



BOOKS,
STORIES, AND TAPES
TO USE AND
ENJOY

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RESOURCES

SPROUTS, KIDS, AND VIDEOTAPE

By Larry Johnson

Minneapolis-based talespinner, educator, and videomaker Larry Johnson, the founder of the OGP (Old Gardening Party), has devoted his life to combining a few of his favorite things: kids, stories, gardening, and video. In today's mass-produced culture, Johnson says, "We've managed to take away the public's ability to work things out on their own." The cure? Getting people involved in growing their own food, telling their own stories, and creating their own TV shows.



Kids at work in the children's section of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the site of the 1989 National Children's Garden Symposium

LARRY
JOHNSON
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TO PAY MY WAY THROUGH BROADCAST SCHOOL IN THE late '60s, I directed travel camps and taught kids about wild foods in nature's garden. At that time I began to experiment with the new portable video equipment and to give kids who didn't fit in well the power to tell stories by making their own TV programs. I don't think I could've articulated it then, but I believe that telling your own story or making your own video is to watching commercial television what growing your own food is to buying it in glossy TV-advertised packages from the supermarket.

After I spent a two-year stint in the armed forces, my family and I relocated to Austin, Minnesota, in 1972, where I again directed travel camps and did a local children's TV show with an environmental slant. I told stories, kids shared talents, and a big purple angleworm wearing a blue baseball cap tended the garden.

In 1977 I started America's first live, participatory call-in patient channel at Minneapolis Children's Hospital. We planted a garden on the roof and broadcast a daily "Electronic Get-Well Card." Patients could call in order to talk to Tyler the Angleworm or their own teddy bear or play such games as "Hospital Squares."

By 1980 I was regularly writing and telling stories about what I call the OGP, or Old Gardening Party, and espousing planks such as this:

Since one minute of advertising on prime-time TV costs in the neighborhood of \$150,000, the

OGP asks that one minute on each show be left blank so viewers can use their own imagination and that the money saved be used to pay five or six storytellers a salary to tell in person for a year in schools.

Although a newspaper columnist had nominated me for the presidency on the OGP ticket, the time wasn't right, needless to say. But rather than let that bother me, I just went on gardening, telling stories, and making video letters.

In September 1989 I had the opportunity to go to New York and inspire folks at the first National Children's Garden Symposium to tell garden stories and trade video letters about their kids' gardening programs. I came home even more inspired to get an International Peace Garden going at my school and to start a little summer gardening, storytelling, and videomaking project with the neighborhood kids.

And if you'd like to tell gardening tales to children, the following bibliography is a place to start. Tell the stories you like, and send me the ones I forgot or wasn't aware of. ♦