

HEARD ANY GOOD stories lately? If you haven't, ask Arne Nixon to tell you one. Ghost stories are his specialty, as are folk tales and all sorts of children's stories, like the very popular "Runaway Bunny" and Nixon's own "Belly Button Monster." But be forewarned, the professor does not take requests. You just have to trust him. He knows what's appropriate. Like right now ... speaking in expectant hushed tones, CSUF's legendary storyteller can spin a tale of his own life:

In a rather isolated part of the Great Plains, circa 1935, a young boy listened attentively to his grandfather. The grandfather, an immigrant from Finland, was a storyteller who enjoyed sharing the rich folk culture of his homeland with his grandson.

Nixon interjects, "Storytelling — while it may come from books — also has an oral tradition, which is very old, maybe the oldest of all the human arts."

The young boy became a voracious reader in a pretelevision era. He discovered that books are the door through which one walks in order to go beyond one's own experiences of life. From his earliest childhood, when he learned to read and to speak English — Finnish was the only language spoken at home — the boy considered books and other reading material to be as essential as the air he breathed.

It was always his objective to become a teacher. This he understood from the time he was a very little boy. He loved the notion of being a teacher and regarded it as the most important work a human being can do on this earth.

Again, Nixon adds interest to his story by noting that "even in the sacred tradition of our culture, God had one Son, and He was a teacher."

BORN: February 19, 1927, Fredrick, South Dakota.

HONORS: Include CSUF Outstanding Professor for 1984; John Martin Literacy Award, Fresno Area Council, California Reading Association.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Originator and director of the university's annual Festival of Children's Books; presenter at hundreds of teacher workshops and conference programs in Washington and California.



"Language is what makes us human, and its preservation is in books."

Arne Nixon

Professor,
Teacher Education

Arne Nixon

The young man accepted his first elementary teaching position in a one-room schoolhouse in North Dakota. Later, he would receive his master's degree from Western Washington University in Bellingham, Wash., and his doctorate from Columbia University in New York City.

In 1961, after establishing himself as a nationally-recognized educator of children's literature and turning down some tempting job offers in New York, he accepted his first formal position with CSU, Fresno. Those early years with the university were spent in Africa as an adviser in teacher education in the Republic of the Sudan. He found this to be a very rich opportunity to do storytelling with children in North Africa and to observe some of the very best storytellers on earth — those

desert people who have such a rich tradition in storytelling.

This position carried with it an appointment as a professor here at the university. The young man saw the Valley as a lovely place to be and, much to his delight, the university offered him great freedom and encouragement to move beyond the immediate responsibilities of teaching classes, which in turn enhanced his teaching and led to worldwide activities.

For example, in 1987 and 1988, he traveled to the Soviet Union. He spent several weeks there doing storytelling with the children and discovered that they experienced the same joy and showed the same interest as our children. There were no barriers of culture or anything else that got in the way of that enjoyment.

continued