

# MILBRE BURCH:

## THEATRE OF THE SPOKEN WORD

### In *Saints and Other Sinners*

a collection of saint stories and original monologues about faith, struggle, endurance  
and the miracle of small human kindnesses



Photo by Scott Robinson

From humor to high drama, Milbre Burch's one-woman show, **Saints and Other Sinners**, unfolds onstage between kitchen and countryside. Using a crutch, a loaf of bread, a tea cup, a parcel wrapped in paper, Milbre Burch tells traditional, literary and original tales to capture moments in the lives of St. Nicholas, St. Christopher, St. Clare, St. Odilia, St. Aloys and just plain folk.

*The Providence Sunday Journal Magazine* published three of the four original monologues in the show. "Meeting Martin," Burch's favorite of these, has become her signature piece, and appears on the National Storytelling Network's audio anthology, *A Storytelling Treasury - Tales Told at the 20th Anniversary National Storytelling Festival*.

Burch says of the story: "In 1988, I was commissioned by St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Providence, Rhode Island, to tell St. Martin's story on his Feast Day, November 11th. While I was doing my research on the legend of St. Martin of Tours, I took a cross town city bus and encountered several homeless people also making their way through the snow. That evening, I wrote the story, transposing it from the 5th century to modern-day Providence. It came to me in the voice of a homeless person, and that's the way I tell it. Whatever else it may be, this monologue is very much a love story to a place."

After the show's debut, the *Sierra Madre News (CA)* wrote: "Much has been said about the power of a good story well-told. With Milbre Burch to tell them, we can cease the discussion and just listen and let them settle into our hearts. One exquisite story after another." After its booking at the Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, museum educator Beth Shaw-McGuire called it: "An engaging and thoughtful performance." And Los Angeles-based writer/director Louise Steinman called it: "A tour de force of storytelling."

For booking information, contact:

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The material in each act of **Saints and Other Sinners** consists of the following pieces:

#### ACT ONE

**"Abe Zaccheus"** by Milbre Burch.  
(based on the Gospel according to St. Luke, 19:1-10)

**"The Rabbi Spoke in Stories"** by Milbre Burch.  
(based on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, 13:31-32; 19:13-15)

**"St. Aloys, the Blacksmith"** adapted from *British Folktales* by Katharine Briggs.

**"Odilia and Aldaric"** adapted from *Giant and the Ford* by Ursula Syngé.  
(based on the legend of St. Odilia, patron saint of the Blind)

#### ACT TWO

**"St. Clare Blesses the Bread"** from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

**"Wilbern's Story"** by Milbre Burch.

**The Giant at the Ford** adapted from the book by Ursula Syngé.  
(based on the legend of St. Christopher, patron saint of travelers)

**"How Come Christmas"** adapted from the story by Roark Bradford.

**"Meeting Martin"** by Milbre Burch.  
(based on the legend of St. Martin of Tours)

**Running time is 90 minutes. There is one 10-minute intermission.**

Milbre Burch's live recording of **Saints and Other Sinners** features the selections above, and was a NAIRD/AFIM INDIE Award Finalist in 1991.

A catalog of Milbre Burch's recordings is available at:

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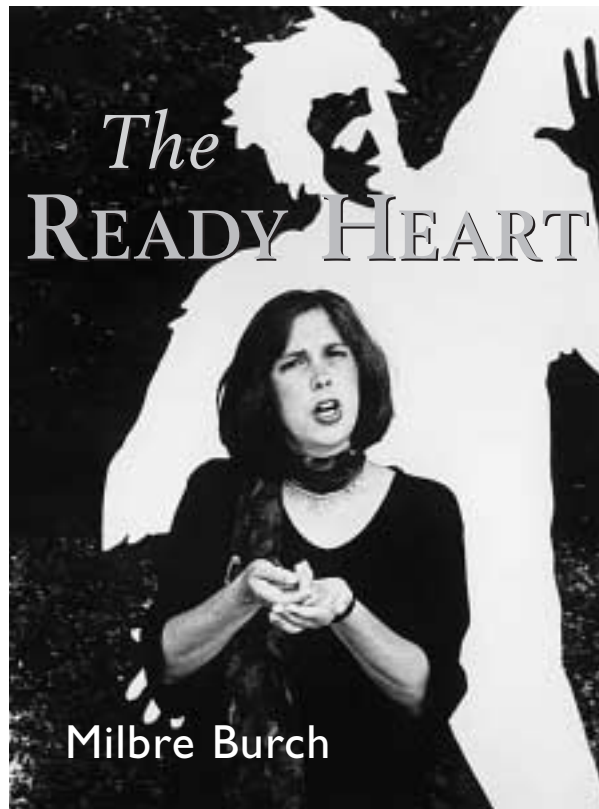
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# MILBRE BURCH:

THEATRE OF THE SPOKEN WORD

In *The Ready Heart*

an evening of stories and poems by Jane Yolen



Milbre Burch

Photo by Beth Thielen

Set in an environment of standing paper sculptures reminiscent of the figures in a pop-up book, **The Ready Heart** features the writing of award-winning American author Jane Yolen, performed by her most distinguished spoken word interpreter, Milbre Burch. With the strands of the writer's words, the teller spins a web of stories, some whimsical, some chilling. In them, a young man marries a cat; a sailor's wife retrieves him from the deep; a fairy is caught in her own spell; a girl meets her vampire mother after dark, and more.

Called America's Hans Christian Andersen, Jane Yolen has published over 200 books ranging from children's picture books to adult non-fiction, science fiction and fantasy. Among her numerous writing honors are the World Fantasy Award, the Kerlan Award, the Golden Kite Award, the Mythopoeic Society Award and the Christopher Award. Of the performer, Yolen has said, "Milbre Burch is my other soul. I love the way she tells my stories."

Burch premiered **The Ready Heart** at the University of San Diego in March of 1995. That same spring she included excerpts in a juried performance at the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival, and in a twelve-city European tour. Her participation in Sushi Visual and Performing Art's Solo Visions Festival in San Diego garnered critical acclaim. The San Diego Union Tribune

called Burch "an instinctively rhythmic performer with a wonderfully organic use of movement and gesture... She became a kind of transparency through which to see the heart of each tale. Her simple, selfless performances were mesmerizing, like a fine solo dancer's."

Before taking sections of the work to Austria in 1997, Burch performed **The Ready Heart** at the California Institute of Technology and at Occidental College. Ellen Ketchum, who was then Occidental's Performing Arts Director, wrote this: "A very strong 'bravo!' for your wonderful performances here. You are one of the most smashing actresses I have seen in my long years spent running theaters. I consider myself an advocate of your splendid work."

The haunting figures that set the stage for **The Ready Heart** were created by limited edition book artist Beth Thielen. Her work has been exhibited at the Getty Museum and in the book collections of Harvard and Yale Universities.

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The material in each act of **The Ready Heart** is selected from the following sources:

"**The Ballad of the White Seal Maid**" adapted from *Neptune Rising – Songs and Tales of the Undersea Folk* by Jane Yolen.

"**The Fisherman's Wife**" adapted from *Neptune Rising – Songs and Tales of the Undersea Folk* by Jane Yolen.

"**The Cat Bride**" adapted from *Dream-Weaver* by Jane Yolen.

"**Sans Soleil**" adapted from *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* by Jane Yolen.

"**Knives**" by Jane Yolen adapted from *Snow White, Rose Red*, edited by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow.

*Sleeping Ugly* adapted from the book by Jane Yolen.

"**Beauty and the Beast: An Anniversary**" adapted from *The Faery Flag* by Jane Yolen.

"**Mama Gone**" by Jane Yolen adapted from *Vampires*, edited by Jane Yolen and Martin Greenberg.

"**Dragonfield**" adapted from *Dragonfield and Other Stories* by Jane Yolen.

*The Boy Who Had Wings* adapted from the book by Jane Yolen.

"**The Storyteller**" adapted from *Dragonfield and Other Stories* by Jane Yolen.

**Running time is 90 minutes. There is one 10-minute intermission.**

Milbre Burch's recording of **The Ready Heart** features some of the selections above, and was awarded a Parents' Choice Gold Award in 1995.

A catalog of Milbre Burch's recordings is available at:

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# MILBRE BURCH:

THEATRE OF THE SPOKEN WORD

In *Mom's the Word:*

*A Journey in Meter and Centimeters*

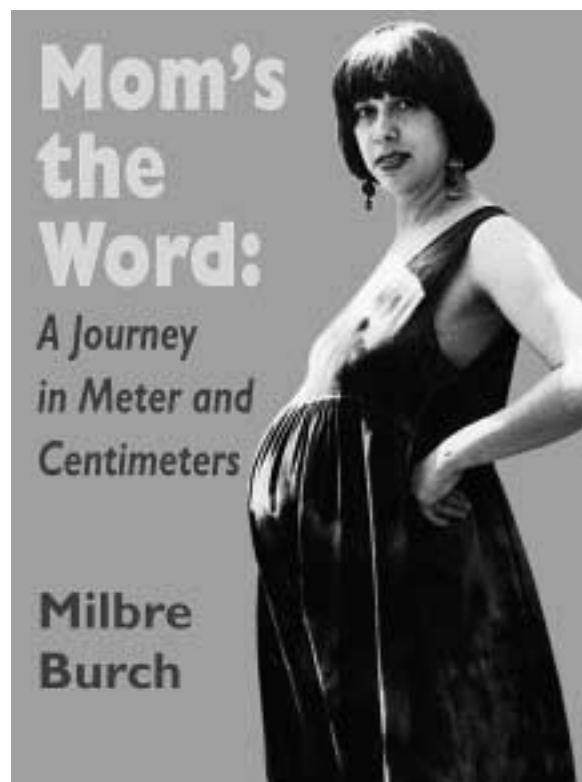


Photo by Joanna Keller-Church

Milbre Burch bridges the mythic and the personal, the anecdotal and the poetic in **Mom's the Word: A Journey in Meter and Centimeters**. On a sparsely set stage decorated with totems, Burch tells about the births of her daughters with wit and passion. Drawing on her theatrical background, she becomes an Irish immigrant who sees the Statue of Liberty as her new mother, and later "La Llorona," the wailing woman of Latin American legend. Burch's strengths as a poet are heard in "The Voiceless Maiden," "Rapunzel Revisited" and "A Page from the Manual of What You Want the Lover to Say."

A sequel to **In the Family Way**, her earlier work about family life, the show has traveled to the National Storytelling Festival; the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival in Orem, Utah; the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival; adult storytelling series at the Beverly Hills Library, the Monterey Public Library, and Tales by the Sea in Malibu; All Saints Church in Pasadena; Cafe Patachou in Indianapolis, and National-Louis University in Evanston, Illinois.

Having seen the show at the 1999 National Storytelling Festival, actor, author and storyteller Bill Mooney wrote: "**Mom's the Word** is a terrific story and you tell it wonderfully well. Even among the many of us who were standees around the edges, there were tears of recognition.

The humor was pithy and to the point, and the story galloped along." Susan Klein, an internationally known performer, speaker and storytelling coach, asked Burch: "Were you aware what your poem, 'What You Want the Lover to Say' did to that poor, unsuspecting audience? They were bowled over by the clarity and honesty and courage of the piece and of the whole show."

Burch calls the piece "an exploration of the many mysteries of birth and child rearing, and an initiation into some of the best-kept secrets of being a woman." After sponsoring the show at National-Louis University, Nan Murnighan wrote to her: "You tackle that most sacred of topics, Motherhood, by not only singing its glories but also, and equally importantly, by fearlessly acknowledging and exploring the dark and down sides of motherhood. And you do so with humor and pathos in a way that is accessible to all."

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The material in each act of **Mom's the Word** consists of the following pieces, written by Milbre Burch:

ACT ONE: **Barrenness to Birthgiving**

**Scene One: "The Prologue"**

**Scene Two: "Our Heroine Marries and Matures"**

**Scene Three: "Conception and Quickening"**

**Scene Four: "Labor and Delivery"**

**Scene Five: "It Takes a Village I"**

**Scene Six: "Lost Child I"**

**Scene Seven: "It Takes a Village II"**

ACT TWO: **The Birth of Sisterhood**

**Scene One: "Welcoming the Second Child"**

**Scene Two: "Labor and Delivery Reprise"**

**Scene Three: "Adjusting to Siblinghood"**

**Scene Four: "Travels with Rosebud"**

**Scene Five: "When the Psyche Needs a Facelift"**

**Scene Six: "Lost Child II"**

**Scene Seven: "The Fairy Tales Revisited"**

**Running time is 90 minutes. There is one 10-minute intermission.**

Milbre Burch's recording of **Mom's the Word: A Journey in Meter and Centimeters**, features the selections above, and was a Storytelling World Honors Winner in 2000.

A catalog of Milbre Burch's recordings is available at:

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# MILBRE BURCH:

THEATRE OF THE SPOKEN WORD

## In *In the Family Way*:

### *Generations of Stories*

a mosaic of folk, literary and personal tales about family relationships



Photo by Clotie Lowe

In a setting reminiscent of home, Milbre Burch weaves the stories of her own family into a seamless cloth of folktales, literature and fables from around the world. With poetry by Mary Oliver, a story by Betty Miles, and a healthy serving of folk and personal wisdom, **In the Family Way: Generations of Stories** has been called "the world history of the baby boomers."

Burch says: "I developed this show in the wake of my father's passing. While working on it, I realized that family stories are as familiar as the air around us, though we are often unaware of breathing them in. In performing my own family stories, I want to remind the listeners of theirs."

Best-selling author and teller Ed Stivender has said, "With her interweaving of personal and traditional stories, Milbre has created a whole new genre of storytelling." Having featured her at the Family Business Seminar of Kennesaw State College, Dr. Joseph Astrachan wrote to Burch: "You evoked serious contemplation and gracefully lightened the atmosphere with humor. All in all it was an experience to be cherished." And Vicky Reed at the University of San Diego said of the piece: "Milbre Burch takes us on an incredible journey over her family landscape."

Premiering at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena in the spring of 1991, the show has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival; the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival in Orem, Utah; the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival; Kennesaw College Family Business Seminar; the University of San Diego; the 14th Street Playhouse in Atlanta; the Walden School and the By Word of Mouth storytelling series in Pasadena; the Circle of Women's Retreat for the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan; the Washington (DC) Storyteller's Theatre, and Stories, Inc., of Indianapolis.

Bob Sander, Director of Stories, Inc., had this to say of the show: "The audience went willingly with Milbre into all the specific nooks and crannies of her own personal stories, for, in truth, by delving into her stories, listeners unleashed stories of their own from memory. Milbre's talent, from her commanding stage presence, articulate language and expressive movement, is truly astonishing."

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Besides a framework of personal stories, **In the Family Way** includes the following pieces adapted from folk tradition and literature:

ACT ONE:

"**A Mismatch**" adapted from *Let's Fight and Other Russian Fables* by Sergei Mikhalkov.

"**The Grandfather and his Grandson**" (traditional)

"**Twins**" (traditional)

"**One, My Darling, Come to Mama**" adapted from *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales*, collected by Diane Wolkstein.

"**Atalanta**" adapted from the story by Betty Miles in *Free to Be...You and Me*, edited by Marlo Thomas and Friends.

ACT TWO:

"**It's in Your Hands**" (traditional)

"**Mother of the Waters**" adapted from *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales*, collected by Diane Wolkstein.

"**The Cow-tail Switch**" adapted from the book by Harold Courlander and George Herzog.

"**In Blackwater Woods**" adapted from *American Primitive* by Mary Oliver.

**Running time is 90-120 minutes. There is one 10-minute intermission.**

Milbre Burch's live recording of **In the Family Way** features the selections above.

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# MILBRE BURCH:

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In *The World is the Storyteller's Village*

a family-oriented spoken word concert of tales from all over the world



Photo by Scott Robinson

Against a backdrop of colored banners and woven cotton tapestry, Milbre Burch creates a universe in which a scar-faced girl finds healing, a smart but silent parrot finds his voice, and a simple man finds all the brains he needs. **The World is the Storyteller's Village** has been called "a flavorful feast of stories told by a master storyteller."

Burch says of the show: "This is my golden oldies concert because the tales are all folktales. When we listen to the wisdom of stories that bridge cultures, continents and epochs, we begin to realize that 'once upon a time' is now."

Premiering in Pasadena in the summer of 1994, the show earned this review from Jerry Willis, then Public Events Manager at the California Institute of Technology: "Milbre, as always, demonstrated her consummate abilities as a storyteller. The content of the show is eclectic and wide-ranging. Production values were excellent and the audience reaction was most positive. I recommend and commend the show to you."

When it was presented in the Mark Taper Auditorium of the Los Angeles Public Library, Louise Steinman, Director of Cultural Programs, wrote: "The folktales Milbre selected and the gesturally vibrant way she chose to tell them, spoke to the heart of the culturally diverse audience. She is that rare performer who is equally successful performing for both children and grown up audiences. Her material, both original and traditional, is first-rate. Her performances are graceful and witty."

The show was part of the Appalachian State University's Summer Festival in Boone, North Carolina, in July, 2001. Sponsor Sali Gill-Johnson called it "Wonderful."

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The material in **The World is the Storyteller's Village** is selected from the following sources:

"**The Smart Parrot**" adapted from *King of the Mountains and Other Latin American Folktales* by Maurice Jagendorf and R. S. Boggs.

"**Morgan and the Pot O' Brains**" adapted from *Tales from the Welsh Hills* by Ellen Pugh.

"**Grandmother Spider**" adapted from the original story by Elizabeth Ellis.

**Why Mosquitoes Buzz** adapted from the picture book by Verna Aardema.

"**The Mirror**" adapted from "The Nun as Judge" in *Folktales of Japan* edited by Keigo Seki, translated by Robert J. Adams.

"**The Purchased Miracle**" adapted from *The Enchanted Orchard and Other Central American Folk Stories* by Dorothy Sharp Carter.

"**The First Strawberries**" adapted from *John Rattling-Gourd of Big Cove* by Corydon Bell.

"**Sweet Misery**" adapted from *The Piece of Fire and Other Haitian Tales* by Harold Courlander.

**Borreguita and Coyote** adapted from the picture book by Verna Aardema.

"**Strength**" adapted from *Peace Tales* by Margaret Read MacDonald.

"**Pine Trees for Sale**" adapted from "The Wife's Portrait" in *Folktales of Japan*, edited by Keigo Seki, translated by Robert J. Adams.

"**Little Burnt Face**" adapted by Milbre Burch in *Ready-To-Tell Tales* edited by David Holt and Bill Mooney.

"**Bye Bye**" adapted from *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales* collected by Diane Wolkstein.

**Running time is 90 minutes. There is one 10-minute intermission.**

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Milbre Burch's live recording of **The World is the Storyteller's Village** features the selections above.

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# MILBRE BURCH:

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In *The Mary Stories*

Four stories from the life of a woman known the world over  
as the mother of a Messiah

Originally commissioned for the annual women's retreat of a Congregational Church in the Bay area, **The Mary Stories** is a quartet of pieces written and performed by Milbre Burch. "They asked me to contemplate three defining moments in the life of Jesus' mother," says Burch, "the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Finding in the Temple. Once those pieces had been written, I realized there was a fourth story I had left to tell: that of a mother who outlives her son. So I wrote about the Crucifixion from her point of view. In these four pieces Mary is very human, despite her extraordinary circumstances. It's that word portrait I wanted to paint, that story I wanted to tell."

Since their debut in 1990, the stories have been featured at the National Storytelling Festival; the Sierra Storytelling Festival; and an interdenominational mix of churches from coast to coast.

*The Yarnspinner*, a publication of the National Storytelling Network, described the work as "an old parchment come to life...Milbre's thorough research shows and so does her skill of writing and performing. It's a brilliant collection." And Yellow Moon Press in Somerville, Massachusetts, called it: "Unusual, refreshing and beautifully done...the stories have a simple and everyday quality...an incredible mix of the ordinary and the extraordinary."



Photo by Scott Robinson

The night after Burch's performance of **The Mary Stories** at the 1999 National Storytelling Festival, award-winning teller and emcee Susan Klein wrote to her: "...when I asked my host at a dinner party how he enjoyed your Mary stories, he filled up with tears and couldn't speak. When he regained his composure, he asked me how you did it, with so little historical reference to go on, how did you get inside of characters like this? I could only tell him what I knew. 'Because she's the best,' I said."

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The material in **The Mary Stories** includes:

"**Waiting for the Wonder**" written by Milbre Burch.

"**The Visitation**" written by Milbre Burch.

"**Treasures in Her Heart**" written by Milbre Burch.

"**Coming Back from the Calvary**" written by Milbre Burch.

**Running time is 70 minutes. Performed with or without an intermission.**

Milbre Burch's recording of **The Mary Stories** features the selections above.

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