

## **Opening welcome address to the conference:**

### **A new narrative for homo narrans – Written by Bob Dick .. Read by Andrew Rixon**

Our species has been called 'homo narrans', the story teller. Story is an integral part of who we are as a species. And the story of us as a species is an epic story indeed.

The age of our species is being debated. Until recently it was assumed that we evolved from other hominins about 200,000 years ago. Recent research suggests that 300,000 years, or even longer, may be a more accurate estimate.

Language, in particular, sets us apart from other species. We learn collectively for collective survival. Language embedded in story conveys learning from generation to generation.

We are a small-tribe species. For most of our history we lived in clans or villages small enough that everyone could know everyone. We are social beings.

There is evidence that most hunter-gatherer tribes were egalitarian. So are many tribes that are still hunter-gatherers. To maintain our egalitarian culture we managed our dominant males. They contributed toward the benefit and survival of the tribe -- or faced punishment.

That part of our species' story persisted for many many years. Then, only 8,000 years ago, an important shift occurred. Agriculture was developed. A hierarchy of power and status also developed.

Even then, many people avoided or escaped the agricultural settlements. Some maintained their hunter-gatherer existence and their freedom to make collective decisions. Many agricultural settlements were walled, as much to keep people in as to shut them out. They could then be taxed.

The shift to settled existence was costly in freedom and health except for the elites. Hunter-gatherers led healthier lives. However, the shift overlay our small-tribe inheritance with 'civilisation'.

Notice what a small fraction of 200,000 years or more that 8,000 years represent. However, we do owe that civilisation for our large organisations and other social systems.

It is currently under threat. As systems enlarge, change accelerates. Turbulence increases. Hierarchy begins to falter.

So here we are as the social structures of the past several thousand years slowly degrade. We grope towards a future featuring alternatives to our current forms of hierarch. We do not yet know what shape the new forms will take.

What we do know -- or can guess -- is this. Our nature as a story-telling species may become even more important. For our survival we need a new story. A new narrative that equips us for the future we face. Our individual and collective efforts can further craft our story. Thus may we continue to give our story a happy ending.

## **Opening address conclusion provided by an email from Christine Carlton**

Dear Andrew,

As I am not well enough to travel to the conference this year I'm sending a message of good wishes for you, Sasha and all the participants. It is 10 years since the first conference and I have participated in each one and so am most disappointed that I'm unable to present my workshop and be part of the gathering to enjoy the shared wisdom of both presenters and participants.

Story is at the heart of who we are. We live story and all of us have stories waiting to unfold and waiting to be told. When we take time to share and listen to our own stories and the stories of others we stretch our stories and are open to discovering little gems, insights that give us nourishment for life's journey. There is an invitation to a greater understanding and well-being for ourselves and the wider community in times of work and play.

In the words of Barry Lopez "If stories come to you, care for them and learn to give them away where they are needed."

May these next few days provide moments of exciting, challenging and playful discoveries. May there be good networking and a real sharing of the essence and power of story and storytelling that contribute to individual's and community well-being.

Kind wishes,  
Christine Carlton