

in the city



Eric Miller at a storytelling session by the Marina Beach

HOW TO SPIN A YARN YOUR WAY

Telling stories is Eric Miller's *métier* and the forthcoming festival aims to enlarge its scope

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That storytelling is a lucrative art is a foregone conclusion, especially with movies themselves being mediums to tell a story. But going back to the basics, there is one man who has made storytelling a way of life. Eric Miller might be an unassuming American who can be seen casually scouring bookshops, galleries or museums in the city, but on each of his visits, he is looking for opportunities to spin a yarn.

Amar Chitra Katha, the popular illustrated series that brought Indian myths and legends to life in graphic form, isn't on the racks any more nor is Chandamama and this lacuna seems to motivate Miller. "I want to be able to connect people with the rich stories of the past, our Indian life, heritage, history and modern living too," he says emphatically.

Embarking on a three-day storytelling fest in the city, Eric and his team which includes his wife Magdalene Jeyarathnam, an award-winning counselor, are planning to conduct various tours, seminars and treks that will help young people tune in to an unnoticed art. From tourism to child development, Eric and his team are conceptualising this fest, keeping in mind how society and government can benefit. "The art of storytelling helps people be more articulate, discuss stories, change endings and look at things from the point of view of different characters," says Miller. "It helps critical thinking, which is not necessarily about criticising things, but about looking at a subject from all angles. And during this festival, we have case studies on how storytelling has been used for education, art and even dance."

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▼ Danseuse Dr Anita Ratnam will be speaking about storytelling through movements and gestures. "And we also have a session at the Marina Beach where the fishing community will showcase their stories," Miller says. These sessions are free and can be registered for on the website. (<http://www.storytellinginstitute.org/200.html>)

But the highlight of the festival, he points out, is a two-day trip to Thanjavur "where we will be taught about telling grandma's tales in a unique style that blends singing and storytelling.

We have translators and this workshop will help us understand these traditional tales and ways to narrate them"

Gandhian and art critic V. R. Devika, refers to the time when storytelling came in many forms, such as puppet shows. "But when stories began to be visually represented through TV and movies, those mediums became more popular. Now, in what seems to be a reversal of sorts, people want to actually sit down and listen to stories. They prefer a more interactive experience," she says.

It's the eternal lure of a well told story that Mita Bordoloi, a storyteller and author of *Bulbuli's Bamboo*, sees as the reason for the art never dying out. "When kids see a person come out and narrate the story to them, there's a great connection involved.

They visualise, imagine when a story is read out loud. E-books and other tech-savvy methods may interest the kids of today, but when it comes to broadening their imagination, nothing beats storytelling," she says.