

Remembering Geronimo Radio

On Sunday, January 23, 1994 I sat down in front of the radio controls and played the Pete Seeger banjo riff theme music for Rocking Chair Tales for the first time. The place: the Lagunitas School District's former custodian's closet. The time: 7pm. My opening line from then on was "Welcome to Rocking Chair Tales! I'm Amy Valens, and I'm sitting in my rocking chair ready to tell you a story." Of course I was actually sitting on a folding chair.

Geronimo Radio had only been on the air for a short time when I asked Terry Garthwaite if there was room for a story hour. She showed me the ropes: there wasn't a lot to learn, but somehow I still made quite a few mistakes--mainly remembering to have the mic on, and/or to turn on the cassette player so that I would have a record of the show. Over the next 3 years I and my guest story tellers recorded over 150 programs.

When I invited others to squeeze into the closet with me, they'd go along with the premise that we were all sitting in rocking chairs. One of my favorite memories is when I had several Open Classroom students (Joe Vigneri, Matt Prebluda, Chevy Anton and Catherine Shaw) with me because they had found the winning tickets hidden in school-made candy celebrating Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. I gave them a "tour" of the supposedly huge radio station, and they went along with the fantasy beautifully. My guest story tellers included Open Classroom teacher Larry Nigro, Amazing Grace owner John Pederson, Seth Castleman (who told a story about how Forest Knolls got its name), SSSH (Second Sunday Story Hour at the Tiburon Community Church) master storyteller Don Leach, World Of Tales actor Jim Griffiths, Point Reyes Preschool teacher Michael Carney, San Geronimo librarian Eliza Wingate, and Point Reyes ranger of Pomo and Miwok descent, Lanny Pinole.

The radio's reach was limited, being it was a cable station that you really had to search for. I think some nights my only listener may have been Zoila Berardi. I did have sponsors for a while: Oliver's Books, and Good Earth Natural Foods. We eventually ran out of steam, but it was fun while it lasted!