

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD BY CHUCK SHEPARD

■ A 43-year-old motorcyclist was killed on Interstate 35 near Osceola, Iowa, when he tried to stand on his bike with his arms folded (and smashed into a guardrail) (October). A 19-year-old driver, performing for two pals who were videotaping, was killed in West Rutland, Vt., when he attempted a "Jackass"-like stunt by leaping from the car at about 30 mph (September). A 39-year-old bicyclist was killed when he raced, unsuccessfully, to beat an oncoming train through a railroad crossing in Oakland Park, Fla., and was knocked more than 100 feet (November).

■ The Democratic Process: Randy Logan Hale won election to the school board in Homeland, Calif., in November, despite having been incarcerated since September for a parole violation. (He gets out in February.) And James Skwarok campaigned for mayor in Victoria, British Columbia, as a one-issue candidate opposed to pumping raw sewage into open waters, appearing always in costume as a chunk of that sewage, named "Mr. Floatie." (Skwarok dropped out of the race in October.)

■ A new land speed record for a blind driver was set in September (Mr. Hein Wagner, 33, reached 160 mph in a Maserati V8 GranSport on an airstrip in Mafikeng, South Africa, with help of a navigator).

■ Harvard's libraries contain at least four books bound in human skin, including a treatise on Spanish law with an inscription calling the binding "all that remains" of a fellow named Jonas Wright (according to research by student Dan Alban, writing in the Harvard Law Record in November).

QUOTE OF THE DAY
"We need a president who's fluent in at least one language."
BUCK HENRY

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Alleged misconduct at Woodlawn

BY RYAN HYATT
Daily Press Staff Writer

Burning the candle on both ends of the earth



Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

Buddhist monks from the Los Angeles area, Bhante Chao Chu (right) and Ahangama Dharmara throw a flower into the ocean during the Sri Lanka foundation's candlelight vigil that was held at the end of the Santa Monica Pier on Monday. The event was held in remembrance of the lives lost in the tsunami a year ago Monday.

Dukakis featured at lecture

By Daily Press staff

Michael Dukakis, former Governor of Massachusetts, will come to a Santa Monica church next month to tackle the topic of healthcare reform.

Dukakis, the 1988 Democratic nominee for U.S. President, will be the honored speaker at the 15th annual Ernest D. Pipes lecture series at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Santa Monica.

The title of Dukakis' talk is "The Health Care Crisis: 45 Million Uninsured and Counting." The talk will be followed by a question and answer session and reception. The lecture begins at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 28 and admission is free.

In his academic career since losing the 1988 presidential election to George H.W. Bush, Dukakis has become an expert on health care issues. He is currently a visiting professor at the UCLA department of public policy.

Gov. Dukakis was born in



MICHAEL DUKAKIS

Brookline, Mass., where he began his career in local politics after graduating from Harvard Law School. His parents emigrated from Greece. Now 72 years old, he has eschewed a traditional retirement in order to inspire college students to work in government, and promote democratic values and competency in public policy.

Ernest D. Pipes was the minister of the Unitarian Church in Santa Monica for 35 years, retiring in 1992. The public is invited to the lecture. The Unitarian Universalist Church is located at 1260 18th St.

For more information call (310) 215-7743.

INTERNATIONAL

Wave of the future: Tsunami victims rebuild, mourn

BY CHRIS BRUMMITT
Associated Press Writer

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — Mourners returned to battered shorelines Monday to mark one year since the Indian Ocean tsunami crashed ashore in a dozen countries, laying waste to coastal communities and sweeping away at least 216,000 lives.

Under a clear sky and before a gentle sea, survivors, friends and relatives of those who died and world leaders commemorated those lost in one of the worst natural disasters the modern world has experienced.

In Indonesia's Aceh province, which was closest to the earthquake that spawned the waves and bore the brunt of the disaster, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono led hun-

See TSUNAMI, page 11

CITY HALL — Attorneys made opening statements this month in a personnel hearing over the firing of Michael Steen, who is accused of ethical and financial misconduct when he was the director of Santa Monica's publicly-owned Woodlawn cemetery.

Steen appealed City Hall's September decision to terminate him after a nearly year-long investigation concluded there was no criminal wrongdoing in financial discrepancies discovered at the cemetery. However, high ranking officials at City Hall say Steen's behavior warranted his termination, particularly since he promoted his domestic partner's monument-making business at the cemetery to Santa Monicans seeking burial service.

"This is about an employee who violated the trust of the public, that at the time of their greatest need, dealing with those who passed away, (Steen) took advantage of them," said Deputy City Attorney Carol Kurtz during a personnel board hearing held on Dec. 8. "The findings will show financial mismanagement and an operation at the cemetery that was out of control."

"When (Steen) was confronted with the significant evidence of financial mismanagement, he passed the buck."

When Steen appealed his termination, the matter was set to go before a five-person personnel board, of which its members are appointed and neither hold public office or are city employees. The board serves as an advisory to the City Council and City Hall's human resources director. It is a quasi-judicial review body for employee appeals of disciplinary actions. The Dec. 8 hearing had four board members present. The hearing is expected to continue in January.

According to Kurtz, Steen himself has attested to receiving a \$1,000 monthly kickback from his partner for promoting the business, called Woodlawn Monument.

Not so, said Steen's attorney, Bill Bleecker, who indicated Steen

See WOODLAWN, page 6



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Santa Monica Daily Press

JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS The stars show the kind of day you'll Have:

★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★★★-Average ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★ Realize when you are in a no-win situation, which easily could be today. You need to back off and not get triggered. You are more fed up and tired than you realize, especially with a key person in your life. Tonight: Vanish while you can.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★ No matter what you do, you seem to hit a brick wall. Either stop, hop over the wall or go around it. You could see red otherwise and take out your frustration on someone you care about. Tonight: Cocoon.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★ Sometimes you don't realize how negative you can be (like today). Immerse yourself in a project or favorite hobby. You will be a lot happier and work through your mood. Holding in anger or hurt might be the source of this mood. Tonight: Choose a stress-buster.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★★ You have many ideas, but you don't have a receptive audience. Let go of needing others, and do what you enjoy. A child will be only too happy to join you in some fun and play. Are you up for it? Tonight: Still enjoying yourself.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★ Try not to spoil someone's good mood. You might feel pressured by a responsibility that really feels like a burden. You cannot change this situation, but you can adopt a new attitude — try this suggestion. Tonight: Get some extra sleep.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★ You actually could be too cheerful for someone who feels a bit down. Are you forcing yourself to be cheery? You might want to think about that sooner or later. Today you are busy making calls and running around. Tonight: Think "winter getaway."

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★ A friend could be overly serious and difficult. An associate might not be as giving as you would like. Do something you have wanted to do for a while. Be careful with runaway spending, OK? Tonight: Gather your bills.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★ You might be A-OK, but those around you might be off-center. Express a willingness to pitch in and help. Someone key to your life is difficult. You are not imagining it. Understand, but don't trigger. Tonight: As you wish.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★ Back off as soon as you hit an obstacle. In fact, you might find that keeping your own company is easiest. Though you are a gregarious sign, you gain through centering and some downtime. Life will get hectic soon enough. Tonight: Mystery becomes you. Not to be found.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★ Where the crowds are is where the Goat needs to be found. You will be much happier if you allow yourself to relax and hang out. Yes, you have many demands and responsibilities. Take a few days off from them. Tonight: Just don't be alone.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★ Others seek you out. Make it your pleasure to pitch in. Realize that you could be neglecting a family member who is on the warpath. Touch base with him or her. This person still might be out of sorts. Tonight: Don't feel like you need to race home.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★ Your strength will come from taking an overview and not getting plugged into a problem. Do be careful, as your head might be in the clouds, making you an accident-prone Fish. Recognize when you are tired. Tonight: Early to bed.

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Astronomical lecture series comes to SMC

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monica College's Friday night astronomy lecture series is back. "Falling Between the Cracks" — a look at new objects in the universe that do not fit into current astronomical categories — will be the feature show Jan. 6, 13, 20 and Feb. 3 and 17.

The guest lecture will be, "Asteroids: Why Dinosaurs Wished They Were Better at Math." Jon Giorgini of the jet propulsion lab's solar system dynamics, will talk about the history of asteroid orbits and methods of predicting asteroid hazards. The guest lecture will be Friday, Jan. 27.

The feature show and guest lecture are at 8 p.m. Each is preceded by, "The Night Sky Show," which re-creates the night sky and provides the latest information on space exploration, at 7 p.m.

The astronomy shows are held in the John Drescher Planetarium, which features the state-of-the-art Digistar projection system. It is located on the second floor of Drescher Hall, 1900 Pico Blvd. The guest lecture is in science lecture hall 140.

Tickets are \$5 each or \$9 for the "double bill," with discounts for children and senior citizens. For information, call (310) 434-3000.



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SNOW AND SURF REPORTS

CONDITIONS

DATA PROVIDED BY ONTHESNOW.COM

BEAR MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:00am - 4:00pm	8	7/12

CONDITIONS: Machine Groomed, Hard Packed, Thin Cover

JUNE MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	24" - 36"	8:30am - 4:00pm	35	6/16

CONDITIONS: Powder, Packed Powder, Machine Groomed, Obstacles

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
12"	72" - 96"	8:30 am - 4 pm	150	12/26

CONDITIONS: Powder, Packed Powder, Machine Groomed

MOUNTAIN HIGH

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	8" - 12"	8:00 am - 10:00 pm	10	8/16

CONDITIONS: Granular, Wet, Thin Cover

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SNOW SUMMIT

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:00 am - 9:30 pm	8	8/13

CONDITIONS: Machine Groomed, Hard Packed, Thin Cover

SNOW VALLEY

NEW SNOW (24 Hrs)	BASE DEPTH	LIFT HOURS	RUNS OPEN	LIFTS OPEN
0"	12"-12"	8:00 am - 4:00 pm	5	5/11

CONDITIONS: Machine Made, Machine Groomed

CONDITIONS

WATER TEMP: 59°

DATA PROVIDED BY WETSAND.COM

SWELL FORECAST (8-16 FT)

Today we should see continued WNW swell from 275-285 with some of the shorter, lagging periods finally arriving. Size should even out a bit more along disparate west facing breaks with the better set waves running 2-3 feet overhead along most all west facing breaks; however, may sets may only reach head high.

LONG RANGE SYNOPSIS

NW swell peaks in SoCal Monday...

Significant NW swell due mid week...

NW swell on radar for the 2nd...

TIDE FORECAST FOR SANTA MONICA

SATURDAY	11:03PM	2:0FT	9:38PM	1.7FT
LOW TIDE:	4:15AM	4.4FT	4:06PM	3.0FT
SUNDAY	11:56PM	1.3FT	10:23PM	2.0FT
LOW TIDE:	4:45AM	4.8FT	5:38PM	3.0FT
MONDAY	12:39PM	0.5FT	11:08PM	2.2FT
LOW TIDE:	5:17AM	5.2FT	6:48PM	3.1FT
TUESDAY	1:17PM	-0.1FT	11:53PM	2.3FT
LOW TIDE:	5:50AM	5.7FT	7:42PM	3.3FT
WEDNESDAY	12:56PM	-0.7FT	N/A	N/A
LOW TIDE:	6:27AM	6.1FT	8:28PM	3.5FT
THURSDAY	12:38AM	2.3FT	2:36PM	-1.2FT
LOW TIDE:	7:07AM	6.5FT	9:11PM	3.6FT
FRIDAY	1:02AM	1.7FT	3:04PM	-0.9FT
LOW TIDE:	7:39AM	5.9FT	9:40PM	3.1FT

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The Q Line

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There's a lot of issues facing Santa Monica and 2006 is shaping up to be a big year of changes. New leadership in the City Manager's office, a new homeless czar and a new president at SMC will all happen in January, as well as a major revamp on a city-wide plan that will shape development for the next 20 years here.

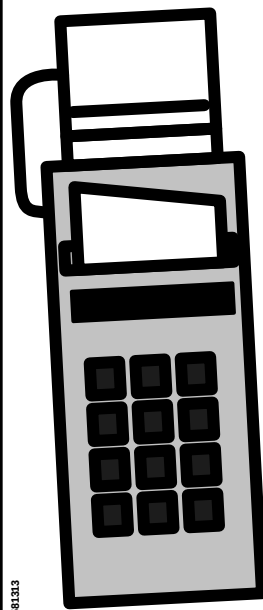
So this week Q-Line asks "What should the City Council's resolutions be for 2006?"

Call (310) 285-8106 before Friday at 5 p.m. and we'll print your responses in the weekend edition. Please try to limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Renters' rights is a place for church

Editor:

I'm truly saddened and angered by Dennis Zane and the renters rights group's shameless intrusion on the religious experience of La Posada in a brazen effort to promote their self-serving political interests and agenda (SMDP, Dec. 20, page 1).

There already are plenty of long-standing and well-known safeguards available to protect all Santa Monica tenants. You have a city attorney with a strong anti-harassment ordinance that has been revised three times in the past six years. You have a rent control department with an annual budget of \$4 million and a staff of 50 full-time employees, which each year sends out numerous pieces of correspondence and newsletters to all Santa Monica tenants — in both English and Spanish — informing tenants of all of their rights and who they may contact if they have a complaint. You have a free local legal aid society, which gets many of its referrals from the rent control department, that provides free legal assistance to any Santa Monica tenant. You have the Los Angeles County Health Department, which regularly inspects all Santa Monica apartment properties whether or not a complaint has been made. You have the city code compliance department that investigates all complaints. And finally, you have the renters rights group that spends more than \$200,000 on each and every election.

Zane and his renters rights group need to keep their grubby, power grabbing hands out of the church.

David E. Gonzales
 Santa Monica

SM is no Utah, thank God



WHAT'S THE POINT?

BY DAVID PISARRA

This year we again went to Utah to do the family Christmas thing. It is always a strong reminder of what the middle of America is like, and how very different our life in this hamlet of happiness called Santa Monica truly is. We live in a rich society and we shouldn't forget it.

My partner and I make the road trip to Utah each year by car. We do so for several reasons — the time spent together is a great opportunity for us to be alone and talk about all the things that we don't normally have time for in our hectic, crazy days. We bring along our little dog who creates great joy and spontaneity and he forces us to make stops along the way.

The drive also lets us see the country up close and personal. Each year we see the growth of the mega marts and their infiltration on society. As the miles pass, the deaths of the small companies and "mom and pop" shops become more striking.

Each year the truck stops become more and more alike — they all have the same corporate fast food eateries, the same tacky cassette tapes for sale, and a boarded up diner that used to be named something like "Dinah's" or "Mom's" but now is just a shell.

Once we enter Utah, there are four Wal-Mart Supercenters in the distance of 200 miles, and near each one is a Kohl's, Home Depot, Costco and a Super-K. Fully one-third of the cars on the road are Tahoes, Suburbans, F250s and Expeditions. There are kids with kids everywhere. It is commonplace for 19-year-olds to have a family of two or three and all that goes along with it.

This is the land of consumption. We are a nation of buyers and users, controlled by the media that tells us what to buy, where to buy it and how to save a bundle doing it. Our country is fast becoming the Brave New World, 1984, Brazil world of doublespeak, mixed messages, and abdication of our personal responsibility to the need for "more."

As the president continues his "war on terror" by spying on people, even if they are not Americans, and claims to give us security at the price of our privacy, I look around and see that we are becoming a nation of zombies who are kept numb and dumb. We are fat, and distracted with our latest and greatest new plastic toy, fresh from the factory in China.

I was in a line with my sister-in-law in a Toys-R-Us and all the parents were surrounding us with their shopping carts full of Barbies and Legos. As societal outcasts in this land of conformity and consumption, we stood out as an odd couple. I'm a gay man, and she a multi-racial African American looking woman. We were surrounded by people who think there is only one right way to live your life, and we don't fit that picture.

We were the odd ones, not only in our

make up, but also in that we were laughing and joking. I saw none of that in the people around us. We were the happiest people I saw. There were no smiles, no sense of joy in the giving. Just obligation in the buying.

I see it everywhere. In the grocery stores there are stacks and stacks of everything. In this land of plenty we are inundated with advertising, marketing, opportunity for eating, learning, creating. And what have we done with it?

We have become a fat and disconnected country of discontent. We have more than any other country has ever had in the history of man, and we have created obesity, malaise, ignorance and apathy.

There is a striking difference between our country at this time, and other countries in their times of plenty. China 1,000 years ago had plenty, and they created art, jewelry, sculptures, architectural masterpieces, poetry and fiction.

India, too, had plenty, and they created poetry, art, architecture, philosophy and song.

Europe explored the world, and brought government systems, distribution channels, and a form of peace as they conquered other lands.

What have we done? We have explored space, deep sea, technology, medicine and worlds of thought. We have writers who are willing to say what they think, and philanthropists who are striving to do good in a world of disaster. We have created a society that can cure disease, feed itself and others, provide safe living conditions for its members and protect itself.

Like other countries before us, we step forward on the backs of the masses. Others did it with slavery, and serfdom, we do ours with the creation of the underclass. Luckily our underclass has it better than any other underclass.

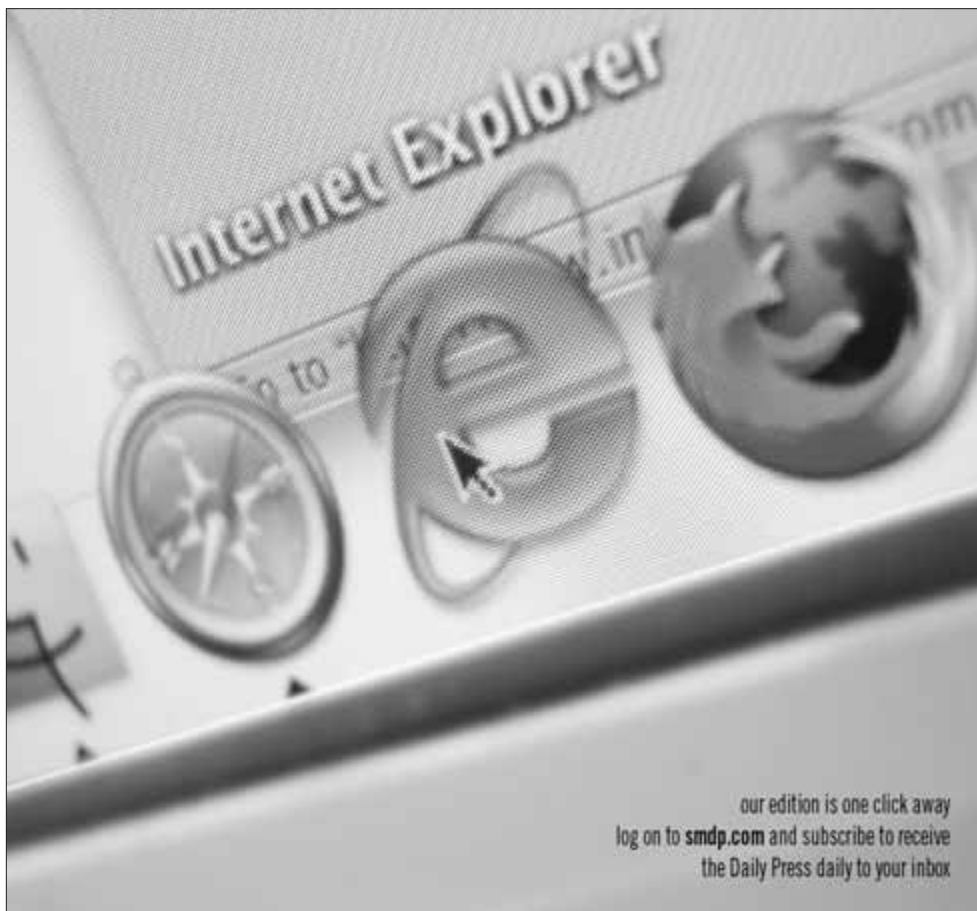
As in a good family, we will stand together against the world, yet still fight amongst ourselves over the basics of what each person should have in this country. What rights we will grant and to whom.

It becomes clearer to me each year, when I leave our bastion of bourgeois life, to the core of what keeps this country going, how very lucky I am to be here. How lucky we all are. We live in a city that provides for us, that allows us to grow and explore, and doesn't dictate to us how should live our life.

In this country of plenty, we have material possessions and food beyond our needs. We have a large portion of the country that is apathetic, drugged with their fast food and latest novelty, spending their days in their SUVs scared of the outside world.

It is a stark reminder of how feeding the body is the easy part. It is the feeding of the soul that we need. For us, in this happy little burg, we have writers, artists, thinkers, anarchists, activists and rebels. We have a very rich society in our little burg. And we should not forget that, even as we fight amongst ourselves.

(David Pizarra is a business development lawyer in the Santa Monica firm of Pizarra & Grist. He can be reached at dpizarra@pizarra.com or (310) 664-9969.)



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Mission impossible: Christmas traveling



ANY DAY IN LA

BY HEIDI MANTEUFFEL

I don't think I'd be a very good CIA operative, 'cause I'm pretty obvious about the fact that holiday traveling gets on my nerves. I'm not really stressed about the actual take-off as much as the people and events that surround the day-long extravaganza.

My mission starts waiting to see if the van service will come on time for once on the busiest day of the year. My 30-, 60- and 90-minute call marks after requested pick-up get increasingly more agitated. An initial worried check in turns into an unnecessary Emmy award nomination for best dramatic performance while waiting for a red van.

After arriving two hours late, they often will have the nerve to ask me if I want to get Starbucks coffee on the way to LAX.

Needless to say I don't use that service anymore, and yes, I take cream and sugar in my coffee.

The next task entails some good loathing as I wait in the 40-minute holiday check-in line. On my way to Chicago this Christmas, some elderly woman ranted that she had to go to Hawaii two hours earlier than her ticket says.

The employee just kept apologizing to me as Miss Hawaii left waving, pushing people out of her way with her pokey, rolling luggage.

At least at Disney World you get to go on a teacup or train ride after hours of filing through the line. All I got after waiting for my ticket was a glare from a Cranky Cathy and her little bag too.

I'd completely fail the assignment to remain nonplused while standing in the

never ending sea of humanity at baggage check. Two years ago, I got picked every other flight for a 45-minute bag search. Sponge Bob socks and Care Bear breath mints are often confused with jihad-esque behavior.

You think the stuffed animal Snoopy might tip them off they're zipping up the wrong Samsonite.

But where I really fail the mission is when I'm asked to play the How-Will-I-be-Annoyed-on-This-Trip airplane game. At least with Monopoly you build hotels and get sent to jail. Jail has solitary confinement.

This particular game was played by a food-obsessed perky pants behind me that couldn't stop talking about how much she loooves butternut squash. You'd think the insanely loud plane noise could hamper her vegetable recipe tirade just a bit, but no. The whole row, heck the whole world, must know what great soups you can make with eggplant and pureed baby carrots.

I think it's great that this same woman tried to aggressively cut me off with her bags after exiting the plane. As if she couldn't be away from her kumquats for one more minute.

I would fall flat on my face for operative Find The Christmas Luggage. I dread wondering if they will lose my luggage, again, like last Christmas, and will be forced to wear mom's 5 foot 4 inch clothes on my 5 foot 9 inch frame. No need for capris in 16-degree Chicago winter.

So the votes are in, mostly from me, and it's unanimous. A CIA vocation is definitely not in my future. I would not fair well on Mission Impossible Christmas Travel with my un-stealthy dislike for holiday traveling and the many vegetable nemeses I meet along the way.

(Heidi can be reached at anydayin-la@gmail.com.)



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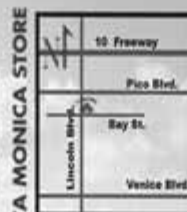
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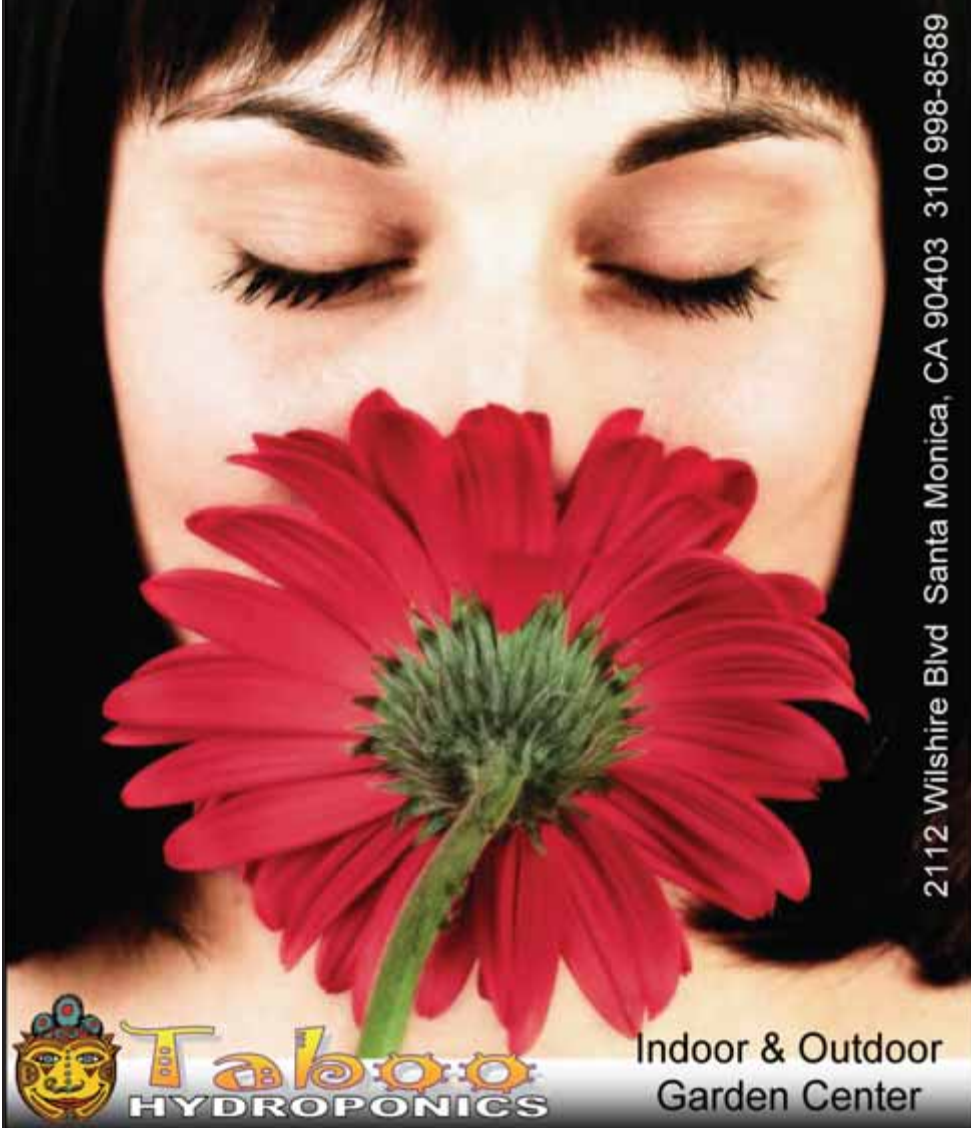
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LOCAL

Cemetery director said he was wrongly fired

WOODLAWN, from page 1

received excellent evaluations during his 15-year tenure at the cemetery and labored under a management system that lacked appropriate checks and balances in the financial accounting of the operation.

"His evaluations show he was an outstanding employee and his strength is the way he interacts with the citizens of Santa Monica," Bleecker said. "We all have specialties in what we do. Mr. Steen was not an accountant, but in 2004, he complied with overall expectations."

Bleecker also said Steen didn't receive money through any unethical business schemes.

"There was nothing hidden about the fact Steen (promoted his partner's business)," Bleecker said. "He had been doing it for years."

"There was one citizen complaint, and it was subsequently addressed."

Steen and his assistant were removed from their posts on Dec. 17, 2004 after an audit released in July of that year appeared to confirm that Steen and his co-worker failed to follow accounting guidelines — initially suspected by city finance officials after a first audit was conducted in 2001.

From December of 2004 until September of 2005, Steen and his assistant were put on paid administrative leave. Steen was then let go and his former assistant was transferred to another city department.

City Hall officials concluded there was not sufficient grounds to press criminal charges against Steen. However, officials believed there were grounds for his termination.

Kurtz explained that Steen began his tenure as Woodlawn's top administrator in 1989. During the 1990s, occasional audits first showed signs of financial discrepancies at the cemetery. However, it wasn't until a 2001 audit conducted by an outside accounting firm, Moss & Levy, in which a "significant number of issues came up," Kurtz said.

Steen's manager — Gil Borboa — issued a corrective action plan in light of the audit, but Steen didn't accept it, according to records. He also didn't

accept the evaluation of his performance in 2001. Instead, he appealed it.

"While the appeal required that (Steen's boss) make a few changes, the overall evaluation was upheld," Kurtz said. "They said Steen's (approach to the issue) was not what would be expected of a manager, but what would be expected of a low-level field supervisor."

"This is the beginning of Mr. Steen's pattern of pointing the evidence of (his) financial mismanagement," she added.

In 2002, then City Manager Susan McCarthy asked another outside auditing firm, to follow up with the 2001 audit. The new audit, however, wasn't available until 2004, according to testimony. The audit company was only able to locate a draft of its audit, which it presented to City Hall in July of 2004. Six months later, Steen and his former assistant were placed on administrative leave, according to Kurtz, after the evaluation seemed to indicate an investigation was in order.

That investigation wasn't concluded until this past September, at which point Steen was terminated and his assistant was allowed to remain.

Their removal came after a three-pronged investigation that involved the City Attorney's Office, City Hall's human resources division and the Santa Monica Police Department.

Bleecker said the evidence showed more about City Hall's incompetence than it did that of his client.

Bleecker admitted that after years of service, there was a citizen complaint about Steen promoting his partner's business. As a result of that complaint, Steen's partner agreed to remove the words "Woodlawn Monument" from the top of his company's letterhead, which may have inappropriately associated the monument-making business with City Hall.

However, Bleecker said the September 2004 complaint may have coincided too nicely with the allegations of Steen's financial mismanagement.

"The complaint was addressed, but after the complaint, something happened," Bleecker said. "The city became excited and put Steen on leave, but we know it wasn't based on his performance."



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Obit writer takes the words right out of your own life

BY GILLIAN FLACCUS

Associated Press Writer

LAGUNA WOODS, Calif. — Dean Davisson spent his career as a public relations executive creating buzz — but it took retirement for him to start putting a spin on life itself.

Davisson, 84, spends his days crafting free obituaries for dozens of not-yet-dead fellow senior citizens at the 18,000-resident Leisure World in Laguna Woods, a retirement community so large that it's an incorporated city.

Davisson's dabblings in the delicate art of obit writing have become a must-have in a place where an average of one person dies each day.

His slogan: Have the last word first. The more whimsical the story, the better.

"How many times have you sat down with someone and they say, 'What about you? How do you feel about this? What do you like?'" It's the single time in their lives that they have the last word first," Davisson said as prepared to deliver four freshly written obituaries. "It's your story — whatever you tell me is fact."

Davisson is a free spirit who studies parapsychology and wears a crystal around his neck — a gift from his third wife, whom he recently married. He does, however, have his limits — in one case he told a man he had to list his former wife's name or else their four children would be "bastards in your heritage."

Davisson worked at the Knott's Berry Farm theme park for 18 years until he started his own PR firm in 1976.

He first thought to offer free obituary writing three years ago, after a former boss requested that Davisson prepare his eulogy.

Davisson wrote a two-page remembrance, which he reviewed with his friend and his friend's family and colleagues. Each person added a little until the final draft reflected the man's life exactly as he wanted it.

The experience touched Davisson — and made him realize how preparing an obit can bring comfort and a sense of control to the end of life. In a place like Leisure World, where death and dying are the backdrop of a vibrant community life, that's especially important, he said.

"We have about 10 people that are listed each week in our newspaper that have died. You go to a meeting and someone says, 'Well, Julie always does this. Where's Julie?' And someone else will say, 'She died, didn't you know?'" said Davisson. "Some people don't like to read the obituaries for fear they'll be there."

Five months ago, he started his writing service out of his second-floor apartment tucked in a quiet cul de sac. Davisson doesn't advertise — clients come by word-of-mouth by the occasional articles about him in local papers.

None of the dozens of obits he's written has made it into a newspaper, as far as he knows, though he tells his clients to

share them with family members who should send them to hometown papers after death. Typically, obituaries are written by family members or by newspaper staffers from a simple form relatives have filled out.

After a potential client inquires, Davisson sends back a questionnaire and his literature.

"Some people like to read the obituary column first thing each day just to make sure they are still alive," it begins. "You can help decide what is going to be said about you after you are gone."

Questionnaire returned, Davisson drafts an obituary which he reviews with the person, sometimes visiting up to six times to make sure it reads just so. His wife, Georgette, proofreads each one before the final copy is mailed to the client.

So far, he's sent out about 200 questionnaires; only half came back. People, he says, get spooked as they answer questions about where they will be buried, who will officiate their memorial service and whether their casket will be open or closed.

Other friends tell him they love the idea of writing their own obituary — but they could never bring themselves to do it because it means confronting death.

"What about death? Have you planned to meet your maker?" he said. "Many people don't really want their life history revealed because they've never talked about it to anybody. When they get to talking about death, (they think) that means they're dying. But this is for the living."

Davisson says most clients enjoy the process because they are able to include things that children and grandchildren might not know. One woman read the final draft of her obituary to her daughter, who was shocked to learn her mother had several college degrees, he said.

June Smith Stockdale, one of Davisson's recent clients, was thrilled to write her own death notice because she could include things her two sons likely wouldn't know — things she considered highlights of her golden years.

"They would just say, 'She died and that's it,'" Stockdale says with a chuckle. "They're loving boys, but they don't know me as well as they think they do."

Stockdale, 86, was a riveter at Lockheed during World War II and was working at the naval base in Long Beach when the war ended.

But what she really wants to be remembered for is her panda collection (55 and counting); her love of Polynesian dance and study of parapsychology; her multiple rides in gliders, hot-air balloons and helicopters; and the fact that she's visited Hawaii 27 times and seen four continents.

When she does get around to dying, Stockdale wants to be cremated, with her ashes scattered at sea. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the SPCA.

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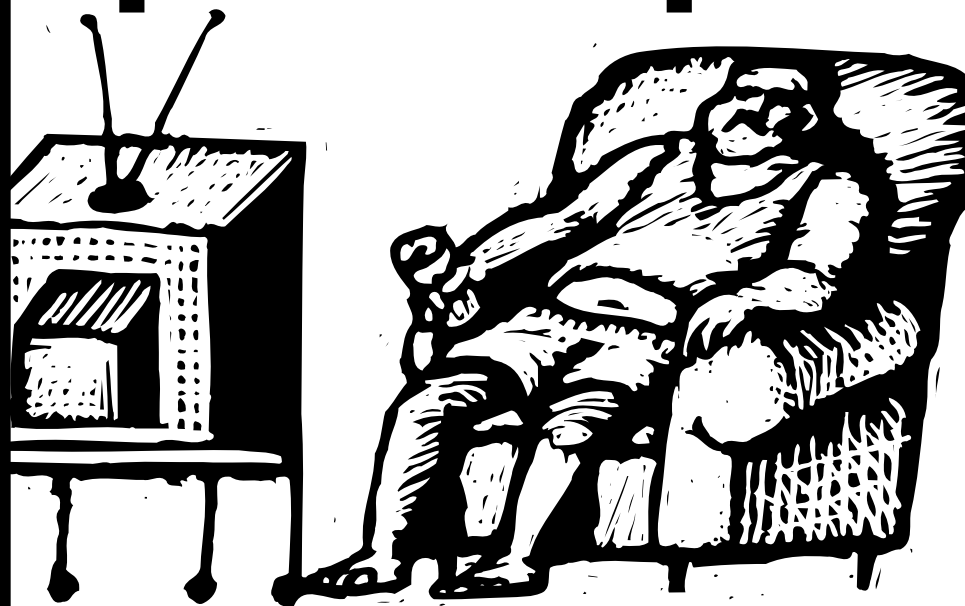
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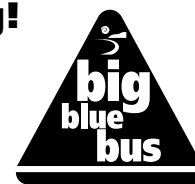


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GUEST COMMENTARY BY LINDA MILO

Five tips on how to be a more lighthearted parent

Playtime between a parent and a child creates a deep emotional bond. It's the bond that sets the path for joyful, creative, cooperative times by being together.

Adults seem to shun fun and games in their daily lives. Some parents just don't know how to play with their children or feel they don't have the time. It's no wonder — most parents work a full-time job and feel drained with little or no energy at the end of the day to feel playful. If only parents knew how much playtime shapes their family life, more parents would welcome it. They would come to know that it recharges their adult batteries.

Most parents played as children. Parents experienced being silly, laughing at nothing, playing games on their own or with their peers. Why is it that parents today have forgotten how to play? Why do parents feel like outsiders or simply ignore this way of communicating with their children? Parents make sure their children are loved, comforted, safe, fed and sheltered. But when it comes to playing, most parents can't seem to get in the swing of it. Our society in general doesn't take playing very seriously either. Most "play professionals" such as day-care providers, after school program teachers, recreation department workers and camp counselors are paid very low wages for the really important work they do for our children's lives. Those workers are treated more as baby-sitters than

experts on children and play.

Playtime is a rewarding time for a fresh, renewed look at life. It's the time when a zestfulness of living takes place. When a parent plays with his child, there is a deep heart-to-heart vibration that can overcome all the day's stresses and frustrations. Participating in your child's playtime arena — whether it's on the floor, eye-to-eye, sitting next to each other or across a table — creates enjoyment and spontaneity, happiness and an opportunity to interact as no other activity can. Years of research has shown that successful parenting is when there is a sensitive response to a child's needs. That response includes physical contact, smiling faces, eye contact and communication, both verbal and nonverbal.

Some of my clients have said, "My family members need to feel more connected. We seem to be disconnected and going in different directions."

Playing helps build that connection and communication so vital to a loving family environment. Asking a child to play with you and then allowing your child to lead you to what they want to play and how they want to play, is the first step to creating a deep connection. Hide-and-seek, tag, chasing, wrestling, fantasy play, sports, pillow fights, art projects, racing, etc. are games that all children like. You can start by knowing that anything can be fun, especially doing it together.

Here are five ways to be a more lighthearted parent:

1. Lead the way: Ask your children what type of activity they would like to do with you. Talk it over and accept an activity that will bring both of you a feeling of gladness. Children like rules — start the game with "OK, if we play there will be no giggling or blinking." Then pretend to fuss when your child breaks the rules. Let the games begin.

2. Loosen up: Playtime is just that: play and time. Don't worry about messiness, noise, or commotion. Just remember to let the play flow and follow it along. As long as you hear silly giggles, howls of joy, see happy smiles, then you know that the playtime session is a success.

3. Encourage your children: Understand that when you play with your child it encourages strong feelings of excitement, exuberance, joy, as well as frustrations, anxiousness, jealousy and embarrassment. Get a handle on those emotions by knowing that these emotions should be freely expressed rather than having them buried and held inside. So take time out during your playtime to stand back and remind your child that having those feelings is OK, and that being angry or being joyful are emotions that are acceptable. It will create a deep connection between you. After all, play is a child's way of expressing themselves and their emotions.

4. Be playful with your children: Use

a voice that is relaxed and goofy. Step outside of your everyday stern parent style and start to feel the energy of play. Choose games that allow you to give your children encouragement, inspire their confidence, and allows for their need of attachment and closeness. Give your children your complete attention accompanied with love, hugs and affection. Always promote win-win situations in the games you play and have a good time.

5. Be lighthearted: Being lighthearted while playing with your child actually adds to your life and brings you time. Playtime is rejuvenating. You may have to push yourself at first, but very soon thereafter, you will feel, understand and want to play as the payoff is well worth it.

To help your batteries feel recharged after your exhausting day at work, take the initiative to spend more together time with your children, even if it only means hugging them, talking to them, being with them at the end of the day. Bring up everyone's spirits by telling them how much they mean to you and what you most appreciate about each family member. Create a healthy, energetic connection today that your children will remember for the rest of their lives.

(Linda Milo is a local "Parent-Child Connection Coach. She can be reached at linda@empoweringparentsnow.com.)

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MARINA DEL REY'S NEW YEAR'S EVE FIRE-WORKS
11:55 p.m. – 12:05 a.m. Burton Chace Park, 13650 Mindano Way. FREE!
305-9545 for more info.

DOWNTOWN ON ICE – THRU JAN. 16
Don't miss your chance to glide at this outdoor skating rink located at Pershing Square. \$6 per session, \$2 skate rental, 532 Olive St., 213-847-4970, www.laparks.org.
Mon. – Thurs., noon to 9:00 p.m.; Fri. – Sun., 10:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.

HOLIDAY LIGHT FESTIVAL – THRU DEC. 30
5:00 – 10:00 p.m. This annual tradition features 500,000 lights in festive displays showcasing LA locales. Shuttle service available on select weekends from LA Zoo. Crystal Springs Dr., Griffith Park, 888-LA-PARKS, FREE!

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Program begins Jan. 9. Contact Shelana Philip-Guide for more info at 393-2721, ext. 107 for more info. 1332 6th St., www.ymcasm.org.

KID'S YOGA CIRCLE WINTER/SPRING SESSION
Session dates are Wednesdays, Jan. 4 – March 22 (no classes Jan. 18 & 25)
Ages 4 – 7, 3:30 – 4:25; ages 8 – 11, 4:30 – 5:30. Classes are taught by Darlene D'Arezzo, named Best Kids Yoga Teacher by the LA Weekly. At the Center for Living Meditation, 220 Pier Ave. Call 587-3235 or visit www.kidsyogacircle.com for more info.

ONGOING CALENDAR BELOW
Special Note – many story times and classes are on break for the holidays. Please note the new session dates on many listings and call to confirm class times and dates.

TUESDAY

Movies for Moms! 11:00 a.m., Loews Cineplex Broadway Theatre, 1441 3rd St. Promenade – for Moms and babies newborn – 1 year old. Doors open early for socializing and getting comfortable. Visit www.enjoytheshow.com/reelmoms for details. Dec. 27 – Rumor Has It... starring Jennifer Aniston, Kevin Costner and Shirley MacLaine. Comedy; Rated "PG-13."

Storytelling

Main Library – Preschool and Toddler story times will be held at the new Main Library beginning in January.
Fairview Branch Library – 2101 Ocean Park Blvd – 310-450-0443.
Cuentos Para Pequenos and Lap Time will begin again in January.
Twilight Story Time -7pm – an ongoing program for 3-5 year olds.
Montana Avenue Branch Library – 1704 Montana Ave – 310-829-7081.
Family Story Time – 7:00 p.m., all ages. No stories Dec. 27.
Ocean Park Branch Library – 2601 Main St. – 310-392-3804.
Toddler Storytime, 10:00 and 10:30. Music, rhymes and stories for 2 to 3 year olds.

Registration underway for the next session beginning in Jan.
Tiny Tuesday Storytime at Storyopolis
For ages infant to 3. 11:00 a.m. 116 North Robertson, Plaza A, LA. 310-358-2500, www.storyopolis.com
Barnes and Noble at the Grove
Storytime for ages 2 – 6. 10:00 a.m. 189 Grove Drive, LA, 323-525-0270

Classes

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 9:15 - 10:15 a.m. – 12 to 36 months; Infant & Me Class – 10:45 – 11:45 a.m. and 1:30 – 2:30 p.m., 0 – 12 months; 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.
YMCA – Attachment Parenting Classes - 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., 1332 Sixth St., 393-2721 (ask for Shelana Philip-Guide or Audrey Meyer). This new class for mothers/dads and babies up to 12 months is presented by Karol Darsa, PsyD, a licensed psychologist with extensive experience working with children and families. Fees: Members – 1 class - \$40, 5 class pass - \$180; Non-members - \$50, 5 class pass - \$200.
BREAKTHROUGH PARENTING CLASSES – 7:00 – 9:30 p.m.
An advanced 10-week parent education course. Continuous enrollment. For info call Jayne A. Major, Ph.D., Breakthrough Parenting Services, Inc., 310-823-7846, jm@BPinAction.org.

Yoga & Exercise

Prenatal Aqua Aerobics at the Santa Monica YMCA
10:00 – 11:00 a.m and 7:30 – 8:30 p.m; Free for members, non-members \$90 for 10 classes. (also Thursday nights 7:30 – 8:30 p.m.) 393-2721, ext. 117 for more info.
Yoga Works – 2215 Montana Ave, 310-393-5150; Pre/postnatal – 12:15 – 1:40 p.m., \$15. Mommy and Me – 1:45 – 3:00 p.m.
Mommy Care – at the Dance Factory, 11606 San Vicente Blvd., Brentwood, 310-394-6711. Combined Pregnancy/Recovery Exercise Group – 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. - (babies welcome, includes baby massage and workout at the end)
Itsy Bitsy Yoga – Baby IBY (6 weeks to pre-crawling) – 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. With Khefri Riley at Ocean Oasis, 1333 Ocean Ave. Register at www.khefri.net or call 323-549-5383.
Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:30 a.m. Mon. – Fri., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

Breastfeeding Group

The Pump Station, 2415 Wilshire Blvd., 310-998-1981 - drop-in, first class free, \$10 fee thereafter. Moms/babies 0-4 months, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY

MOMS Club of SM South Playgroups – 4:30 p.m., separate groups for children born in 2000 and 2001. Call or email Alison at 393-4481/riversalison@hotmail.com for more info. All moms welcome!

Storytelling

The Talking Stick Coffee Lounge – 1630 Ocean Park Blvd., 450-6052
10:30 a.m. Free story time for moms and kids ages 0-4 at this neighborhood coffee shop.
Fairview Branch Library – 2101 Ocean Park Blvd – 310-450-0443.
Next session Jan. 4 – Feb. 8.
Toddler Story Time – 9:30 a.m., for two year olds with adult.
Preschool Story Time – 10:30 a.m.; for 3-5 year olds with adult.
Montana Avenue Branch Library – 1704 Montana Ave – 310-829-7081.
Next session Jan. 4 – Feb. 8. Baby Time - 10:15

& 11:15 a.m., ages 0-2.
Ocean Park Branch Library – 2601 Main St. –392-3804.
Preschool Twilight Story Time – 7:00 p.m. Parents/children ages 3-5.
Barnes and Noble, Westside Pavilion – 2 pm – ages 2-5 – 310-475-4144
Border's, Westwood – 11a.m. – 310-475-3444.

Classes

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 10:45 – 11:45 a.m., 7 to 36 months; 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.

Rhythm Child Parent & Me Rhythms, Santa Monica Studios, 3025 Olympic Blvd., 9:30 – 10:15 a.m. Children explore rhythms through drum play. For toddlers. \$100 for 8 weeks. Call 204-5466 or visit www.rhythmchild.net for more info and session dates.

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 9:15 - 10:15 a.m. – walkers to 3 years; (Mon – Fri); 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.
Enchanted Lunchtime Theatre at Santa Monica Playhouse, 1211 4th St., 394-9779
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. For ages 3 – 5 with parents. This theatrical adventure includes story time, theatre games, crafts, play building and lunch. Reservations required 24 hours in advance, \$19.50 includes lunch for child and lunch.

Yoga & Exercise

Yoga Works, 2215 Montana Ave, 310-393-5150 Pre/Postnatal – 12:15 – 1:45pm, \$15
Fitness for Moms – Babies Welcome! Step Aerobics, 10:30 a.m. at the YMCA, 393-2721, ext. 117 for more info. Free for members, non-members pay \$90 for 10 classes.
Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:30 a.m. Mon. – Fri., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

Breastfeeding Group

The Pump Station, 2415 Wilshire Blvd., 310-998-1981, drop-in, first class free, \$10 fee thereafter. Moms/babies 0-4 months, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Other

Puppetolio – 1:00 p.m., 310-656-0483, 1255 2nd St., ages 3 & up, reservations suggested

THURSDAY

MOMS Club of SM South Playgroup – 3:30 p.m., for children born 3/03 – 12/03, Call or email Alison at 393-4481/riversalison@hotmail.com for more info. All moms welcome!

Storytelling

Babystyle, 1324 Montana Avenue, 434-9590
10:30 a.m. Free story time for moms and kids ages 0-4.
Main Library – Preschool and Toddler story-times will be held at the new Main Library

beginning in January.
Fairview Branch Library – 2101 Ocean Park Blvd – 310-450-0443.
La Hora Del Cuento – 7:00 p.m. Spanish stories, songs and rhymes for all ages.
Montana Avenue Branch Library – 1704 Montana Ave – 310-829-7081.
Next session Jan. 5 – Feb. 9. Toddler Story Time – 10:15 a.m., for 2 year olds.
Preschool Story Time – 11:15 a.m.; for 3-5 year olds. No stories Dec. 29.
Ocean Park Branch Library – 2601 Main St. – 310-392-3804.
Lap Time will begin again in January.

Classes

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 9:15 - 10:15 a.m and 10:45 – 11:45 a.m., 12 to 36 months; Parent Support Group – 3:30 – 4:30 p.m., age 3 – 5 years; 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.
BREAKTHROUGH PARENTING CLASSES – 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.
An advanced 10-week parent education course. Continuous enrollment. For info call Jayne A. Major, Ph.D., Breakthrough Parenting Services, Inc., 310-823-7846, jm@BPinAction.org.

Yoga & Exercise

Prenatal Aqua Aerobics at the Santa Monica YMCA
7:30 – 8:30 p.m; Free for members, non-members \$90 for 10 classes. (also Tuesdays at 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. and 7:30 – 8:30 p.m.) 393-2721, ext. 117 for more info.
Yoga Works – 2215 Montana Ave, 310-393-5150; Pre/postnatal – 12:15 – 1:40 p.m., \$15. Mommy and Me – 1:45 – 3:00 p.m.
Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:30 a.m. Mon. – Fri., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

Breastfeeding Groups

La Leche League of LA/Mar Vista – meets the 1st Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. in the Community Room of the Westchester Municipal Bldg., 7166 W. Manchester Ave., corner of Lincoln and Manchester. Call 310-390-2529 for info.
The Pump Station, 2415 Wilshire Blvd., 310-998-1981 - drop-in, first class free, \$10 fee thereafter. Moms/babies 4-8 months, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

FRIDAY

MOMS Club of SM South Playgroups
11:00 a.m. - playgroup for children born 10/04 – 5/05. Call or e-mail Alison at 393-4481, riversalison@hotmail.com for more info.
Parent's Night Out at Child's Play, 2299 Westwood Blvd., 6:00 – 11:00 p.m.
Kids get a night of supervised fun with pizza, games and more while parents go out. Ages 3-10, \$9 per hour, \$7 siblings, 3 hour minimum. Reservations required, 470-4997. www.child-splayonline.net
Planetarium Show at SMC's John Drescher Planetarium, 7:00 p.m. - Night Sky Show, 8:00 p.m. – featured program. \$5 adults, \$4 chil-

dren. Pico and 17th St., 434-3000.

Classes

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 9:15 - 10:15 a.m. – 12 – 36 mos.; 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.

Yoga & Exercise

Fitness for Moms – Babies Welcome! Indoor Cycling, 10:30 a.m. at the YMCA, 393-2721, ext. 117 for more info. Free for members, non-members pay \$90 for 10 classes.
Yoga Works – 2215 Montana Ave, 310-393-5150; Pre/postnatal – 12:15 – 1:45 p.m., \$15. Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:30 a.m. Mon. – Fri., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

Other

Baby Attuned - Fridays, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., A new program promoting sensitive parenting and developmental awareness. Eileen Escarce, PhD, MSN, (PSY 18819). Introductory fee: \$15 per screening with feedback. 1137 2nd Ave, Suite 213. By appointment only 310-367-1155.

SATURDAY – NEW YEAR'S EVE CALL TO CONFIRM LISTINGS DUE TO HOLIDAYS.

Storytelling

Barnes and Noble, 3rd St. Promenade – Kid's Story Time – 10am, 310-260-9110
Barnes and Noble, Westside Pavilion – 10:30am – ages 2-5, 310-475-4144.
Children's Book World, 10580 1/2 Pico Blvd, LA - 10:30 a.m., 310-559-BOOK.
Village Books, 1049 SwarthmoreAve, Pacific Palisades – 10:30 a.m., 454-4063.
826LA, 685 Venice Blvd, 2nd Floor, Venice – 10:30 – 11:30 a.m., ages 3-6, RSVP to info @825LA.com or 310-314-8418. (826LA is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write).

Classes

YWCA – Toddler & Me every other Sat., 9:45 – 10:45 a.m., \$15 per class; Parent Enrichment once per month , 11:00 a.m. – noon, \$15 per class, \$25 per couple.

Yoga & Exercise

Santa Monica Yoga – Pre- & Post-Natal Yoga, Saturdays – 12:30 – 2:00 p.m.
1640 Ocean Park Blvd, 396-4040, www.santa-monicayoga.com
Mommy Care – at the Dance Factory, 11606 San Vicente Blvd., Brentwood, 310-394-6711. Combined Pregnancy/Recovery Exercise Group – 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.(babies welcome, includes baby massage and workout at the end)
Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:00 a.m., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

Other

Puppetolio – 1:00 and 3:00pm, 310-656-0483, 1255 2nd St., ages 3 & up, reservations suggested
Magicopolis – 2 and 8 p.m., 1418 4th St., Admission is \$20 for evening, \$15 for matinee. Call 310-451-2241 for info.
Precious Prints – Ceramic Heirlooms for a Lifetime
Second Saturday every month at The Pump Station, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Contact Kristan Ritchie at 310-802-8013 or visit www.preciousprintsstudios.com for more info.
Lakeshore Learning Stores "Free Crafts for Kids" – Saturdays, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., 8888 Venice Blvd., 559-9630.
"A Faery Hunt" – 10:30 a.m., every Saturday at Franklin Canyon Park. An interactive children's show, searching for fairies and other enchanted creatures in the magical canyon and finding them! \$10, call for reservations – 818-324-6802. www.faeryhunt.com. Meet in the parking lot of the Sooky Goldman Nature Center, 2600 Franklin Canyon Dr., Beverly Hills.

SUNDAY – HAPPY NEW YEAR!

MONDAY

CALL TO CONFIRM LISTINGS DUE TO HOLIDAYS.
MOMS Club of SM South Playgroups
Noon – 2:00 p.m., for children born 1/02 – 2/03; 9:30 a.m. – for children born 1/04 – 9/04; call or email Alison at 393-4481/riversalison@hotmail.com for more info. All moms welcome!

Storytelling

Main Library – check back for details on Lap Time and Family Connections in Jan.
Barnes and Noble, 3rd St. Promenade – Toddler Story Time – 10am – 310-260-9110

Classes

YWCA – A Place for Parents –Toddler & Me Class - 9:15 - 10:15 a.m. – 12 – 36 mos.; "Playtime – A combination play time and parent support time", 10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., 2019 14th St. Call 452-3881for details and prices.

Breastfeeding Group

The Pump Station, 2415 Wilshire Blvd., 310-998-1981 - drop-in, first class free, \$10 fee thereafter. Moms/babies 0-4 months, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Yoga & Exercise

Yoga Works, 2215 Montana Ave, 310-393-5150 Pre/Postnatal – 12:15 – 1:45pm, \$15
Itsy Bitsy Yoga – TOT IBY (crawling – 2/3 years) – 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. With Khefri Riley at TURNOUT Performing Arts Center, 12113 Santa Monica Bl., St. 201. Register at www.khefri.net or call 323-549-5383.
Yoga Garden, - Restorative yoga for pre/postnatal – 6:30 p.m., 310-450-0133. www.yoga-gardenstudios.com
Stroller Strides Fitness Class – 9:30 a.m. Mon. – Fri., Palisades Park, call 800-795-6708 or visit www.strollerstrides.com for more info.

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Wrecked neighborhoods and trailer celebrations

BY MARY FOSTER

Associated Press Writer

NEW ORLEANS — Harold Hansford didn't make it home for Christmas.

He just visited.

Hansford spent part of Christmas morning wandering around the gutted house in the New Orleans suburb of Arabi that he, his wife and son called home for the past 17 years.

"You get 14 feet of water in your house and it don't leave much," said Hansford, who had managed to salvage a few

Christmas decorations from the attic. "We always fixed the house up for Christmas."

This year it's decorated with the marks painted on by rescue workers as they made their way through the neighborhood looking for people and bodies.

"I never imagined Christmas like this," he said. "Not much of left, but we'll be back."

Huge swaths of New Orleans remained empty Christmas Day. Streets that filled with flood water after Hurricane Katrina crushed the city Aug. 29 were still stretches of smashed houses and debris.

In the Lower Ninth Ward, where most of the dead were found following the levee break, a few sad relics of Christmas past stand forlornly among the wreckage — a waterlogged stuffed Santa, a headless angel. A wrecked car has "Merry Christmas" spray painted on the side and a stuffed reindeer in the driver's seat.

Cheryl Anderson was only too happy to get up at 2 a.m. Christmas morning to begin cooking in the tiny kitchen of the trailer she shares with her husband, son and three grandchildren. Even the location, on the grounds of Metairie Cemetery, where her husband works, didn't bother her.

Anderson, 26, floated away from her house on a door when the water hit 9 feet. She spent two days on an overpass, then took shelter at the Superdome before being evacuated to Birmingham, Ala. Her family was scattered across four states and it took her months to find them.

"I didn't think I'd live to see this Christmas," Anderson said. "Now we're having everything like a regular Christmas — the gumbo, the ham, all of it. Everything except a tree. That won't fit in the trailer."

The congregation of First Emmanuel

Baptist Church drove from Baton Rouge, Houston and other points far and wide on Christmas, then walked past collapsed buildings and piles of storm wreckage to worship in their old church for the first time since Hurricane Katrina.

"This means everything. We've come home," said Lila Southall, the minister's wife. "My house is gone but I'm still home for Christmas."

The 118-year-old church had lost much of its roof, part of the ceiling still hung precariously and the soggy carpet had not yet been replaced. But the magnificent stained-glass windows survived unscathed, and so did most of the 1,200 members.

Only a handful of people swayed in the pews to the music on Christmas morning, calling out "Amen" to the pastor's words, but that number will grow, Southall said. The church in the Uptown section, several miles west of the French Quarter, will run a bus from Baton Rouge each Sunday to bring members back for the 7:30 a.m. service.

"It's a grand feeling to be back home," said Southall, whose house was submerged in 8 feet of water after the hurricane. "We're back together. We'll go on from here."

Stores slash prices, bring out new merchandise to grab shoppers

BY ANNE D'INNOCENZIO

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — With a ho-hum pre-Christmas season behind them, the nation's retailers were preparing to usher in the post-Christmas period on Monday with expanded shopping hours, a blitz of deep discounts and fresh new merchandise.

Retailers are aiming directly at consumers who are returning to the stores armed with their gift cards, whose popularity is soaring. Merchants are hoping that consumers will pick up some discounted holiday leftovers while buying some regular-priced goods. That will help retailers preserve profits and recoup lost sales from earlier in the season.

Clothing and accessories stores such as Coach Inc. and American Eagle Outfitters Inc. are showcasing new spring assortments. Big sellers of consumer electronics like Best Buy Co. Inc., Circuit City Stores Inc. and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. are pushing such home entertainment products as DVDs and video games for shoppers who received consoles and DVD players as gifts.

KB Toys Inc. is also positioning itself to win big, stocking up on new hot toys like newly released action figures related to the "King Kong" movie.

"We're resetting as quickly as possible. We are putting a lot of emphasis on what you need for the stuff you got," said Gail Lavielle, a spokeswoman at Wal-Mart

Stores Inc.

Ernie Speranza, chief marketing officer at KB Toys Inc., believes that the next four weeks after Christmas will be "the best retailers will have ever seen."

"We still want to get rid of excess inventory, but unless you have new product available, the customers won't be staying long in the stores," Speranza added.

Michael P. Niemira, chief economist at the International Council of Shopping Centers, expects the week after Christmas will be "big." But he still believes that merchants will wind up with a modest 3 percent to 3.5 percent sales increase for the November-December period.

The estimate is based on same-store sales, which are sales at stores opened at least a year. But Niemira added that if more shoppers than expected redeem their gift cards this week, that could boost December sales by 0.75 percentage point.

Niemira expects that 20 percent of gift card holders will redeem their cards this week.

According to ShopperTrak RCT Corp, the week after Christmas accounted for 10 percent of holiday sales last year, but analysts expect that period could account for as much as 14 percent, given the soaring popularity of gift cards.

The National Retail Federation estimates that consumers will spend \$18.48 billion on gift cards, this holiday season, up 6.6 percent from a year ago, based on a survey conducted by BIGresearch.

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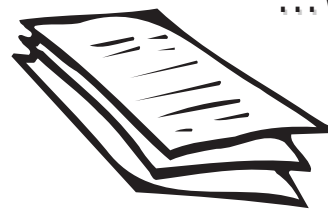
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Santa Monica Daily Press



Private ceremonies held for tsunami victims

TSUNAMI, from page 1

dreds of other officials in a minute's silence at a ceremony held on a jetty overlooking the sea.

"It was under the same blue sky, exactly one year ago that mother earth unleashed her most destructive power upon us," Yudhoyono told the gathering.

Similar periods of silence were to be observed at officials ceremonies in Thailand and Sri Lanka, where flags would be lowered to half-staff and bells rung in remembrance. Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu prayers services were being held across the tsunami zone.

Some preferred more personal reflection.

In Thailand, one man sat in the sand, a bouquet of white roses laying in front of him. The man, who declined to talk to a reporter, was among scores of Westerners who traveled to sites along Thailand's world famous beachfront where their loved ones disappeared into the waves.

Ulrika Landgren, 37, of Malmoe, Sweden, brought her 9-year-old son to Patong beach where nine friends died. "Somehow it's good to see this place," she said, tears falling from behind her sunglasses.

One year ago Monday, a magnitude 9 earthquake _ the most powerful in 40 years _ ruptured the sea floor off Sumatra island, sending waves 33 feet high across the Indian Ocean.

They crashed ashore in a dozen countries, sweeping entire villages away in Aceh and Sri Lanka, swamping resorts in Thailand and surging into coastal communities from India to east Africa.

At least 216,000 people were killed or disappeared, The Associated Press found in an assessment of government and credible relief agency figures in each country hit. The United Nations puts the number at least 223,000, though it says some countries are still updating their figures.

The true toll will probably never be known _ many bodies were lost at sea and in some cases the populations of places struck were not accurately recorded.

In Aceh, Yudhoyono set off a siren at 8:16 a.m. to mark the moment the first wave struck. The siren is part of a tsunami warning system that did not exist last year. He later scattered petals over a grave holding almost 47,000 bodies that were hastily buried in the days after the disaster.

Hundreds of people gathered at a mosque in Kajhu village for one of scores of prayer ceremonies in the province.

"It is important for me to come here to pray for my family, may they rest in peace," said Darmawati, 39,

who lost her husband, two daughters and both parents in the disaster. "I pray that God will give me strength to raise my only son who survived.

Indonesia also tested a tsunami warning system for the first time Monday, sounding alarms in the western Sumatra town of Padang which sent many residents running through the streets according to an organized evacuation plan.

Residents of the town had been warned ahead of time that it was a drill.

In Sri Lanka, President Mahinda Rajapakse joined mourners in the southern village of Peraliya on Monday to honor the more than 31,000 Sri Lankans who died in the tsunami. Four new postage stamps were also being issued showing tsunami waves and a passenger train that was washed off the tracks in the village.

The tsunami generated one of the most generous outpourings of foreign aid ever known. Some \$13 billion was pledged to relief and recovery efforts, the U.N. says, of which 75 percent has already been secured.

But the pace of relief and reconstruction has been criticized, and frustration has grown among some of the

80 percent of refugees who are still living in tents, plywood barracks or the homes of family and friends.

Margareta Wahlstrom, the U.N. assistant secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said people have to be patient.

"If you don't do things well they will collapse in a couple of years," she told AP on Sunday. "If you don't take time to do proper planning, and ask people what they want ... then you are going to create new problems along the way."

It was a somber Christmas for many of those who decided to hold private ceremonies Sunday.

Sigi Gsteu, of Feldkirch, Austria, wiped away tears as he told of three close friends who died when the torrents flooded their Thai resort bungalow.

"When a person is missing and you don't have (a body), you cannot say goodbye," he said as he set two simple wooden plaques engraved with his friends' names beneath a lone pine tree where the resort once stood.

Not everyone was thinking of the past, though. Holiday revelers partied with bar staff dressed in Christmas hats in Patong's notorious nightclub district.

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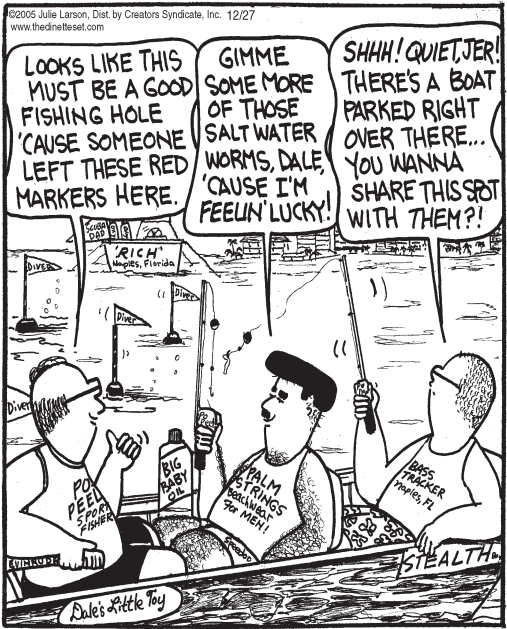
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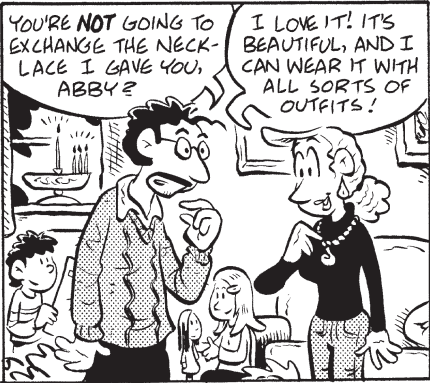


COMICS

The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



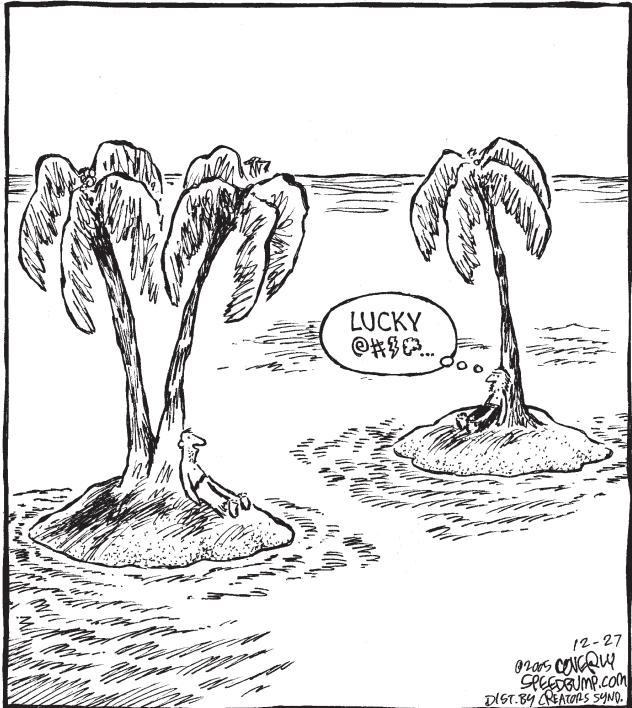
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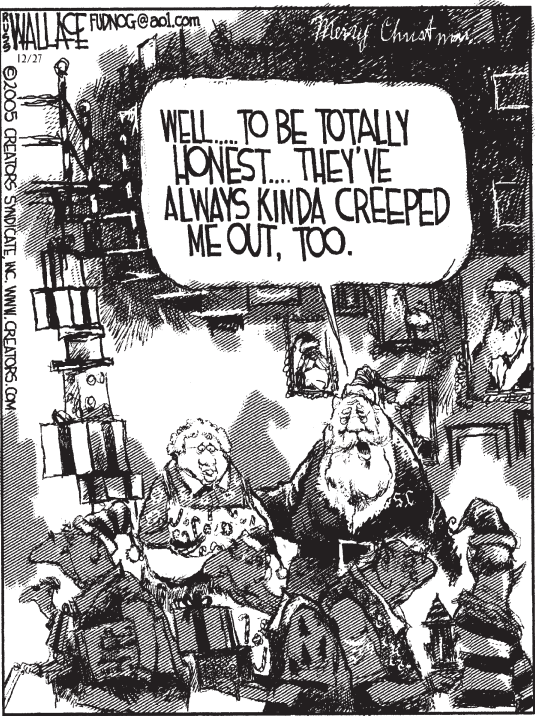


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- 18 Countri-fied
- 20 Enjoy a lollipop
- 21 Reek
- 22 Is inquisitive
- 23 Libya neighbor
- 25 Boot attachment
- 28 Forays
- 31 Highlands gal
- 32 Fancy
- 34 Common verb
- 35 La Brea stuff
- 36 Siesta
- 37 Sub part
- 40 Choice
- 41 Restau-rant fixture
- 42 Car type
- 43 Honey bunch?

DOWN

- 1 Mist
- 2 Pretty good grade
- 3 Most pleasant
- 4 Corp.'s superior
- 5 Sketched
- 6 Furrow
- 7 Jackal-headed god
- 8 Retreat
- 9 Furtive ones
- 11 Excursion
- 14 Popular ice-cream flavor
- 19 Layers

- 20 Classic language
- 24 Chatty bird
- 25 Black-boards
- 26 Prisoner's hope
- 27 Log-on need
- 29 Vienna's river

- 30 Horse house
- 33 Some swords
- 35 College freshman, usually
- 38 Bake-sale sponsor
- 39 Keyboard key

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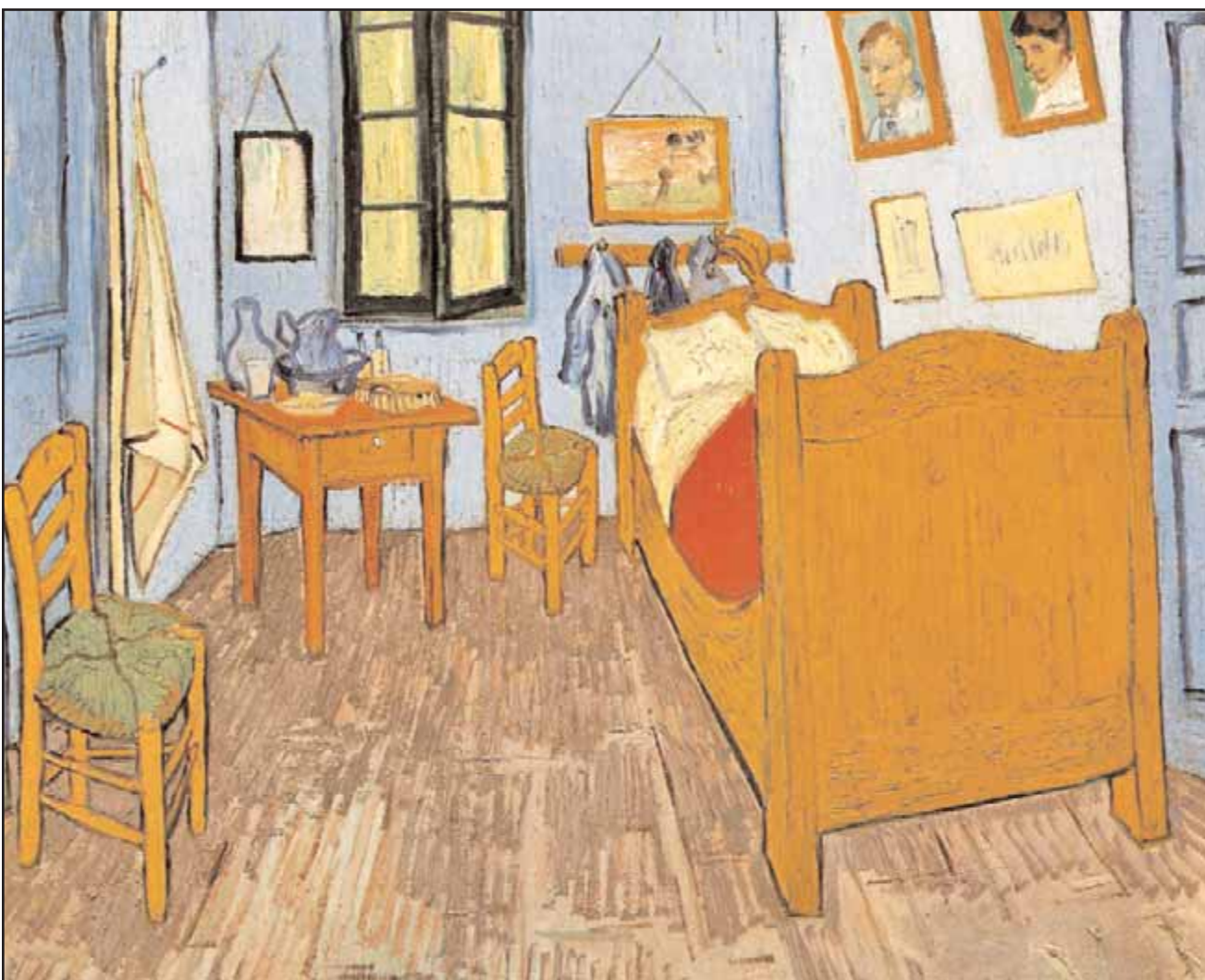
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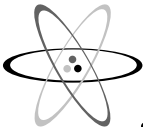
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This statement was filed with the County Clerk of LOS ANGELES County on 11/07/05. NOTICE: THIS FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT EXPIRES FIVE YEARS FROM THE DATE IT WAS FILED IN THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK. A NEW FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT MUST BE FILED PRIOR TO THAT DATE. The filing of this statement does not of itself authorize the use in this state of a fictitious business name statement in violation of the rights of another under federal, state, or common law (see Section 14411et seq.,Business and Professions Code). SANTA MONICA DAILY PRESS to publish 12/6/2005, 12/13/2005, 12/20/2005, 12/27/2005

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Spur of the moment: Parker gets traffic ticket

By The Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — San Antonio Spurs guard Tony Parker was cited for impeding traffic and failing to produce a valid Texas driver's license during a traffic stop in which "Desperate Housewives" actress Eva Longoria was his passenger, police said.

The incident happened early Saturday. According to police, a bicycle officer saw a stopped car impeding traffic and rapped on the hood with his hand.

Parker, who was behind the wheel, questioned why the officer touched the car, and the couple "began screaming in a verbally abusive and demeaning manner," police said.

Police said Parker then began to drive away, almost hitting a man standing nearby. After being told to stop and get out, Parker showed a French driver's license, police said.

The officer who wrote the citations said that Parker complained: "This is all the cops do, just mess with people," and that Longoria shouted from the car: "He's just a Mexican bike cop! He only wants your autograph!"

Longoria denied making the comment.

"It's a shame that one officer conducted himself in such an inappropriate and disorderly manner. I never made any sort of racial slurs, let alone made any comments about the officer being Mexican, as a Mexican myself," Longoria said through her publicist.

HANOI, Vietnam — Police have completed their investigations into child abuse allegations against veteran British rocker Gary Glitter, his attorney said Monday.

Glitter, 61, his lawyer Le Thanh Kinh and prosecutors will all receive a copy of the police report, and prosecutors will take about a month to decide whether to put

him on trial.

Glitter, whose real name is Paul Francis Gadd, is being held in a prison on suspicion of engaging in obscene acts with a child, an offense punishable with up to 12 years behind bars. He was seized while trying to board a flight to Bangkok from Ho Chi Minh City on Nov. 19.

Glitter won fame as a flamboyant glam rocker in the 1970s. He was convicted in Britain in 1999 of possessing child pornography and served half of a four-month jail term.

WASHINGTON — The author of "Memoirs of a Geisha" is defending the film version amid criticism from some experts in the geisha world.

In a letter to The Washington Post published Monday, Arthur Golden wrote that "no storyteller or journalist is ever exact enough for an expert."

The movie, based on Golden's novel, chronicles a girl's rise from poverty in a Japanese fishing village to life in high society as a geisha — a woman schooled in the art of dance, singing and conversation to be a companion for wealthy men.

The Post ran an article Dec. 15 quoting experts who criticized the accuracy of the costumes and dancing in the film.

"It's worth bearing in mind that 'Hamlet' makes poor Danish history and that 'Lawrence of Arabia' grossly oversimplifies the politics and cultures of the Middle East," Golden wrote. "I don't mean to say that drama should never concern itself with factual accuracy, only that a work of art must be judged by a higher standard."

The English-language film also has been criticized by those who felt a movie about Japanese culture should have a Japanese actress in the lead. The movie stars Chinese actresses Ziyi Zhang and Gong Li, and Chinese-Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh.

MIAMI — When it came time to make a movie out of "The Producers," Susan Stroman had a simple approach: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Stroman, who directed and choreographed the award-winning stage production, was tapped by Mel Brooks to transfer the energy onto the screen with stars Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick.

"Right from the start, Mel said, 'Do the musical,'" Stroman said in Friday's Miami Herald. "So it was really about finding a way to take this musical, which is in proscenium, and give it four walls and a sky."

Stroman said the musical numbers gave her the chance to pay homage to the old movie musicals that inspired her as a child, including "Singin' in the Rain" and "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers."

"I ended up working in theater, because the movie musical genre was dead," she said, "but I still wanted to fulfill the passion I felt when I saw Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing. So now to have had the opportunity to direct a movie musical — me, who has lived her whole life doing musicals — is really beyond dreams realized."

SAN FRANCISCO — Risk? There was nothing to risk for Felicity Huffman in playing a man becoming a woman.

"I'm not a beauty. That's not my thing. So it wasn't like I was risking anything," Huffman said in Sunday's San Francisco Chronicle. "What I was risking is whether I could do it. There are many places to fall."

Huffman, 43, was nominated for two best-actress Golden Globes on Dec. 14 — as Stanley/Bree in the film "Transamerica" and as the beleaguered mom Lynette in TV's "Desperate Housewives."

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