

which might completely turn you off storytelling. This is for you to *practice for yourself*. So tell it to yourself, maybe in the bath or while you're walking the dog. Once you can retell a story like this to yourself, choose one which your child does *not* know and which you'd like to share with her.

- Don't be afraid to use props. Like Native American elders drawing out a stone, a feather or a piece of hide from their story bags whilst storytelling, don't hesitate to find a way to help yourself learn and retell your stories. Another possibility is, for instance, if you're preparing to tell the Gingerbread Man, to cut out simple figures of the Gingerbread Man, the old woman, the old man, the cat and so on. Line them up in order and use them as prompts to remind you of the correct sequence of events as you tell the story. Later, you can help your child make his own set or he might like to play with yours.
- A drawing or painting prepared before the story can serve the same purpose. Puppets - or wooden or plastic figures - can also work.
- Really get into the rhythmic song-song quality of stories such as *The House That Jack Built* or *The Enormous Turnip*. Such rhythm helps the memory and you might just find the story spilling out without your conscious effort! By using chanting or rhythm, bards and griots of old, as well as modern people memorizing long works such as the Talmud or the Koran, could commit astonishingly lengthy passages to memory.
- Don't just stick to fairy tales or stories from books. Make up your own stories about tomtens who live in your kitchen or fairies who live under the rose bush in the yard. And retell stories from your childhood, or stories your mother or grandmother told you. Precious family memories can be built up in this way.
- Get a good book such as Nancy Mellon's *Storytelling with Children*. This book can help *anyone* become a confident and competent storyteller!
- Don't condense the stories or cut out the repetitive parts - these are what make the stories really live for young children and are incredibly nourishing for them. As I've said elsewhere, little ones crave rhythm and repetition and it helps strengthen them. I found a lovely book that was a retelling of *The House That Jack Built*, called *The Pot That Juan Made* but unfortunately, the author shortcut the long repetitive passages and so, in my mind, made the book lifeless.

When telling or reading fairy tales to your child, the idea is to let the language and the magic of the story itself work on the soul of your child. Although one may want to have fun with, for instance, the voice of the giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* ("Fee fie foe fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!"), it is important not to over-dramatize what to us adults seems violent or cruel. When Gretel pushes the witch into the oven, this is a picture of good overcoming evil, not a real little girl being vengeful to her captor. In general, it is best to use a fairly even and non-dramatic voice when telling or reading fairy tales. Think of your voice providing *gestures*: in the case of Gretel pushing the witch in the oven, the gesture is one of finality, of having dealt conclusively with evil.