

ENCINO SUN

FIERCELY LOCAL

VOL. 1 NO. 18

WWW.ENCINOSUN.COM

OCTOBER 21-27, 2006



SUNDIAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

HALLOWEEN



Halloween Events at Pierce College

Visit a five-acre corn maze plus other attractions. Pierce College, 6498 De Soto Ave. (corner of De Soto and Victory) in Woodland Hills. (818) 999-6300. Through Oct. 31. www.halloweenharvestfestival.com

Spooktacular at Lanai Road Elementary
Spirited fun for the whole family. Oct. 22, 11am-4pm. Admission is free. 4241 Lanai Road. www.lanairoad.org

Halloween Carnival Encino Community Center

Free admission for an evening of games, food, prizes, costume parade and more. Trick-or-treat in a safe environment while parents enjoy the silent auction. Game tickets for 25 cents. Donate any canned good item and receive 1 game ticket per can donated - max 5. Oct. 31, 4-8pm. Agnes 1-10. Encino Community Center, 4935 Balboa Ave. (818) 995-1690.

Halloween Carnival Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Park

Haunted house, carnival games, trick-or-treat village, costume contest, jump-house, food, drink, prizes. Nominal fee for most attractions. Oct. 31, 5-9pm. Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Recreation Center, 14201 Huston St. Rob De Hart (818) 783-5121

Haunted Travel Town

Playful Spooks invade the mini-trains (1/8 scale) at Griffith Park. Evening rides feature 30 displays around the track. Oct. 21-22, 28-31, 7-9:30pm. 5202 Zoo Drive, Griffith Park. Donation \$2 / kids \$1. Info: http://www.lals.org or 323-662-8030.

Grimstone Cemetery

A less-scary place that "shows you the spookiness that Halloween has to offer." Good for all ages. 2006 will be the last year. Oct. 29 - 31, sundown (6:30) to 11pm. Free. 6706 Blewett Ave., Van Nuys. Info: http://www.grimstonecemetery.com.

In the Shadow of the Raven

Actor Duffy Hudson portrays Edgar Allan Poe in this one-man show on Halloween night about the enigmatic life and death of the suspense-horror writer and poet. Oct. 31, 8pm. Whitefire Theatre 13500 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks. (818) 990-2324

Boo-tiful Downtown Burbank

Opportunity to trick-or-treat before it gets too dark or too late in the evening. Children and families who visit Downtown Burbank's shops and restaurants will enjoy Halloween with treats from participating merchants. Oct. 31, 4-7pm. Downtown Burbank. Info: http://www.downtown-burbank.org/events.htm

COMMUNITY

Encino Community Center Classes

Fall classes now in session. 4935 Balboa Blvd. For more information: Lee Marks (818) 995-1690. www.laparks.org/valley/encino.htm

Encino Neighborhood Council

Meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Encino Community Center, 7pm. Next meeting, Oct. 25. 4935 Balboa Blvd. (818) 255-1040. www.encinocouncil.org

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Life story writer binds memories in cherished pages

Chronicling the extraordinary lives of ordinary people

BY RACHEL HELLER

Having sifted through harsh memories of the Holocaust, of Depression-era Chicago and the Japanese internment camps of World War II-torn Manila, Loren Stephens has shaped a steadfast personal philosophy.

"You can tell a story as if you're a victim," she says, "or you can tell a story."

The memories aren't her own. They belong instead to a colorful list of L.A. denizens who have entrusted Stephens to tell their life stories, a pursuit the Brentwood based writer believes will preserve voices and legacies far too precious to let die with their bearers.

To many, memoirs are only warranted by celebrity; biographies belong to the realm of the famous, like Bill Clinton or Elizabeth Taylor. That's why Stephens founded Write Wisdom, Inc. on the principle that "everyone has wisdom to impart" - some might just need a little guidance along the way.

"Lots of people need their stories told, but they don't have the discipline or the know-how to sit down and do it. Many people need a guide to ask the right questions," she noted one recent afternoon. "Everyone has a fascinating story. It's just a question of unearthing it."



Loren Stephens at home.

Stephens' four to five-month process begins with a series of interviews that she later transcribes, crafting a tale from her subjects' memories told in their own voice. For a few thousand dollars, she can turn the written manuscript into a hardcover book of 150 to 200 pages, complete with printed photos of loved ones and significant events.

Now in the finishing stages of her fifth book, Stephens is used to the positive reactions of past clients like Hedi Azus.

"It was an enjoyable experience. She managed to get stories from me that I'd stuck away in the little corners of my mind," said Hedi, a Los Angeles resident who asked Stephens to write her story, *The Music of My Life*, after she finished that of her husband, Al Azus. "She brought it all out."

From the ocean liner that brought the Gelsdorf, Germany native to New York at age five, to a career in modeling and a long-distance romance with her Army officer husband during World War II, Stephens' rendering of Hedi's memoir captures the intimate details that comprise her life.

Working at the Gibraltar Savings Bank in Los Angeles after the death of her first husband, Hedi caught the eye of a self-made businessman raised in Chicago by a Turkish immigrant family during the height of the Depression. Al's "rags to riches" success in the envelope business - told with grit and heart in Stephens' *Life is a game: Bet on Yourself* - has given the Azus family status as honored donors at children's charities and local institutions, including the Jewish Home for the Aging in Reseda.

"We've been married for 30 years. continued on page 8

Propositions debated, superintendent Brewer unveiled at VANC meeting

BY ANA KACZMAREK

The October 12 meeting of the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC) featured an LAUSD update by school board member Jon Lauritzen and discussions on Propositions R and H.

Held at Sherman Oaks Hospital, the meeting's attendees learned the name of the new LAUSD superintendent, Admiral David Brewer III, before the Board of Education announced it to the press the following day.

"The one shortcoming that he offers is that he's not specifically an education person, but that's also his biggest asset at this point because he'll

be able to step into the district with a clean slate," Lauritzen said of the board's unanimous approval of Brewer. Lauritzen said the Board notified the Mayor of their decision first.

"It's been a rather arduous task for the board," noted Lauritzen of the selection process. "We took a lot of hits for the secrecy that was involved. I think if we were to do that again we might probably change our decision on that."

Lauritzen said candidates were kept anonymous to avoid jeopardizing their current job positions. He lamented that the most recent applicants'

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Tree Planting Workshop ♦ L'Artiste Patisserie ♦ Filmmaker Jeff Roth

LIFE STORIES from page 1

He's my second husband; I'm his third wife," Hedi noted. "We have a few stories between us."

Whether through words, film or the stage, telling stories has always been Stephens' specialty.

Before delving into her current venture, the award-winning filmmaker produced several documentaries and almost 30 plays through her Studio City based production company, One Step Productions.

Among her theater credits was *The Normal Heart*, an account of the AIDS epidemic starring Richard Dreyfuss and Kathy Bates. She also produced *To Gillian* on her 37th Birthday, which David E. Kelley adapted for the screen in 1996, and a one-woman show depicting the life of Hungarian poet and diarist Hannah Senesh as she volunteered for a European rescue mission during the Holocaust.

Segueing into film with partner Judy Chaikin, Stephens explored the impact of the Hollywood blacklist on members of the entertainment industry in the 1940s and 50s with *Legacy of the Hollywood Blacklist*, picked up by PBS in 1987 and nominated for an Emmy. The pair went on to produce other films including *Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?*, highlighting the struggles of the famous abolitionist and suffragette.

Despite her success documenting others' lives for entertainment, Stephens five years ago became inter-

ested in a more personal narrative – that of her mother.

Carol Rubin Meyer was born into a prestigious New York family in 1915. She graduated from Smith College, studied opera, taught French and started a family in Harrison, New York, where Stephens grew up.

After losing her husband, Meyer built a new life for herself, "which, for many women," Stephens said, "was a daunting idea." She went back to school, became an expert and collector of Pre-Columbian art, traveled the world, and at age 84, was inducted into the New York chapter of the Society of Women Geographers (founded in the 1920s by Amelia Earhart).

"I didn't see it as a business when I wrote her book," Stephens recalled of her first project, *I Turned a Key and the Birds Began to Sing*.

"For me, it was just an opportunity to capture a very extraordinary life. After having written the book, and seeing first the joy that she got out of having done this, but also the pleasure that I got out of writing it for her [...] I thought there might be other people who would be interested in having their stories told."

She was right, and has since honed her process through the challenges each new subject presents.

Stephens helped her latest client, a Holocaust survivor, recount his life in a ghetto, the horrors he endured in Nazi camps, and his U.S. immigration after his family's death.

"I was a little afraid," she admitted, probing his tragic past. "I was sure how emotional [the stories] would be. But he was so intent on getting the story told; even though he felt such tremendous emotion, the task at hand was very important to him."

For one American POW in the Philippines during WWII, the notion was so important that he charged his eldest daughter with the task before passing away.

William Charles Clark, held for three years in a Japanese internment camp in Manila, told his daughter Thelma

to write his story down just before he died of an intestinal disease he incurred while imprisoned. More than 60 years later – and halfway around the world, in Orange County – 75-year-old Thelma Santiago fulfilled his wish with Stephens' help.

Some clients become emotional while telling their stories, the writer said, but "it's not a Barbara Walters weep-fest. I'm not there to create melodrama. And I'm not there to be a psychiatrist. I'm there to help them tell their story in a way that they can be proud of."

Hedi Azus' pride was apparent as she described how she cherishes her book as a way to relive favorite memories.

"Everyone should do this," she said. "Some days are rainy, not as good as others, and you pick the book up and realize, 'I did have good times.'" *

To learn about Loren Stephens' life story writing, visit www.writewisdom.com.



Loren Stephens (center back) and Jane Wyatt (center front) on the set of *Legacy of the Hollywood Blacklist*, 1987.

"When you're gone, everything about you and all those great stories are gone with you. He wanted his family to know where he came from, what he lived through and what his values are. Being able to transfer those values to one's children and grandchildren is extremely important."