

A LIBRARY IN NEED

The tale of the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival started with a fund-raising project. No one said, "Let's have a storytelling festival. In fact, we didn't even know what a storytelling festival was!" said Karen Ashton, founder of the festival.

The city library in Orem, Utah, needed a new children's wing. The children's section of the library at the time was a windowless basement with eight foot high book shelves--shelves much too tall for little people under four feet high to reach, let alone an adult. Besides being dark and gloomy, there were no bathrooms on that level.

It was a worthwhile and needed project. There was just one little problem--money. The City of Orem agreed to provide the rest of the funding, if the library could raise the first half-million dollars.

After completing two consecutive terms on the Library Advisory Commission, Karen Ashton decided to take on the challenge. She resurrected a dormant Friends of the Library organization and the group took the first small steps toward raising the \$500,000.

A variety of projects were launched: bake sales, used book sales, backyard drama performances, and a home tour--of Karen's own home at Christmas time.

At the rate the Friends of the Library were raising money, it would have taken them years to collect the \$500,000 dollars they needed--and they didn't want to wait years for a new children's wing. The new wing was needed now. So other funding sources were sought.

With a clear need and the will to help fill it, serendipity intervened. Karen was flipping through the pages of an online flight magazine as she returned to Utah from a trip to New York. An advertisement for the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee caught her eye.

"I don't know why," Karen Ashton said, "but I felt compelled to do something about it."

Her husband wasn't interested in going with her, so she and her best friend packed their bags. They had never been to a storytelling festival, nor had they ever been to Tennessee. But they were off on an adventure--one that would change a lot of lives.

"I went to the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough expecting to find ladies telling stories to groups of children in a library. Instead, I found thousands of adults crowding into eight tents, listening to dynamic performers relate tales of history, culture, folk and family life, as well as magical stories of "what if . . .!"

--Karen Ashton