

BAILEY PHELPS (November 12, 1941 to April 9, 2018)

Bailey Phelps had two careers; both involved storytelling. First, as an ordained Presbyterian minister and student of storytelling and oral cultures, he often incorporated stories into his sermons. Eventually, he earned a Doctor of Ministry degree with a focus on Biblical storytelling and wrote two books on that topic—*Telling the Bible: Storytelling and Performance from the Scriptures* and *With Our Own Eyes: First-Person Stories Based on the Gospels*. Both are now out of print.

While serving a church in Rogers, Arkansas, Bailey was asked to participate in a tribute to famed cowboy humorist Will Rogers, who was a distant cousin. Soon thereafter, he won a local “Liars Contest” with an original tall tale set in the Ozark Mountains and began to be introduced as a storyteller.



When his wife’s genealogical research revealed that one of Bailey’s grandmothers was Cherokee, he embraced that culture and began to learn as much as he could about the Native American oral storytelling tradition. Soon he decided to “retire” from the ministry and moved West to devote himself to storytelling.

As a proud member of the Cherokee Nation, Bailey shared traditional stories from that culture and many other American Indian nations. He often accompanied these stories with music, using one of his many Native American flutes or other instruments. His broad story repertoire also included tall tales from the Ozark Mountains or from the American frontier, American hero yarns from Paul Bunyan to Pecos Bill, scary stories for all ages, folk tales from cultures around the world, and stories of his own creation ranging from hilarious to deeply moving. Some of his original stories appear in *Storied Treasure: Stories and Poems for the Telling*, the book he co-authored with his daughter Kathleen Dale in 2009. He also recorded (in 2001) songs, stories, and music from American frontier and Native sources as a CD called *American Folk: Cowboys and Indians*.

Bailey was a beloved member of the National Storytelling Network, the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Rocky Mountain Storytellers, and Northern Colorado Storytellers. Over the years, he shared tales with audiences of all ages--school children, charitable groups, civic and social clubs, and many others. He performed at museums and storytelling festivals and was a featured teller for many Tellabitations (e.g., Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Denver). He performed in settings as diverse as the Bartlesville Sunfest; the 11th Annual Pueblo Gathering at Mesa Verde National Park; Frontier Days in Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Rutgers University. Some of his original stories have been featured on National Public Radio.

Bailey’s funeral was a private family service at the Nederland (CO) Community Presbyterian Church, where he had once served as Interim Pastor. No formal obituary was published.

Bailey’s website is still active. The link is <https://baileyphelps.wordpress.com>.