

Gathering stories

PEOPLE Story teller and collector **Cathy Spagnoli** on stories across the world

Cathy Spagnoli is a seeker. Of stories. And then, she is a storyteller. At the InKo Centre, where she has come to conduct storytelling sessions for children, Cathy recalls her story-hunting expeditions to South, South East and South Asia and America. In her website she writes that she has "slid through Indonesian rice fields, sipped sake with Japanese epic singers, met with Korean monks in high mountain temples, hiked the Himalayas with Tibetan dancers, marvelled at Kamishibai Festivals, and shared tea with warm-hearted Southeast Asian refugees."

Stories vary from place to place, she says. In India, there are on family, in Japan on war, in strife-torn Laos on harmony and in America, on heroes — individual successes. "Almost every Asian country has one epic tradition and almost every country, folk stories," she says. One running theme through all



THE SEEKER Stories vary from place to place, says Cathy
PHOTO: M. KARUNAKARAN

cultures is smart alecks. If we Indians have Tena-li Raman and Birbal, Korea has Kim Sondal. At the InKo centre, after a stint at Hannam University, Korea, Cathy was to share tales from Korea. "In Korea, till recently, people did not respect their stories. They thought the stories were not modern enough. Now they are rediscovering their stories."

Stories, she says, are

who we are. So, we should never lose them. Therefore Cathy encourages her students to tell their own stories through "family story boards". She pulls out one made by her student, from her bag. It unfolds to about 10 squares and in each square, the student illustrates one important event in her life. The board is among the few props she uses to tell stories. Another is the Japanese kamishibai

cards. "An oral story teller uses voice, gestures and few simple props."

One of Cathy's favourite storyteller is T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal, a Harikatha exponent. "Amazing," she terms him. A good story is difficult to pin down, because it varies from culture to culture, she says. "But a good storyteller is one who knows the right story to tell and how to tell it."

ASHA S. MENON

TIPS FROM CATHY

- Story telling is tough. Practice well. Even if the audience is your two-year-old.
- Use "family story boards" to tell stories about your family
- Include humour and use pauses.
- Interesting props, like kamishibai, can help shy teachers and shy students come out with their stories.
- For more tips visit her website www.cathyspagnoli.com