

# Storytelling/Endangered Stories Act

By Tania Soussan

Bob Kanegis' grandparents fled Lithuania during the anti-Jewish pogroms at the turn of the 20th century. Though the threat of these massacres and the couple's immigration to America may have been the most generationally significant events in the family's history, Kanegis knows hardly anything about them



or their immediate impact on his grandparents' lives.

"On a personal level, there's a sense of missed opportunities," he said.

To prevent others from feeling that same kind of remorse, Kanegis, who is a Corrales storyteller and storytelling coach, created the Endangered Stories Act in 1995. The proclamation honors the heritage of oral tradition and recognizes the power of stories to enrich, transmit values and celebrate both diversity and a common heritage. The self-ratified act, which can be read at [www.storyconnection.com/family](http://www.storyconnection.com/family), calls upon people to ask elders to tell stories of their origins, accomplishments, hardships and dreams; strengthen both their listening skills and their voices; find and tell their own stories; and become the caretaker of a narrative that speaks to them so that it's not lost.

"It's an idea that's out there in the world that hopefully is encouraging elders to share their stories and young people to listen," Kanegis said.

The act also is a catalyst for family storytelling, events, coaching and legacy workshops that Kanegis and his wife, Liz Mangual, offer to help seniors capture and tell their most important stories.

As a storytelling couple, they also

perform in schools and libraries, telling traditional folk tales and other stories while weaving in their personal experiences and natural history. They also teach literacy skills as part of telling tales. Storytelling, Kanegis said, is "a way of being engaged with people in a very convivial way."

Sally Moore, a 72-year-old friend of the couple, has participated in two legacy workshops and found that they spurred her to think differently about sharing stories.

"It was a great creative experience and one that I think a lot of people would enjoy," Moore said. "I thought differently about things I would like to say to my grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Kanegis' interest in storytelling was sparked when as a young man he hitchhiked back and forth between New York and Alaska. Kanegis eventually began asking people he met about the greatest gift they had ever given or received. A waitress told him the tale of a Christmas when her family was going through difficult times. Her grandmother said she wasn't able to buy her a gift that year but, because

she was the only granddaughter who had expressed interest in her life, wanted to take her for a long weekend and share her life story.

"She said that was the greatest gift that she ever received," Kanegis said.

The experience of hearing the waitress' story was also a catalyst for Kanegis to create the Endangered Stories Act.

Although talking about challenging times can be difficult, Kanegis said, sharing them is important because these stories not only teach us about ourselves and other people but also may help young people learn that they can navigate difficulties. For example, when Kanegis spoke to a classroom of fourth-graders, he suggested they ask their parents to tell them something they had never shared with them before. Following the assignment, one child said that his mother told him about being on a train to a concentration camp. She jumped off the train and survived. "I didn't know my mother was a hero," the child said.

In their workshops, Kanegis and his wife teach what they call the

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