

Book Launch – 2008 Pysanka Symposium, Washington, DC – March 8, 2008

Presentation by Joan Brander

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you Mr. Sorokowski for the introduction.

1. Intro

- I am a person who eats, breathes and dreams about my passion. My passion is eggs—not the ordinary ones but the extra-ordinary and beautiful Pysanky. About 15 years go I discovered that I also love to teach Pysanky

2. Teaching Experience

My teaching experience is varied and extensive

- I attend schools and give workshops to students of all ages. Also to teachers for their professional development so that they are encouraged and supported in their lessons to students
- In British Columbia we have a unit in our grade 5 curriculum called “Ukrainian immigration to Canada” so lots of students learn how to make Pysanky
- Over the years I have developed many teaching aids, lesson aids and handouts to appeal to the various ways that people learn and to fit into my type of workshop
- I am a member of Ukrainian Community Society of Ivan Franko in Richmond, B.C. and have developed monthly Pysanka Workshops that would carry on year-round at our centre
- At Easter I present annual Workshops. All of this in return for a heaping plate of pyrohy at our popular monthly fundraising dinners
- One of the things I brought with me is a scrapbook of photos spanning 15 years of giving workshops. I invite you to please have a look at it

I'd like to tell you some stories that have happened over the years to indicate what my experience has been like

3. Demonstrations and Displays

I find the process of demonstrating Pysanky very therapeutic and rewarding. I have enjoyed doing this in many different venues

- My youngest observer was inside a shopping mall many yeas ago. She was a little Chinese girl -- maybe 3 years old (the same age as my son when he learned to make a Pysanka). But neither she nor her mother could speak a word of English. So the communication was all non-verbal
 - her mother let me put the child's hand over mine as I heated the kistka in a candle flame
 - and she kept it there while I wrote some patterns on an egg
 - then I let her touch the egg and the beeswax lines
 - we repeated this for a very long time
 - although I have demonstrated to thousands of people over the years, the memory of this one little girl and her interest and fascination is the one that is sealed in my mind

- [prop] The oldest people would be those at Senior Citizens Homes. Here's a photo of me holding up a giant ostrich pysanka to a resident. Cameras catch the darndest things, don't they? Cuz right here beside her is another resident who is fast asleep!
- Some of the outdoor venues have included multicultural festivals such as the Vegreville Pysanka Festival – home of the largest Pysanka in the world. [prop?] A story I remember from there is about a child whom I had taught how to make a Pysanka. At the end I explained that I would varnish his egg. He resisted loudly, saying that he liked his Pysanka and wanted to keep it. He didn't want it to “vanish” away.
- Anyone who teaches Pysanky knows how much people enjoy the learning experience. At one of my favourite malls, after I've set everything up, I face a wall of teenage girls literally “running” to get to the workshop, they enjoy it so much! I'm looking forward to seeing them again next weekend. Which reminds me, maybe that's how I can get my teenage son back into making pysanky! Teenage girls. hmmm.
- My favourite response is this heartwarming email I received last year from a home-school parent. It says: [prop]

Hi Joan,

Just a quick note to say thanks for the terrific workshop on Tuesday. All the kids (and parents!) had a great time. I was stunned that Duncan actually finished his egg. As I told you, he NEVER does art. (He is learning disabled and gifted -- music is his passion and he's never shown any interest in the visual). It was great to see him captivated by the project -- and actually finish it!! He was very proud of himself and he even did another egg the next day, using the kit we bought.”

I'll be seeing Duncan, his sister, and their mother on Tuesday, as I conduct another workshop for their home schooled peers.

It's all these experiences that are so rewarding for me.

My husband, who is a non-Ukrainian, is very supportive of my passion.

But it hasn't always been that way. When Easter came around and the demand for my time increased, he would just throw up his hands and say, “I want nothing to do with your eggs. This is your business. Your eggs. I don't care about your wax and dyes. Just leave me out of it”. He wouldn't help me much. But that gradually changed and it wasn't that many years later that I found him up late one night just before Easter. Yes, writing his own Pysanka. Now his knowledge of the technique and tradition rivals mine. He comes to all my workshops and events with me and once substituted for me in a feature newspaper article which you can see in my portfolio that I brought with me. You can recognize us by the nice, round, Pysanka-shaped bodies that we've both developed over the years.

4. Research

- Early on I started a personal collection of Pysanky books, beginning with the great books published by the fine people at the Ukrainian Gift Shop in Minneapolis [prop]. I tried to get my hands on as many books as I could
- However, I could not find a printed bibliography on pysanky
- So I set about to write my own

- My search for titles lead me to collect books, periodicals and audiovisual material
- I set about to reviewing references, bibliographies and lists of books in these published works
- I knew the significance of Pysanky and how important it is that we record our history and tradition and not let the tradition get watered down in any way
- This process took a very long time. I had life's challenges to deal with and my own procrastination. Even last year's civic strike in Vancouver and the closure of all public libraries took its toll on my project as the publishing deadline loomed closer.
- There was someone who pushed me right to end—my sister who is in the audience today. Her name is Joyce Chyrski and she is a librarian at the University of Toronto, and author of her own published bibliography on an unrelated topic.
- I still have your note from May 3, 2001 [prop]. It says “this is the most comprehensive database one can ever find and search. Do the Bibliography now!” And when you see it in print, it's in all caps which just shouts from the paper.
- Once all the titles I could possibly find were collected, I tackled the task of citing them. I drew on my knowledge of preparing lists of legal cases that I do regularly at my job working as a legal secretary in a law firm.
- I've always enjoyed making lists. I can think of making birthday lists, shopping lists, Christmas gift lifts, mailing lists, team lists, Pysanky lists, and all the yellow stickies I have used so that I wouldn't forget to put something on a list. I also have a “honey do list”. It's not the honeydew melon, it's my honey to do list for my husband.
- I didn't realize how much I liked lists until I cleaned out my filing cabinet to make some room for the new year collection of paperwork. I came across a file labeled “Lists”. And not surprisingly, in the file was a bunch of lists. How scary is that?
- One of my biggest challenges was transliterating my list of foreign titles. I often regret that I can't speak Ukrainian, and that was very obvious during the course of writing this bibliography. So I gleaned the talents of friends who helped with the Ukrainian and German transliteration.
- Finally, the printing stage! This was more time-consuming than I thought it would be. The process that started in September completed just a couple of weeks ago. These books are hot off the press and the Symposium registrants are the first people who have the opportunity to see it.

Another story— I signed off the printing order on a Thursday. On Saturday I went to the post office to pick up a parcel that had been waiting for me for several days. Do you hear the theme of procrastination here? When I opened it up I couldn't believe my eyes—it was a Pysanka book and a DVD sent to me by a friend in Brazil. So I had to phone my printer to stop the press—as I just couldn't print the bibliography without including these 2 new releases.

So that brings me to today. Speaking at the 2008 Pysanka Symposium. I am so honoured to be here in the company of such distinguished presenters-- living the dream that I spoke about at the outset.

5. Conclusion

- In conclusion I'd like to emphasize how important I think it is for us to record our heritage and culture and to not let the tradition of Pysanky get watered down in any way. I agree wholeheartedly with Orysia, who said, "We must protect our Pysanky".
- My hope is that the bibliography will be a torch to carry for anyone wishing to write more about Pysanky or to simply write a Pysanka.
- I would like to compliment the organizers for hosting this inaugural Pysanka Symposium and to eagerly ask, when is the next one?
- Thank you for allowing me to launch my book at such a fitting event. As a small token of appreciation I would like to present Jurij with a selection of pysanky books and newsletters for the parish library. And as a small token of my thanks to the audience for listening to me, I would like to give you some frameable art cards from British Columbia.
- Please visit my display. Along with the serious stuff, I'd love to hear any lawyer jokes that you have. I have brought with me many of the titles listed in the bibliography, including some rare and unique ones, which you can look at or read. And I will answer any questions you may have about my teaching or my research for the bibliography.

Thank you.