subsequent flights I met other dog companions.



Linda, my patient driver, had waited several hours to pick me up and drove us several more hours to Honesdale in the beautiful Pocono Mountains, north east Pennsylvania.

This is the original home of Highlights for Children <https://www.highlights.com/> and of The Highlights Foundation <https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/>

The Highlights Foundation is a non profit organisation set up over 30 years ago with the aim of improving the quality of children's literature by helping authors and illustrators hone their craft. They run workshops and retreats at their property, the former home of the actual founders of Highlights for Children, located near the company's offices in Honesdale.



Woods near my cabin at the Highlights Foundation Retreat, Honesdale, PA



Several New Zealand authors have taught at the Highlights Foundation, including Joy Cowley who introduced me to executive director **Kent Brown** when he was in New Zealand in 2016.

Kent set up the not-for-profit Highlights Foundation to improve the quality of children's literature. It provides workshops and retreats for beginning and published authors and illustrators to hone their craft.

Kent is the grandson of the founders of Highlights Magazine for Children. He's editor in chief emeritus of Highlights for Children and former publisher of Boyd Mills Press.

Kent had generously invited me to stay and I spent several days in this special place. I interviewed him about his publishing life and his memories of Joy Cowley's visits over the years.



I was also fortunate to interview **Christine French Cully**, the editor in chief of Highlights for Children

This long-standing company publishes the most widely read children's magazines in North America. Chris is responsible for shaping the editorial direction of all of the company's products including the flagship publication, Highlights magazine for school-aged children, Highlights High Five for preschoolers and Highlights Hello for babies and toddlers.

Chris also oversees the Highlights book division and its digital products for kids, including websites and mobile apps. Under her leadership, Highlights has expanded to deliver its content to children in 40 countries throughout the world including China, India, Malaysia and South Africa. It's a huge market.

I spent time in the Highlights magazine office with script and illustrating editors. It was great to see the hands on approach, including lots of feedback letters from children. I also attended a Highlights staff Halloween shared lunch! There was a wide array of costumes and food.



Halloween Lunch at Highlights Magazine

Kent hosted a dinner for me to which he'd invited people who had worked with Joy Cowley. Among the guests I met was editor, publisher and author **Patti Gauch**.

Patti is one of the favourite tutors at the Foundation and has edited several of Joy's own books. It was great to have time talking in depth about the role of editing and nature of fiction and stories. I interviewed her about her own editing and writing experience and about working with Joy.



A quote from Patti - 'A writer's voice is not character alone, it is not style alone; it is far more. A writer's voice line the stroke of an artist's brush- is the thumbprint of her whole person- her idea, wit, humor, passions, rhythms.'

My cabin at Honesdale retreat

Honesdale was a perfect place to begin my Fellowship – a beautiful setting, supported in all ways including being driven to my next destination, the most populous borough of New York City!



I arrived at my airbnb in Brooklyn, my first time in this fascinating neighbourhood, and met my host and her young son. He immediately asked me if I liked Donald Trump, handed me a trick or treat candy and a copy of 'Time Out' magazine. **Here's the cover.**

I met up with some friends living in Brooklyn and we walked through the park to visit the Brooklyn Museum. Highlights for me were some wonderful ancient artifacts, including an early female figure from the 5th millenium BC

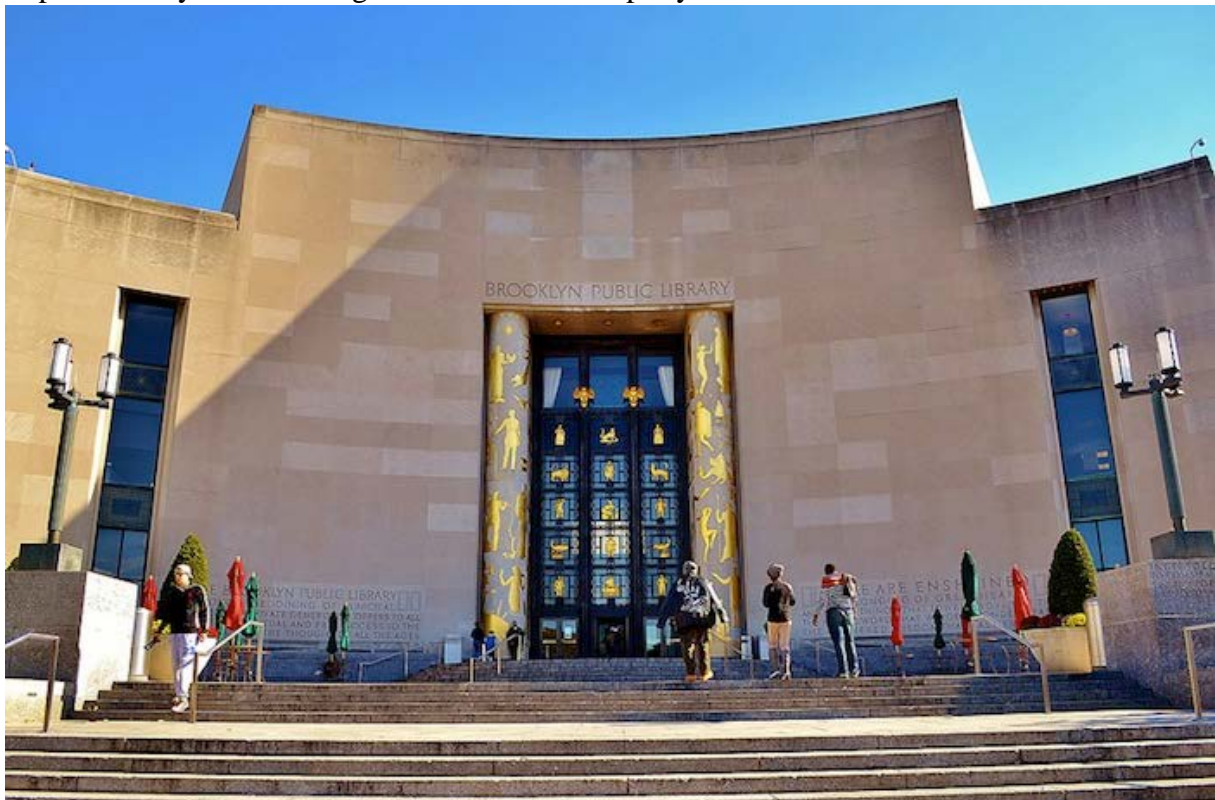
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/124145>

a modern exhibition by Marilyn Minter

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/marilyn_minter_pretty_dirty

and Judy Chicago's iconic The Dinner Party

https://brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party



The nearby **Brooklyn Library** was also inspiring and runs a large range of activites for all ages. A lot of these are similar to the sorts of things libraries are doing here in Aotearoa and of course this library services a huge population. Homework help, chess, poetry and percussion, lego building and tech time were on offer. It made me think about using audio more in our libraries, perhaps including some oral history recording posts for the public.

Here are a couple of services for children I was impressed by:

<http://www.bklynlibrary.org/calendar/spanish-storytime-central-library-youth-win-041717>

<http://www.bklynlibrary.org/calendar/library-lab-central-library-youth-win-041917>

Other great public places in NYC visited included:

The National Museum of the American Indian <http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/>
The National September 11 Memorial <https://www.911memorial.org/>

I also had the good fortune to attend a Broadway play whose use of audio was inspiring, pushing the boundaries of imagination and creativity. 'The Encounter' took a walk across our brains and drew us into the Amazon jungle <http://theencounterbroadway.com/>
The show also played at the Auckland Arts Festival in early 2017, so I needn't have travelled to New York to see it!

I met Courtney Eickman in the Rockefeller Centre for lunch.
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/courtney-eickman-bb74b656/>



David Kleeman had suggested we get together and we talked as the skaters whirled away outside in the autumn sunlight.

Courtney told me the story of her music classes for babies and mums. One of the mothers came up to her after a session saying she'd never been able to bond with her child before and gave her enough money to expand her music business. She has done this and is now a children's media writer, producer, musical and audio play director with a strong focus on designing and creating fun content. She worked for a time developing a children's music show for the BBC. We discussed possible partnerships and collaborating with others on quality entertainment for children.

Sometimes you do have to travel halfway round the world to meet up someone from your own backyard.

I discovered that fellow NZer Jan Bolwell was in NYC at the same time as me and we arranged to meet at the Met. We had a great time sharing our experiences of the city and looking at possible future creative partnerships. The use of audio in stage plays was also discussed. <http://janbolwell.com/jan-bolwell/>



Fellow Kiwi Jan Bolwell and Prue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

I saw an excellent exhibition on Jerusalem here too

<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/jerusalem>



**I couldn't resist taking a snap of this plaque in a small park on my way to WNYC.Churchill Square Garden New York
Churchill Square Garden New York**

I'd arranged to meet WNYC (New York Public Radio) producer Emily Botein when in Chicago, but visited the building as part of an audience for a **Greene Space** concert performed by students from Juilliard School of Music. As well as enjoying the music, it was

interesting to observe the sound and video recording methods and talk with technicians and the producer.

The
Greene
Space
auditorium



The Greene Space <http://www.thegreenspace.org/> hosts live broadcasts of WNYC's shows, classical concerts and festivals from WQXR (New York City's classical music radio station), live tapings of the best podcasts plus original series. There's no longer any children's radio but they are investigating podcasts for children. The Greene Space is sponsored by Audible.

I'd been in contact with David Kleeman for a long time before my trip. He'd been very helpful in pointing me in appropriate directions, giving me contacts and

generally being supportive. It was a pleasure to meet him in downtown NY, near the 9/11 memorial which I visited later that day.

David has led the children's media industry in developing sustainable, kid-friendly practices for more than 25 years.

He travels worldwide seeking best practices in children's and family media, technology and products. He is now Senior Vice President of Global Trends for Dubit, a strategy and research consultancy and digital studio based in Leeds, England. <http://www.dubitlimited.com/>

David Kleeman

David has given presentations on six continents including New Zealand and writes frequent commentaries for the Huffington Post and Kidscreen. I found the level of money and research spent on children's media habits and the fact that it's such a huge industry somewhat daunting.

It's encouraging that there are people like him commenting on and steering current trends.

According to David, Virtual Reality is the new big thing.

Michel de Lorme, the French Canadian pioneer of community radio for children, was in Haiti and out of contact when I plotted my itinerary. I'd hoped to meet up with him and Robert Gauvin who is based in New Brunswick in north-east Canada. Sadly I had to abandon my original plans but I've kept in touch with Roberto Gauvin who works with students using audio at his school near Edmunston. I would love to follow up with some sort of co-production .But that's another journey!

I took a train to Providence, one of the oldest cities in the US, making a slight detour to visit Vanessa Gilbert and her husband on my way to Boston.



Vanessa Gilbert

Vanessa is a creative producer, interdisciplinary artist, and educator who works with humans, objects, and digital media. <http://www.vanessagilbert.com/about/>

Like me, she is part of the Magdalena Project, an international network for women in contemporary theatre and she instigated Magdalena USA, to date the only Magdalena Project festival in the USA. She makes, produces, and directs performance works of varying scales, from miniature puppet theatre to multi-day performance festivals and opera.

We spent the evening discussing politics, storytelling and Magdelana connections and next morning she put me on the train to Boston where I explored some of the pilgrim's trail and took a ferry trip before setting off to meet the head of the kids digital team at WGBH.

I found my way to Brighton in north east Boston and arrived outside a striking industrial style structure with a huge changing digital billboard outside. This is the new multi purpose WGBH building, an impressive public media powerhouse. It consolidates all the operations of this 'idea factory', previously spread across 13 buildings. I discovered the GBH stands for



Great Blue Hills in its original call sign.

WGBH headquarters

WGBH provides a third of the US's Public Broadcasting Service television content. It also serves southern New England with 11 public television services, three public radio services, and local productions that reflect the issues and culture of the region.

Its resources, content and outreach are formidable. <http://www.wgbh.org/about/index.cfm>

Bill Shribman is head of the kids digital team and showed me round some of the studios. I then interviewed him up in the Kids Digital space which he has run since 1998.



Bill is English born and is a multi award winning writer, producer and games designer. He's currently working at WGBH with a diverse team on a wide array of web, mobile, multi-platform, augmented reality, and broadband projects. He and his team produce games, animation, apps, mobile web sites, digital graphic novels, and a variety of applications for engagement with digital educational media. He told me of an exciting long term multi media children's digital story feature in pre production set in Alaska and of his history with work on other projects.

Bill has appeared on several TED talks - <http://www.tedxbeaconstreet.com/bill-shribman/>
<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-cameras-see-that-our-eyes-don-t-bill-shribman>

He also blogs at Geekdad and Kidscreen. I've kept in touch with him since my return.

I returned to NYC and on my last night attended a lecture by prestigious environmentalist Bill McKibben on 'The Fate of the Earth'.

As it was just after Trump's election he and the audience were fairly depressed about this future.



Bill McKibben - <http://fateoftheearth.org/>

I then took a very early morning flight to Chicago, on the shores of Lake Michigan. This was my first time in this 'third coast' city and I made my way to a classic diner.

There I met with a group of special people, some of the core members of KidsListen, a group for audio producers making podcasts for children. <http://www.kidslisten.org/>

I'd been in touch with Lindsay Patterson who produces Tumble, a great science podcast for kids. <http://www.sciencepodcastforkids.com/>

She told me about KidsListen and invited me to join the new group. It's a non-profit organisation creating platforms for producers to share ideas, and publish data and information relevant to creators, consumers, and supporters of podcasts for kids. It also does research.

Lindsay began this grassroots organization to advocate for kids podcasts, along with Andrew & Polly of Ear Snacks. <http://andrewandpolly.com/earsnacks/>

I found that the New Zealand radio programme SpaceStationKiwi is also a member of KidsListen -<http://www.dunedin.govt.nz/events/kids-stuff/space-station-kiwi>

This was a great connection in terms of finding others making audio for kids and the group is developing from strength to strength.



KidsListen brunch meet up

From left to right -

Benjamin Strouse from <http://www.marspatel.com/>

Lindsay Patterson <http://www.sciencepodcastforkids.com/>

Marc Sanchez from BrainsOn! <http://www.brainson.org/about/>

Kitty Felde from Book Club for Kids <http://www.bookclubforkids.org/>

Pamela Rogers from Buttons and Figs and family, <http://buttonsandfigs.com/>

Prue Langbein

Jonathan Messinger - serialized science fiction - <http://www.finncaspian.com/>

I've been in touch with other members since my return including Sparklestories' David Sewell McCann <https://www.sparklestories.com/> and the Storypirates <http://www.storypirates.org/>

I spent three days in Chicago, most of which were taken up with the Third Coast Festival <http://thirdcoastfestival.org/> offering a multitude of ways to celebrate audio storytelling.

This festival brought together 750 producers, artists, students, and audio enthusiasts from all over the world for a weekend of listening, sharing and learning. There were lots of speakers, panels, workshops, marketing and technical advice and networking opportunities, including more time with KidsListen people. It was wonderful to be with a large group of people committed to the audio medium.

The events began with a lively and fascinating debate - *Mudslide: The Election of 2016* where a panel of journalists looked at the election result, shocking to most of the attendees.

Other session highlights for me were:

- The Only Ten Words that Matter with Eric Nuzum, US vice president of original content at audible
- How to Make Your Listener Levitate & Other Magic Tricks with Cathy FitzGerald, English audio documentary maker
- Audio Educators Swap Meet with Stephanie Rowden and Nishat Kurwa
- Chapter and Verse with Julie Snyder, co creator of the ground breaking podcast Serial
- The Bigness of the Small Story with Alex Kotlowitz

I finally met up with Emily Botein, programme maker and overseer who was developing children's audio for WNYC.

I also enjoyed a discussion with Jay Allison, who leads Transom, a showcase and workshop centre for public radio. This idea of for this organisation originally came from environmentalist and devoted public radio listener, Bill McKibben, arising from his desire to hear more interesting and diverse stories on the air. The Transom website is most useful for technical information as well as sharing audio stories. - <http://transom.org/Transom>

The festival ended with the announcement of the winners of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Competition for 2016.

On my last morning I went to the wonderful art institute of Chicago

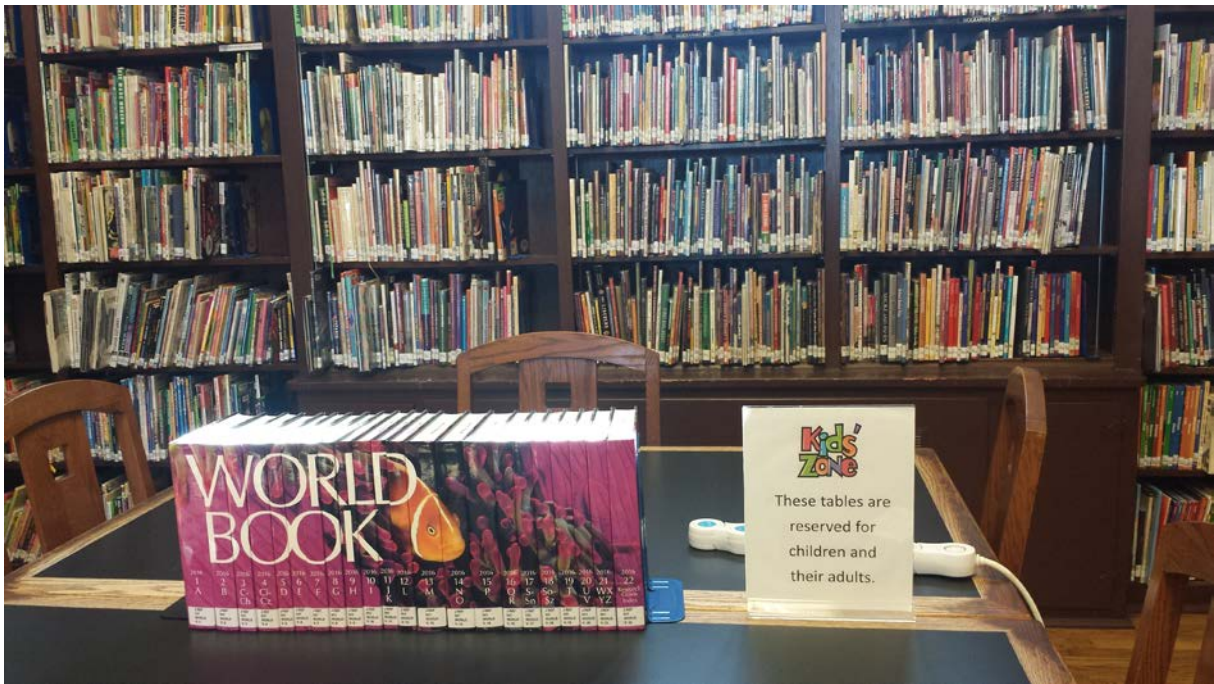
<http://www.artic.edu/>

and took a boat trip for an architectural tour.

<https://www.architecture.org/experience-caf/tours/detail/chicago-architecture-foundation-river-cruise-aboard-chicagos-first-lady-cruises/>

Then I flew to San Fransisco.

I enjoyed some warmth and relaxation after the hectic schedule in Chicago, spending time with my American cousin in San Anselmo, Marin County, just out of San Fransisco. She introduced me to her book group, took me to a jazz concert and an operatic dinner, showed me round her beautiful environment, and took me to a yoga class and the local library.



San Anselmo Library

I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and enjoyed walking in San Francisco city, exploring places like Little Italy, Chinatown and the City Lights Bookshop.

Founded in 1953 by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Peter D. Martin, City Lights is one of the few truly great independent bookstores in the United States, a place where booklovers from across the country and around the world come to browse, read, and just soak in the ambience.



City Lights Bookshop

I spent a day in Berkley, beginning at the University of California, birthplace of the 1960s Free Speech Movement. Some signs of student protest greeted me.



I'd met Claire Schoen <http://claireschoenmedia.com/> briefly in Chicago at the Third Coast Festival and was intrigued to learn that she was making podcasts with children about climate change. Claire teaches courses in documentary radio at the university and I was keen to find out more. With a background in photography and film, she's spent many years making audio documentaries, particularly long form pieces. Now she does a range of activities including creating webstories, often on an environmental theme. These combine still photography with a documentary style of audio storytelling.

Here's a link to her piece she made with a group of 12 year olds.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-949256676/the-loudest-smallest-voices>

I wandered through the university campus, up the Campanile clock tower, through the township and eventually found my way to the StoryCenter offices.

<https://www.storycenter.org/>

I had been in touch with Joe Lambert, who in 1994, along with Dana Atchley and Nina Mullen, founded what has now become known as StoryCenter. This organisation supports individuals and organizations in using storytelling and participatory media for reflection, education, and social change. Begun as a community workshop, StoryCenter has worked with nearly a thousand organizations around the world and trained more than fifteen thousand people in hundreds of workshops to share stories from their lives. It's motto is 'Listen Deeply Tell Stories'

A former local theater producer, Joe explained StoryCenter's roots in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when arts practitioners and educators across disciplines challenged the notion that art should be reserved for the gifted or the professional. Through the centre's work, the way that community activists, educators, health and human services agencies, business professionals, and artists think about the power of personal voice in creating change has been transformed.

Here's a piece about different kinds of stories from Joe's book on digital storytelling -

- Character Stories – explore how we love, who we are inspired by, our relationships
- Memorial Stories – memories of people who are no longer with us.
- Stories about an events in or lives ... adventure and accomplishment stories
- Stories about places in our lives
- Stories about what we do
- Other personal stories...recovery, love, discovery stories

Source: Lambert, Joe (2003). *Digital Storytelling Cookbook and Traveling Companion*. Berkeley: Digital Diner Press. Available at <http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook.pdf>

Joe has recently set up an exciting digital storytelling project for Californian libraries <http://californialistens.org/> which could be something for our libraries to consider.

didn't meet with Joe in person but was introduced to Robert Kershaw who joined Storycenter in 2007. He took time to talk with me while on a break from running a workshop for five people from a range of backgrounds including a Scandinavian midwife. After three days, using Storycenter's methodology, each ended up with a three minute audio visual piece telling the story they want to tell.

Rob has visited New Zealand several times and spent time working with youth at risk in Alaska. He talked of listening being the core technology of the workshops. Although many people's stories are sitting on trauma, the intention is not about therapy or cleansing the soul. It's more about entering a space that allows you to tell a story.



There is currently a Pacific Digital Storytelling Project aiming to give voice to relatively under-represented communities in the Pacific. It's run by Dr Shuchi Kothari and Dr Serena Pearson from Auckland University and uses the StoryCenter model. <http://digitalstories.nz/>

Back in San Francisco I spoke with Susan Skinner at the San Francisco headquarters of Commonsense Media - <https://www.common sense media.org/>



This is the leading independent non-profit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology. It provides unbiased information, advice, and tools to help parents, teachers and policy makers harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids'

lives. The organisation is large with branches in Los Angeles, New York and Washington DC and reports in English and Spanish.

Figures show that US children spend over 50 hours of screen time every week and most of Commonsense Media's work has been about visual media. According to Susan, they are just beginning to look into audio.

On one of my trips into San Francisco, I went to Valencia Street and at number 826 was a pirate shop, front to a writing centre for children and young adults - <http://826valencia.org/> Founded in 2002 by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari, Valencia 826 is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting local under-resourced students aged six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills. I spoke with the helpful young man on duty and bought some collections of writing by children.



Workshop writing room at Valencia 826

On my last day in the US, I went to a lovely wilderness area out of San Anselmo, a perfect way to end my Fellowship time. I'd like once more to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for making it all possible.

