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## Storytelling Nights Find New Popularity

By [Jessica Scott](#)



Storyteller Adam Wade tells a story during "The Adam Wade From New Hampshire Show."

On a night in early-January when the wind chill in New York City is 10 degrees below zero, three dozen frozen bodies descended the dirty, dingy steps at the Theater Under St. Mark's in the East Village. With brick walls, concrete floors and exposed pipes, the small room looked more like a storm cellar than a performance space.

They're here to hear Adam Wade. He personally greets each audience member, opens additional folding chairs as seating quickly vanishes. More than 40 people paid \$5 to see the inaugural "The Adam Wade From New Hampshire Show" — two hours of an entertainment smorgasbord. Wade and his guest performers will tell stories, both funny and touching, show embarrassing old home movies and wrap up the night with a live band — equal parts jam session and improvised story-telling.

Wade begins a charming tale about falling in love in fourth grade, with sixth-grader Mary Ellen.

"At recess I would always watch her — not stalk her — but just watch her because I was in love with her. After a few minutes her pretty boy boyfriend would go play kickball, and then it was Adam Time!"

The crowd erupts in laughter as Wade, with an uneasy, nervous, stuttering tone to his voice, continues. "I

was very petite but a little chubby ... very short ... I was like a ball ... you could bounce me. But I was going to talk to her!”

At 33, Wade is a writer and television producer. Named one of 2009’s Most Promising Young Talents by Time Out magazine, he is the face of a growing movement in New York, Los Angeles and other metropolitan areas across the country — the shift from prepackaged stand-up comedy acts to a more casual storytelling session.

“Everyone thinks it’s so innovative when actually it’s the oldest art form, aside from prostitution,” said Margot Leitman, a former stand-up comedian who made the transition to storytelling four years ago. She now teaches three weekly storytelling classes at the Upright Citizens Brigade, instructs corporate storytelling workshops and works for private clients who’ve got a tale to tell. She said she’s noticed an explosion of interest in storytelling during the past couple years. Her monthly show “Strip Stories,” now in its third year, is routinely standing-room-only.

“I feel like I’m part of an artistic movement, of something big,” Leitman said. “In this day of technology, it’s great to just stand up and tell a story and have people be entertained.”

The first stop for many aspiring storytelling stars in New York is The Moth, a nonprofit city organization started in 1997. It serves as a minor league for writers and performers to practice new material in a casual environment. With 85 shows this year in New York and Los Angeles, The Moth has gone nationwide, expanding its shows to 10 additional cities in the next few years. Other satellite shows that did not exist before The Moth are now popping up everywhere, said Wade.

Not all of the stories at The Moth shows are funny.

“I told a white trash story about hooking up with the world’s worst guido in New Jersey, then the guy after me told a story of pulling children from a burning building,” Leitman said. “He won.”

Watching unprofessional entertainers is why storytelling shows are so alluring, said Andrea Shores, 27, an audience member at Wade’s show.

“It’s nice to see someone who isn’t so polished that they seem fake,” she said. “The realness of the stories and the people telling them are the best part.”

That’s the magic, said Wade, tonight’s headliner, “making people laugh by telling an awkward moment in your life. If you’re honest and show your vulnerability, people can identify.”

Storytelling shows also help catch the attention of industry brass who could someday pave the road to stardom. Wade, for example, was approached by a director after a show and asked to audition for a role in “The Wrestler.” Leitman stars in commercials and television shows and will soon begin shopping her memoir to publishers.

It’s back-to-basics entertainment, and audiences around the country are getting hooked to the authenticity and humanity of a simple tale. The enduring art of words is alive and well, even if at the expense of a young love lost.

“Sadly,” Wade said at the end of his set, “Mary Ellen graduated sixth grade and went to junior high and nothing ever happened. Now I’m 33 and unemployed and kind of a loser.”

But, he said, the best feeling in the world is meeting someone who remembers one of your stories, like the woman who mentioned a story he told about his grandmother more than five years ago.

“I asked her how she remembered it when I didn’t even remember telling it,” he said. “And she said, ‘Because it was a good story.’”

February 5, 2010



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- *Cory Sanchez said:*

This new movement sounds right up my alley. I am glad that someone brought this to light so I can experience a show like this for myself.

# 26 February 2010 at 11:23 am

- *[naipsfona](#) said:*

i surely enjoy your writing style, very unique,  
don’t give up and keep posting due to the fact that it just worth to follow it.  
excited to read way more of your current articles, have a pleasant day!

# 5 March 2010 at 6:39 am

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