

KIRAN SINGH SIRAH

Speaker / Consultant / Peacebuilder

President, International Storytelling Center | 116 West Main Street Jonesborough, Tennessee 37659

PERSONAL PROFILE

Kiran Singh Sirah is President of the International Storytelling Center (ISC,) the global premier institution dedicated to the art and profession of storytelling and producer of the world-renowned National Storytelling Festival. Prior to his appointment at ISC, Sirah helped establish a number of award-winning arts, cultural, and human rights programs throughout the United Kingdom. These included community building programs at National Museums Scotland in response to the 9/11 attacks, and a number of peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives exploring issues of religious, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In 2011, he embarked on a Rotary Peace Fellowship in the United States focusing on the folklore of “home” and studying at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Upon graduating in 2013, he began his tenure at ISC and has helped the institution grow in ways previously unimaginable. Along with his duties as President, Sirah is regularly asked to provide keynote lectures, workshops, and trainings for such entities as the Smithsonian Institution; the US State Department and Department of Defense; the Library of Congress; and the United Nations; and has worked in Colombia, Brazil, and Uganda. In addition to storytelling, his passion includes mentoring youth and young adults, particularly youth-at-risk, budding artists, and poets (including Poetry Out Loud champions,) to help them be positive change agents in their communities.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

President, International Storytelling Center; Jonesborough, TN; 2013-present

Oversees all operations of ISC including: children’s, youth, young adult, and adult programming; regional, national, and global partnerships including the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library; and working in conjunction with the Board to create new opportunities to further ISC’s mission of “a better life, a better world, through the power of storytelling”

Fellow, Rotary World Peace Fellowship; Chapel Hill, NC; 2011-2013

Fellowship at the University of North Carolina’s Department of American Studies Folklore Program focusing on “Aesthetics of Home through Narratives, Memory, and Arts” emphasizing the power of human creativity; worked in homeless shelters to collect stories of people experiencing homelessness

Arts Manager, Sense Scotland; Glasgow; Scotland; 2009-2011

Managed the Helen Keller International Award exhibition including 120 artists and 26 supporting countries; led and developed national and international arts and communications programs supporting people with complex and diverse dual disabilities; helped establish Sense Scotland as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities

Programming Curator, Glasgow Museums; Glasgow, Scotland; 2002-2009

Established high profile, adult and young people’s social justice education program on issues of human rights, slavery, world faiths and crimes against humanity; developed “Societies Emerging from Conflict” peace and reconciliation program for leaders from Northern Ireland’s divided communities

Education Manager, National Museums Scotland; Glasgow, Scotland; 2001-2009

Established “Side by Side: A Celebration of World Faiths in Scotland,” a national post-9/11 educational and interfaith public dialogue program

LECTURES

- “Storytelling and Peace,” +Peace Coalition Launch and United Nation’s International Day of Peace plenary lecture; New York, NY: 2019
- “Home,” Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library *Homecomin’* keynote address at the invitation of Dolly Parton; Pigeon Forge, TN: 2019
- Storytelling and peace lecture series for the annual Rotary International Conference and Peace Symposium; Hamburg, Germany: 2019
- Presented at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 50th Anniversary; Washington DC: 2017
- “Storytelling: The Power of Peace,” US Department of Defense opening keynote and workshop for Collaborative and Adaptive Security Initiative (CASI;) Arlington, VA: 2017
- “Storytelling: A Peaceful Power,” TEDx talk; Nashville, TN: 2016
- “The Transformative Power of Storytelling: A Social Force for Social Change,” Botkin Lecture Series, 40th Anniversary of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress; Washington, DC: 2016
- “Narratives of Hope,” paper at the Society for Anthropology North American conference; Durham, NC: 2013
- “Beyond the Comfort Zone: Challenging Conventional Narratives of Peace,” a speech for the Rotary Spring Conference: 2013
- “Poetry for Social Change,” lecture at the Peace to Peace Conference; Greenwood, SC: 2012
- “Social Justice Folklore,” an address at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage; Washington DC: 2013
- Keynote address to international delegation at United Nations; New York, NY: 2012
- “Ethnography at Street Level,” paper delivered at the American Folklore Society conference; New Orleans, LA: 2012
- “The Engaged Museum,” speech at UNESCO British Council Managing World Heritage Sites conference; Edinburgh, Scotland: 2008
- “Challenging Sectarianism,” lecture at the Gallery of Modern Art Lecture Series; Glasgow, Scotland: 2007
- Keynote speaker at Conference on World Religions: 2007
- “Engaging with Communities and New Arrivals,” keynote at Northern Ireland Museums Conference; Belfast, Northern Ireland: 2005

WORKSHOPS & PROGRAMS

- Training and consulting for the Uganda Storytelling Initiative; Tororo, Uganda: ongoing
- Story Circle Leader, House Foreign Relations Committee; eventually helping lead to the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2019; Washington, DC: 2016
- “Telling Stories that Matter,” a collaborative series of workshops for community building and healing following the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church; Charleston, SC: Feb. 2016
- Community Partners Action Summit participant at the invitation of the White House; Washington, DC: 2015
- Participated in various talks and projects across Colombia focused on social responsibilities, human rights education, and peace promotion with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); Bogotá, Ibagué, and Cartagena, Colombia: 2009
- Human rights-centered program and workshop for World Refugee Day; Glasgow, Scotland: 2008
- Panel speaker on “museums of the future” at the “Moving on Up” development session; UK Museums Association: 2008

(Workshops & Programs, cont.)

- Glasgow representative in sister-city project “Societies in Crisis” sponsored by the European Commission aimed at better structuring and enriching educational approaches to youth initiatives across Europe and the Mediterranean; Marseilles, France: 2007
- “Faith to Faith: F2F,” adult social justice learning program aimed at allowing visitors to discuss and debate issues relating to religion in Scotland and the world; Glasgow, Scotland: 2007
- Invited to chair session at the UK Museums Association conference: 2004
- “Sense over Sectarianism,” a 16 panel exhibition produced by working with two schools and using artworks produced by students; Glasgow, Scotland: 2004

PUBLICATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

- Contributed forward for *Speak Peace: Words of Wisdom, Work, and Wonder* by Lyn Ford and Sherry Norfolk in response to the killing of Alton Sterling; 2019
- “Storytelling and Community in Jonesborough, Tennessee,” Main Street America article for The National Trust for Historic Preservation; 2016
- “Telling Stories that Matter,” a toolkit for exploring one’s potential as a storyteller, used in communities and schools across the US and 18 countries; 2013 (rev. 2016)
- “Challenging Stigmas, Celebrating Disability,” Deaf Blind International; 2010
- “Towards Understanding Slavery,” an article for Glasgow Museums exhibitions commemorating the bicentennial of Scotland’s abolition of the slave trade; 2007
- “St Mungo Museum: Thick-skinned but Full of Faith!” an article for *SHCG News*, the Social History Curators Group biannual newsletter; 2003

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- Purdue Peacebuilding Big Idea Challenge winner; Purdue University, 2019
- Champion for Peace; Rotary International and the United Nations, 2016
- Paul Harris Fellow Award; Rotary International, 2011
- Invited to serve as an advisory member to UK National Commission for UNESCO Scotland and invited to meet with UNESCO Director General, 2011
- Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Scotland recommendation for “Bigot Busters,” 2007
- Invited to present exemplar project at the First Minister’s Summit on Sectarianism, 2006
- Enterprise for Scotland award for “Sense over Sectarianism,” 2005
- Invited to chair session on “Diversify” at the UK Museums Association Conference, 2004

EDUCATION

- **University of North Carolina/Duke University; Chapel Hill, NC:** M.A. in Folklore Studies & Graduate certificate in International Peace & Conflict Resolution; 2013
- **Newcastle University; Newcastle Upon Tyne, England:** M.A., in Museum, Gallery, and Heritage Studies; 2003
- **University of Wolverhampton; Wolverhampton, England:** B.A., Honors in Art & Design, 1998