

## Bringing the world closer with a bagful of stories

All it takes is one conversation with Laura Simms to get her to pull out some of the most engaging and deeply personal tales from her huge bag full of stories, collected carefully over decades from around the world.



Laura Simms

Chennai:

As one of the founders of the Global Storytelling Revival, which was started in the early 1970s as a way of reviving oral traditions, the New York City-based storyteller has trained and inspired several storytellers across the world.

Eric Miller, a city-based storyteller, studied with Laura starting 40 years ago in New York. “The World Storytelling Institute, which I had co-founded here in Chennai in 2007, was inspired by Laura,” admits Eric. Laura, who is visiting the city to take part in the Institute’s ongoing 8th edition of the Chennai Storytelling Festival, says living in times when digital interactions dominate our daily lives, it is stories that help bring people together.

“There was a time when people lived differently. In the current times when we’re losing touch with each other, stories from the past can help people introspect their lives. I try to learn about the historical context of each of the stories I narrate. There can be good vs evil in every story, but I try to wake up the audience to explore the biases on their own,” asserts 70-year-old Laura. The storyteller, who travels world over narrating her stories, reiterates that stories make the digital world seem more human and can also be therapeutic to people.

A member of the Healing Story Alliance (a part of the US National Storytelling Network), Laura is known for her workshops with the approach of allowing participants share personal stories using traditional tales as templates. “I find brilliant storytelling traditions in villages and in theatres across India, where I see the retelling of some of the greatest epics like Ramayana. In the current day, I see that many stories are known to people in this country the way they know their own skin,” she notes. In many countries across Asia, including India, storytelling has been a central part of people’s lives for ages now, remarks Laura.

Besides performing worldwide, she also offers workshops for students, teachers and storytellers. “I was once told by an audience member that one of my stories helped saved her marriage. I think stories can help take us on a journey like no other,” she shares, adding, “It is quite exciting to see how many people have started telling stories in India and around the world.”

Hear Laura Simms' stories at the Chennai Storytelling Festival, which ends on February 16. Refer to [storytellinginstitute.org](http://storytellinginstitute.org) for the schedule.