

## COLLABORATIVE CORNER

By: Susan Hurst

### A Different Kind of Storyteller

Lawyers are storytellers. The best and most entertaining trial lawyers weave and spin before a spellbound jury. By the time of trial, the story we create has a life of its own, far outlasting the trial itself. But the creation of that story begins when the client walks in our office. They start by telling us their truths and we immediately start helping them fashion and shape those truths into a story. Our storytelling ability is perhaps the most powerful tool we wield.

When an event happens, a person involved interprets the experience to give it personal meaning. Facts merge with the interpretation of facts to become the story that person will tell and retell about the experience, thereby forging their own past. This creation becomes that person's "Truth."

In Life of Pi, by Yann Martel, the author illustrates the great capacity of the human mind to tell and believe the most unbelievable stories, making them a part of reality. That marvelous book tells the tale of a young boy who transforms, through storytelling, the mundane horrors of four shipwreck survivors adrift on the sea into an equally harrowing, but heroic and magical tale of tigers and horses, meerkats and carnivorous islands. In just this way we lawyers help the client transform a tale of ordinary, unhappy people into a tale of nobles and villains, martyrs and miscreants. By the time of final divorce, the client has told the story we have helped create enough times for that story to become the client's reality.

A collaborative practitioner means being a storyteller but a different kind of storyteller. Unlike the tales fashioned by the traditional trial lawyer, collaborative stories do not focus on the inflammatory nor exude the outrageous. The collaborative practitioner helps the client tell a story that brings resolution, conciliation, and even forgiveness to the process. For only in helping our clients fashion these stories can we storytellers help to fashion a collaborative settlement. The client leaves the collaborative process with a reality that encompasses these messages—closure, reconciliation, resolution, forgiveness. What a powerful story that is to tell, and for clients to retell to their children.