

# electric city

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## DIRTY LAUNDRY

Storytellers air their tales at StorySlam

## UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Meet 'Green' Wedding Planner Kelly Moore

## DWEEZILTALKS

Zappa Plays Zappa at the Kirby Center

# Spinning yarns

They're airing 'Dirty Laundry' at Scranton's second StorySlam. Who will take home the Slammy?

When it comes to the art of storytelling, it seems folks in the Electric City can really appreciate a great tale. Zoe McNichols introduced Scrantonians to the area's first StorySlam in March and the event received rave reviews. A second Scranton StorySlam will be held on Saturday, June 30, at 7:30 p.m. at the Banshee, 320 Penn Ave. We recently caught up with the McNichols family — Zoe and her parents, Pam and Ed, who have been working in conjunction with Maureen McGuigan, deputy director of arts and culture in Lackawanna County, to keep this new tradition alive in the area. For a glimpse into what we can expect when local storytellers air their "Dirty Laundry," read on...

**Explain what a StorySlam is for those who may not be familiar with it.**

**Pam:** A StorySlam is a live storytelling competition in which 10 contestants each tell a true story inspired by the theme of the evening. Stories are always told, not read, which allows for spontaneity and creates an exciting atmosphere. The best way to describe the experience is to imagine the most spine-tingling, hilarious, or heartbreaking stories your friends have ever told — that is a StorySlam.

**For those who enjoyed the first Slam you did at the Vintage, will we notice the same format at the Banshee? Did you modify things (other than the theme)?**

**Pam:** More than 160 people were crammed into the Vintage like sardines at the first event. This time the StorySlam will be held at The Banshee, which can handle more people and also has a new menu, and serves more than 50 craft beers on tap. It will remain an all ages event, since we think everyone enjoys a good story.

Another change is that we reserved two spots in the lineup for brave audience members chosen from those who put their names in a hat upon arrival. The same rules apply to audience members who wish to tell a story: 5 minutes, all true, no notes.

To add even more excitement to the evening, we may let fate decide the order of the lineup by pulling each storyteller's name from the hat to determine who will tell the next story.



**Special thanks to the organizers of Scranton StorySlam for sharing their signature artwork with ec and dc.**

**Let's talk about the theme: Dirty Laundry! Why did you choose this theme?**

**Zoe:** The purpose of having a theme for the event is to give the storytellers a place to start, and to loosely tie each of the stories together. As always, a lot of blood, sweat, and tears went into choosing a theme, and ultimately we decided on "Dirty Laundry." We figured everyone has some skeletons in the closet, and the secrets that one normally prefers to keep hidden are likely to produce some amusing stories. Besides, don't your ears perk up at the sound of it?

**What kinds of stories can we expect to hear?**

**Pam:** One of the rules of the competition is that stories must relate to the theme of the

## How to tell a great tale

- ◆ Stories must be true, as remembered by the storyteller, and they are told, not read.
- ◆ No notes. Know your story by "heart" and avoid rote memorization, as you may find yourself on stage paralyzed, searching for your next line.
- ◆ Stories must be 5 to 7 minutes.
- ◆ Stories must be inspired by the theme. You do not need to say the words "Dirty Laundry." In fact, you may want to avoid saying them as that is considered lowbrow storyslam storytelling.
- ◆ Know the first and last sentence of your story.
- ◆ Start with a bang: a strong first sentence to grab the audience's attention.
- ◆ Avoid meandering endings.
- ◆ A good story will have a conflict and a resolution.
- ◆ Have some skin in the game. Let the audience know why what happens in your story is important to you.
- ◆ A good story will have a beginning, middle, and end, not necessarily in that order.
- ◆ No essays, rants, or comedy routines!
- ◆ Map out your story and know your destination so you can get where you're going and not get lost along the way.
- ◆ Have fun!

— Compiled by Zoe McNichols

evening. As organizers, we're not intimately involved in the story writing process, but we have learned that some storytellers may take the theme literally, such as Rock 107's Dave DiRienzo, who plans to tell a tale about "a boy, some socks, and an unquenchable thirst for justice." Mandy Boyle has shared that she plans to tell a story about her grandmother's underwear drawer. This made us want to hear more. The possibilities are endless.

**What will the judges be looking and listening for among the contestants?**

**Zoe:** First and foremost, stories must be true, as remembered by the storyteller. The judges and the audience want to hear compelling personal stories that have a conflict and a resolution. Contestants

are judged on content, presentation, staying within the 5-minute time frame and sticking to the theme. We encourage storytellers to know the beginning, middle and end of their stories, so they can steer toward their final destination and not get lost along the way. The victor will take home \$50 and a Slammy, the prestigious StorySlam trophy.

**Who are the judges and contestants?**

**Pam:** Airing their dirty laundry at the event are storytellers Andrea Talarico, poet, manager at Library Express and former managing partner of Anthology Books; comedian and Rock 107 DJ Dave DiRienzo; filmmaker and Community Film Project president Jeff Fowler; poet and co-founder of Prose in Pubs Jim Warner; freelance writer, SEO at Solid Cactus and NEPA BlogCon co-organizer Mandy Boyle; documentarian, playwright and Deputy Director of Arts and Culture for Lackawanna County Maureen McGuigan; comedian, actor and accounting instructor Nancy Cummings; and artist Ted Michalowski, who teaches at local colleges and also runs the popular Drawing Social at AfA Gallery.

Actor Conor McGuigan will return as master of ceremonies. His stories peppered throughout the last event, including one about his detention at Heathrow Airport with a gentleman from Ghana and musicians from Mali, left the audience hungry for more.

A panel of four to five judges, including Marywood University professor Laurie McMillan and Tunkhannock Area High School teacher Katie Wisnosky, will determine the winner.

**Why is storytelling an important artform to keep alive in northeastern Pennsylvania?**

**Ed:** In the age of Facebook and texting, the popularity of storyslams attests to our desire to still connect with others face to face. We're fortunate that there continues to be a rich storytelling tradition in northeastern Pennsylvania, as anyone who has lingered at the family dinner table to listen to their parents' and grandparents' stories of days gone by can attest. Keeping the art of storytelling alive is important because it is through stories that our history and culture are passed from person to person and handed down from one generation to the next.

— julie imel