

## **Can You Top This? Listen In On Our Liar's Contest!**

Tall tales bring smiles to our faces – the best of them even make us laugh out loud. And then we want to pass the amazing stories on to all of our friends.

But who among some of the best tall tale tellers in our region can tell the most fanciful story of all? That's what you will find out when you visit the Seminar Stage for our first Liar's Contest – a match of wits, witticisms, and pure imagination. You are in for a treat!

How did this once very popular kind of entertainment come about? A half century ago, the Liar's Contest was a favorite pastime within the Pennsylvania German community. In those days, groups sponsored annual Liar's Contests with some of the most talented tall tale tellers in the area trying to top each other with yarns that stretched the limits of credibility – incidents that, while they were possible, were also totally unbelievable, and were always hilarious.

The most effective tale telling is a supposed happening woven with a wonderful description on the part of the storyteller and requiring a vivid imagination (and maybe some gullibility?) on the part of the listener. Our contestants on the Seminar Stage will do their best to out-do each other in telling tall tales that will delight you.

Seminar Stage Manager Dr. Bill Donner mentions a couple of examples of tall tale classics that he has heard: "A person describes in detail how one rifle shot went through a deer to kill a bear with a trout in its hand that fell on a pheasant. In another story a man explains at length how he loves turnips so much that he spreads an electric blanket across his garden to grow them under."

"Although there are parallels in other national traditions, for example the Baron Munchhausen stories of Germany, the telling of tall tales has deep roots in American oral tradition and humor. Tall tales can be found in American story telling in John Henry, Paul Bunyan, Mike Fink, Davy Crockett, and in American writers like Mark Twain. In the Liar's Contests, Pennsylvania Germans were using

their Pennsylvania German language as a way to express their American roots,” Bill says.

This is a different kind of humor taken from the pages of our Pennsylvania German heritage. It is a tradition that is grounded in the rural and verbal heritage of this region. Once a main stay in entertainment, a variety of factors have caused liar’s contests to become very rare in recent years. Of course, far fewer people speak the Pennsylvania German language which is often seen as earthier and more humorous than English. Also, the rural, personal, and local culture that provided the content for this humor had been replaced by a more global and industrialized culture, Bill explains.

And, of course, rural communication has been supplanted by mass media. For most Americans, humor is now more commercialized and the content is national, even global. For most of us, daily humor is derived from late night television. Be assured that what you hear on the Seminar Stage will top almost any stand up comedy that you have listened to before.

In bringing back the Liar’s Contest, we are both remembering the old and presenting the new. We are bringing to the stage a once enormously popular type of Pennsylvania German entertainment still familiar to many old-timers, as well as a form of comedy that will be brand new to many of our visitors.

Participants will present their material in the Pennsylvania German language, followed by an English translation, or some participants may decide to present only in English. The audience has a major role in all of this because they will select the best liar.

If you need a good chuckle, join us on the Seminar Stage for our Liar’s Contest!