



Mark Binder

author
storyteller
nice guy

“...a gift for humor—both broad and subtle—
Binder captivates”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Kids will cotton to storyteller Mark Binder.”

—*Booklist*

“Listeners of all cultural backgrounds will be entertained by these tales.”

—*School Library Journal*

“...the best storyteller we’ve had!”

—*The Fay School*

“Mark Binder is a great bloke. A man who knows, who feels, who genuinely loves, and who is very smart and a true creative spirit who carves out wonder in a world at times bent on the wicked.”

—*Larry Quick*



Web:

Booking & Info:

www.markbinder.com

Beth Hellman

401-272-8707

beth@markbinder.com

Pembroke Villa, PO Box 2462, Providence, RI 02906

About Mark — a brief biography

"Readers and listeners often ask if my stories are true. I typically joke back, 'All my stories are true and some of them really happened.' This is what I call the Politician's Answer. It's neither a lie nor the truth, but passes the time long enough for the focus to shift to a better topic."

— by Mark Binder from *It Ate My Sister*

Mark Binder is the author of numerous award-winning books and CDs. As an author, his work falls into three categories: original and traditional folk-style tales, the "Chelm" series of books and stories, and autobiographical whoppers and lies. His novel, **The Brothers Schlemiel** was recently published in a beautifully illustrated hardcover edition. **It Ate My Sister**, is a favorite book for youngsters ages 10 and up (and adults with a sense of humor). His collection, **The Bedtime Story Book** was written for caregivers to share with their children, and has sold more than 60,000 copies in a dozen editions.



"I write and tell stories for a living. No matter which genre I am working in, whether you are reading or listening, I hope that the stories cross boundaries and are universal in their appeal to people of all ages and cultures."

—Mark Binder

Mark Binder claims to have a degree in Mythology from Columbia University. He is a graduate of the Trinity Rep Conservatory, earned a Masters degree in English and Theater, and has taught "Telling Lies" to college and high school students. For more than a decade, he has toured the United States sharing his books and spoken-word stories with audiences of all ages, flavors and varieties. He regularly performs in schools, and community centers, religious venues, theaters and festivals.

"Not long ago, I was at a meeting of artists and performers, all of whom were complaining. I looked around the room and considered what 'worked' for live events. The list included spectacle, huge crowds, food, multiple stages and so on, none of which I could provide. So, I asked myself, what is it that I do, that I can do, and that I want to do? The answer came back in an instant. I can transmit Joy. Joy is something that you can't get over the internet. It's not something that communicates in a film or television show. You only get Joy from other people. Before all my events, I set in my mind the intent that at some point during a show, I want everyone in the room to experience Joy. It may not even be the same moment, but I want them to walk away with that feeling. It's been a major shift in the right direction."

—Mark Binder in a conversation with Beth Hellman

Mark Binder was born in Newton, MA, grew up in Bethesda, MD, has lived in New York, Cambridge and London and resides in Providence RI. In his spare time he bakes bread and makes pizza. He has three children, and is engaged to be married.

Performance Description

How do you describe a performer who can change gears with each story?
It's not easy.

In person, Mark Binder is dynamic and entertaining. His spoken-word stories enthrall audiences. With a huge repertoire of both original and traditional tales, he is able to adapt his material to suit the audience. His performances can target one age group, or can be truly multigenerational, captivating people of all ages—young, teens, adults, families and seniors.

Many of Mark's stories are whoppers or tall tales. He enjoys the far-fetched, exaggerated adventure. He likes to say that his favorite story describes the construction of an impossible event, building it bit by bit until the entire teetering structure of the feat collapses or implodes.

He also shares, with humor and insight, stories that are, or sound, traditional. His programs range from silly stories, and spooky tales to thematically or seasonally connected programs. He also presents several tightly structured sets, including *"The Art of Peace"* and *"Eureka! Relieving Math Anxiety."*

People of all ages enjoy Mark's performances because they are able to share the experience on a variety of different levels. He neither talks down to an older crowd, nor goes so far above the heads of a younger crowd that they are lost. As he says, "I look out at the crowd, and adjust accordingly."

And when necessary, he threatens to sing.



My goal is to transmit joy...

Training and Background (more details)

Mark is a graduate of the Trinity Rep Theater Conservatory with training as an actor, director and playwright. He holds a BA from Columbia College, Columbia University. During his undergraduate career, he took courses in more than 20 different departments. He studied playwrighting under Howard Stein at the Hammerstein Center for the Arts and storytelling with Spalding Gray. He received a MA from Rhode Island College in Theater and English. Mark spent two years studying dance and Decroux style movement with The Adaptors in New York City. He has been a student of Aikido, the martial art for peace, since 1991.

He has worked as a newspaper and magazine editor, and is the founder of the American Story Theater.

He has served on the adjunct faculty of the Rhode Island School of Design where he was nominated for the John R. Frazier Award for Excellence in Teaching.

His programs have received grant funding from the United States Department of Education, the National Storytelling Network, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, and the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Favorite festivals and venues include...

- WaterFire Providence
- ReadBoston Literacy Tour
- LAUGHS Festival
- Live Bait, Perishable Theater
- Sharing the Fire
- Three Apples Story Festival
- Life is Good Watermelon Festival
- Rhode Stories Festival
- New England Folk Festival

Bibliography and Discography

A Holiday Present. Seven stories for seven cultures. Recorded live. Light Publications, 2010.

It Was a Dark And Stormy Night. Spooky and comedy. Recorded live. Light Publications, 2010.

It Ate My Sister. A humorous autobiography. Softcover. Light Publications, 2010.

The Bed Time Story Book. Thirty six stories to read aloud. Softcover, illustrated. Light Publications, 2010.

The Brothers Schlemiel. A novel about identical twins. Hardcover, illustrated. JPS, 2008.

A Hanukkah Present. Hardcover, illustrated, Light Publications, 2007. Softcover edition 2008. Finalist for National Jewish Book Award for Family Literature.

Dead at Knotty Oak. Limited edition live audio cd, Light Publications, 2006

A Hanukkah Present. Eight stories for eight nights. Studio recording. 2007 Storytelling World Award Honors. Light Publications, 2005

Classic Stories for Boys and Girls. Ten stories for youngsters. Children's Music Web Award and iParenting Media Award. Light Publications, 2004.

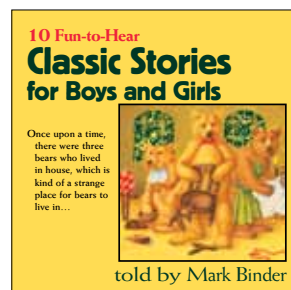
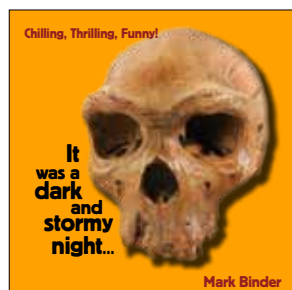
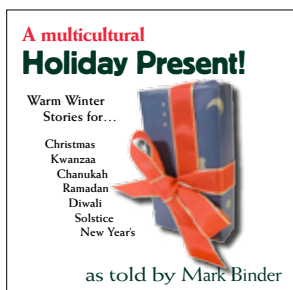
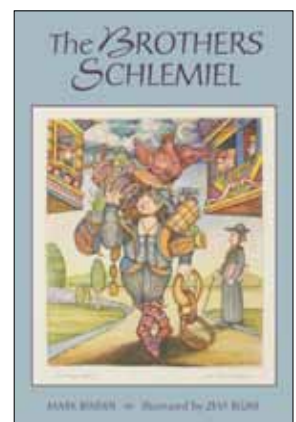
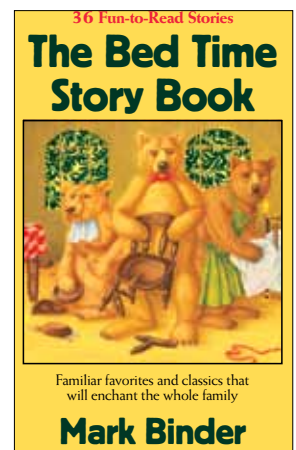
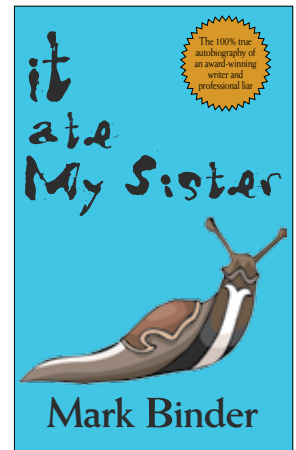
Tall Tales, Whoppers and Lies. Recorded live at the New England Folk Festival. Light Publications, 2003.

The Brothers Schlemiel (from birth to bar mitzvah). Audio book. Light Publications, 2001

The Everything Bed Time Story Book. Softcover. 100 stories from around the world for young people. Published by Adams Media Corporation, July 1999.

Crumbs Don't Count—The Rationalization Diet. Humorous anti-diet book, published by Avon Books, July 1998.

Short Fiction. Hundreds of short stories and novellas published around the world in magazines, newspapers, consumer, literary and trade magazines including: *Cricket Magazine*, *The Forward*, *Fresh Cup*, *Conjure Magazine*, *Bostonia Magazine*, *Beer—The Magazine*, *Camping & RV*, *The Lookout*, *The Family*, *The Shofar*, *Hadassah*, *The Jewish Voice*, *Atlanta Jewish Times*, *The Reporter*, *The Canadian Jewish News*, *Good Times*, *The Observer*, *Quix Art Quarterly*, *The Great Swamp Gazette*...



Several Quotes and Endorsements



Storytelling...

"awesome storyteller"
—*Southborough News*

"It is wonderful to work with performers who know their craft and their business."
—*Slater Mill*

Books and Recordings

"Lethal Latkes... is not a murder mystery. It concerns some awful-tasting latkes (potato pancakes) and what you might call another Hanukkah miracle: love."
—*New York Times*

"Rhode Island author and storyteller Mark Binder is the spellbinder in this clever recording."
—*School Library Journal*

"...infused with gentle humor... entirely suitable for—and commended to—all audiences."
—*The Providence Journal*

"Wired Words... Electric Prose"
—*The Phoenix*

"Think you've heard Jack and the Beanstalk? Think again... Remember Jack cutting down the stalk with an axe? Not this time, homey. Booya! My man Jack comes correct with a fully loaded chainsaw. Binder does crazy impersonations..."
—*Providence Monthly*



And a few more from readers and listeners...

"I read **A Hanukkah Present** completely in one night (only did that one other time with a Stephen King book), and enjoyed it immensely. If I knew Woody Allen's address I'd send him a copy because I know he would enjoy it, too. I'll be looking forward to reading **The Brothers Schlemiel** next."

"I just had to let you know how my six year old grandson told everyone at the holiday table about your stories, in detail. It would have so made you smile! His comments began, 'I met an author yesterday.' I didn't know he was following the stories so closely!"

"Awesome and funny. Who knew adults could enjoy stories?!"

Storytelling Magazine, July/August 2006

A Rhode Island Success Story

Jeanne Donato



The seeds of storytelling planted during the 2001 National Storytelling Conference in Providence, Rhode Island, are bearing fruit; one of them is a unique storytelling venture, the American Story Theater (AST). AST is a storytelling production company, the creation of producer/storyteller Mark Binder of Providence. In just over two years, this innovative, for-profit enterprise has employed over two dozen storytellers in over 25 public storytelling events.



Mark Binder tells at the Tales From October WaterFire event.

One of AST's signature events is to bring storytelling to select evenings of Providence's largest outdoor event, WaterFire. WaterFire attracts over 20,000 people annually. This incredible urban-arts community event continues to light up the evenings of summer and fall with bonfires floating on the river through the center of Providence, exciting the imagination with reflected firelight, music, and now stories. One of AST's WaterFire events, "Tales from October," featured three storytellers for three hours each night.

The American Story Theater continues to produce this event, and has worked to create other venues such as Tellabration!™, Providence's New Years Eve "Bright Night" celebration, and a regular story series called "Odd Wednesdays."

"Odd Wednesdays" is a unique storytelling experience created in partnership with AS220, an urban avant-garde theatre and gallery space downtown. This monthly event, with two featured tellers and a mix of open mic participants, targets adult storytelling audiences, with the featured tellers beginning at 10:00 pm. When asked if he believes storytelling can attract and sustain a year-round, late-night audience, Binder laughed, "I don't know, but I think so. We'll certainly find out."

Binder describes American Story Theater's vision as bold, simple, yet ambitious. "The American Story Theater produces and presents an unmatched variety of story performances for all ages." The mission statement clarifies its scope, "... bringing America's history, heritage, and cultures to life. American Story Theater programs are inspiring, innovative and entertaining. We promote community, learning, literacy, love of language, respect for diversity, and powerful communication. We're fun, too." Binder explains, "The first part of our mission is inspirational. The second part is for grants."

For-Profit or Non-Profit?

Most storytelling groups tend to file for non-profit 501(c)(3) status. "When we started, we were ready to go down the not-for-profit tunnel. We convened a board of directors, collected a board of advisors, and began designing what the AST could become. However, with more than 10,000 non-profits in the state of Rhode Island (one for every 100 citizens), I wondered if another non-profit organization was necessary?" The board decided on a novel approach to this question. AST became a sole-proprietor for-profit business, one that partners with existing non-profits to produce its creative storytelling venues.

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What Cheer Arts, AS220, The City of Providence, Bright Night, The League for the Advancement of New England Storytelling (LANES), and WaterFire have all worked with AST. The RI Storytellers' Tellabration!™, which I have produced since 1990, has also fruitfully collaborated for the last three years with Mark Binder's AST.

American Story Theater is a unique Rhode Island for-profit production company, but much of how it works

can be adapted to meet the needs of any state's storytelling community. For more information about American Story Theater and to hear podcasts from "Odd Wednesdays," visit www.americanstorytheater.org

Jeanne M. Donato M.Ed. (jeannedonato@aol.com), Rhode Island State Liaison, is a storyteller, author, and speaker. She teaches storytelling in Emergent Literacy and Enhanced Learning Techniques at Southern Connecticut State University Sixth Year Program.

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Binder, Mark. *The Brothers Schlemiel*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008. 246 pp. Illus. by Zevi Blum. ISBN 978-0-8276-0865-8, \$19.95.

This delightful tale concerns the lives of twin brothers in the mysterious town of Chelm, known in Jewish folklore as a place where people who lack basic knowledge and common sense still manage to thrive. Their ignorance often turns out to be an advantage when they are able to solve daily problems, catch criminals, and help the less fortunate.

The Brothers Schlemiel is about Abraham and Adam Schlemiel, twin brothers who look so much alike that even their parents can't tell them apart. As they grow up together, they get into a lot of mischief and perform pranks on others, taking advantage of their physical resemblance. When their little sister Shmeenie is born, the family is thrown into great confusion and turmoil.

The close relationship of Abraham and Adam is such that when one feels pain, the other feels it too even if he is nowhere near the other. When circumstances cause them to have to assume each other's identities, they are able to manage this despite their difficulties. With their skills and special bond, Adam and Abraham are successful in avoiding the draft into the Russian army and protecting Chelm from criminals. The story becomes even more interesting when Abraham and Adam enter into relationships with women and eventually marry.

This is great light reading and entertainment for readers of all ages and backgrounds.

Hannah M. Heller
Baltimore, Md.

Parenting People

BY DONNA J. URSILLO

Binder Spins Yarns About the Ocean State and Beyond

This is no tall tale: Storyteller Mark Binder gives his audiences a good time. When the 40-year-old performer steps on stage and into the stories he writes, he's having fun. And that energy serves his audiences well.

"I really want people to enjoy themselves; that's first on my list," says the Providence-based author and storyteller, whose dry and wacky wit works its way easily into the tales he tells.

Binder is relatively new to storytelling; but four years into this professional career, his plate is pretty full. "I used to be a real Rhode Islander for awhile about driving," he quips, referring to many residents' disdain for being on the road for more than 15 minutes. "Now I don't mind driving to and fro for story gigs."

In fact, now he travels to festivals, schools, libraries, churches, synagogues and camps with a hidden agenda: "I believe that storytelling is a great literacy tool. It makes a difference to hear a story, to see pictures in your mind and to have words evoke characters and settings."

While some days are easier than others for Binder to crank up to perform, he seems to have found a fulfilling niche where he combines his loves of writing, acting and telling tall tales. He grew into his job in that order.

"I've been writing for 20 years," says the Columbia University graduate who turned down acceptance to Columbia's graduate schools of theater and journalism for study at Trinity Rep Conservatory. For two years, from 8 in the morning until 10 at night, he acted, directed and wrote plays. The conservatory, he says, was "intensive, fun, like boot camp for theater."



Mark Binder's new CD, *Beyond the Ocean State*, features "Rhode Island-ese" of all sorts. PHOTO BY MARK REA

Intensity works for Binder. About 12 years ago, he founded the Real Fun Theater Company in Providence, where he was determined to produce one play per month. The company performed seven shows in eight months, and Binder "burnt out." Barely breaking even, he quelled the company that thrived for a while above the Columbus Theater and began to freelance.

Binder had worked his way around the local newspaper and magazine industries and had continued writing fiction when he was invited to a storytelling group. There he read parts of the *Brothers Schlemiel*, a serialized novel about twin brothers confused from birth that ran in 100 newspaper installments in the *Texas Jewish Herald Voice*.

At some point during the evening, he wondered, "Can I do that?" He could, and did. Binder, who studied with Spalding Gray, parlayed his writing and theater experience into storytelling gigs and decided initially never to tell the same story twice. "I broke that idea quickly," he laughs. He writes about 80 percent of his tales and changes them slightly with each gig. Depending on the pulse of his listeners, he'll happily tell the story of "Bad Breath Bill," or the "PI (poison ivy) Kid," neither of which is autobiographical, he says.

Although he says it's "scary to give up on my current repertoire," Binder is giving his latest batch of stories, the "Great Rhode Island Clam Shake," a go in Boston and other communities.

Among other tales, he's telling a story of Digga Dan, a Rhode Islander who trains the errant Cyril the seagull to dig clams for him. Binder hopes his latest CD, *Beyond the Ocean State*, featuring Digga Dan, will be ready in time for his performance this month at the Jonnycake Storytelling Festival in Peace Dale.

Binder says he's constantly looking for ways to improve his craft. "If you've seen me perform three years ago, I'm better now. If you see me three years ahead, I'll be even better then. But," he deadpans, "I don't suggest waiting that long."

Learn more about Binder and his CDs and books by visiting www.markbinder.com or calling 272-8707.

Donna J. Ursillo is a freelance writer and mother of one in Westerly.