

A TALE OF TWO PRETTIES

Oviedo storytellers spread their gift in local schools

By Jill Cousins, OWSL

This is the tale of two women who lived in Oviedo for many years. One was a teacher; one was an actress. Both spent several years as stay-at-home moms. They lived strikingly similar lives, and even had strikingly similar hairstyles and bodies. They both had three beautiful children, and both had loving, supportive husbands.

Even though they lived just ten minutes apart, they probably would have never met were it not for their shared love of storytelling. When they finally did meet at a Storytellers of Central Florida Guild meeting in 2004, it was a match made in storyteller heaven. Less than two years after that fateful meeting, **Autumn Garick** (the actress) and **Robin Schulte** (the teacher) decided that two storytellers were better than one and took their act on the road visiting local schools.

"We do seem to live parallel lives," says Autumn, who lives in the Bentley Woods subdivision with husband Bob and daughters Sydney, 13; Piper, 10; and Bryn, 8. "People often ask if we're sisters or twins."

"We have similar physical characteristics," says Robin, who lives in Live Oak Reserve with husband Randy, sons Jack, 9, and Tyler, 14, and daughter Ansley, 17. "But we're both unique and individual people. We both have our strengths, and we do things differently. And that's what makes it interesting."

Since pairing up in August 2006, the duo has performed hundreds of shows, primarily at elementary schools in Seminole and Orange counties. They put their personal spin on classic folktales and children's literature, giving their captive audiences a fun-filled, interactive experience, while providing a lesson or two in the process.

"One of the reasons I love it is that storytelling takes a lesson or a value that's important in our culture or society and dresses it up in a palatable way," Robin says. "It doesn't hit them over the head. There's a beautiful message, but we don't have to say it. They [the kids] just get it."

During a recent visit to Winter Springs Elementary School, Autumn and Robin captivated the school's kindergartners with their unique brand of storytelling. They first explained to the children that instead of reading books, they would be relying on their bodies, their voices, and the imagination of their audience. Then they began weaving their tales about kings, princesses, and the occasional troll.

"When I tell stories, it's not about me," Autumn says. "It's about the connection with the audience. I'm hoping this is something meaningful for them. I know we're not saving the world, but I do think we're bringing something enriching and noble to these kids."

Before having children, Autumn had a busy acting career, doing commercials, repertory theater, radio, television, and film. When her children were born, she wasn't able to travel to auditions and jobs. Having made the decision to be a stay-at-



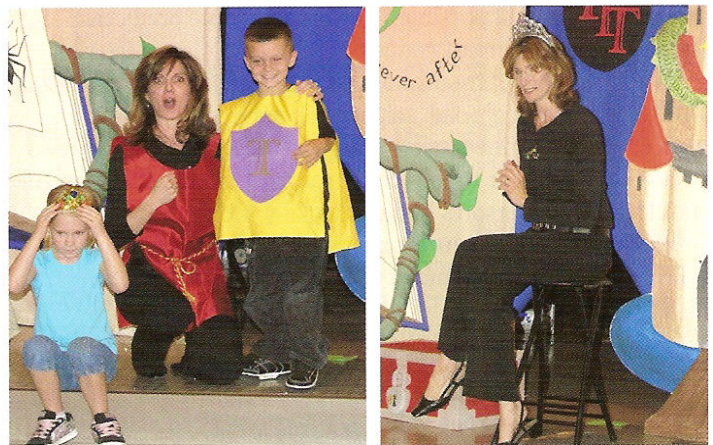
Autumn Garick and Robin Schulte of Oviedo

home mom, Autumn discovered an outlet for her acting skills when she began telling stories at her children's schools. At the UCF Creative School for Children, a preschool on the University of Central Florida campus, Autumn's storytelling ability impressed her children's teachers, and one suggested that she take it up as a career.

Robin had done some acting in high school, but she set her sights on teaching as a career. She started off as an English teacher at Colonial High School in the late 1980s, then worked at Bishop Moore High School, teaching English and speech, and working with the drama department. One day a parent suggested that Robin incorporate storytelling into her speech class curriculum. The mother was a member of the local storytellers guild and was "looking to spread the art to this area," Robin says. She brought some of her storytelling friends to Robin's class one day. The hour-long presentation got Robin hooked, and she began attending the monthly guild meetings.

"Like in any good partnership, it's difficult finding someone you're compatible with," Autumn says. "But it's especially difficult to find it in storytelling, because it's such a small community. So, for me, finding Robin was like finding a needle in a haystack. It is such a blessing."

Robin feels equally blessed. "I would be doing this [telling stories] no matter what," Robin says. "But the fact that it has evolved into a career for me – that makes me feel very fortunate." ♦ OWSL



Autumn and Robin have a gift for storytelling. Just ask the thousands of school kids they've entertained since 2006.