

The Peter Pan Foundation brings musical theatre to special audiences

Submitted by Gina Campo



A fan gets a hug from Moana, played by Nadya Jatoft.

Photo provided

The Peter Pan Foundation brought their music and magic to the Orinda Community Center Nov. 11, giving two special performances for audiences who would not normally be able to enjoy live theatre. The shows, a modified version of the foundation's annual Memorial Day spectacular, "Wish Upon a Star," was specifically produced for the special needs children from Easterseals Bay Area and the children at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, Oakland.

While the first performance for ESBA was performed to a packed live audience, the second performance was filmed and will be given to the hospital to be broadcast to patients' rooms via their closed circuit TVs.

Why provide these specialty performances? PPF founder Leslie Noel explained. "It is so important to provide live theatre opportunities to everyone, including our friends with special needs. What is especially wonderful about the specialty matinees that we are now providing, is that the onstage performances are designed specifically for our audience members with special needs; with lighting, sound, snacks, and interactions adjusted accordingly. Additionally, we are providing a safe, nonjudgmental environment for our guests watching the show. In the PPF, we embrace everyone's beautiful differences, and are working to help make everyone feel included. There is always a strong sense of real magic at the specialty matinees; the magic of loving others."

Stacey Murphy, senior programs manager for Easterseals Bay Area, is especially thankful for the partnership with the Peter Pan Foundation. "In addition to this (performance) and last year's fantastic Wish Upon a Star performances, the PPF has sent characters to five Parents Night Out events to play and sing with our clients and their siblings. I have been consistently impressed with the kindness and enthusiasm that each and every

PPF character shows our children, and watching the children's happy excitement and interaction with the PPF characters is one of my favorite parts of my role at ESBA."

Sheila Martinez, from Union City who brought her 5-year-old son, Nathan, to the show, was emotional about the experience. "When Leslie announced before the show the only rule 'was to be anything you need and want to be,' that the kids didn't have to sit still or quietly, and this show was for them, it brought tears to my eyes," she said.

While the event was a special occasion for the audience of special needs children and their families, the experience was equally rewarding for the performers. "Having the opportunity to provide a safe and loving environment for the children of Easterseals Bay Area to experience the magic of the PPF live for themselves was absolutely incredible," explained Nadya Jatoft, president of the PPF teen council, Bay Area Magic Makers. "Seeing the smiling faces of the kids laughing, dancing, and being able to meet all of the princesses and characters was such an unforgettable and inspiring experience that I will carry with me forever."

As magical as the first performance was, the second show of the afternoon was equally inspiring. Founder Leslie Noel explains how the performance for Children's Hospital Oakland started more than 10 years ago.

"Our very first CHO show was in 2006, with our original Peter Pan, Steffen Ryge. We lost him to a tragic car accident just months later. Visiting the hospital that year ended up serving as the inspiration behind The PPF's philanthropic endeavors. Since then, we have kept up the beloved annual tradition, with the PPF BMM Squad (Bay Area Magic Makers) performing for all of the patients at CHO ... it is one of our absolute favorite days of the whole year! I am so delighted to know that our show will once again be bringing magic to the lives of so many patients, while bringing a little piece of Steffen back to life, too."

You can experience some of the PPF magic for yourself at their upcoming holiday show, "Twas the Opening Night Before Christmas" Dec. 8-10 at Northgate High School in Walnut Creek. The original musical is a story about the magic of putting on a pageant during the holiday season. It follows a high school in the midst of auditions, callbacks, opening night, and all the comedy and drama that comes with it.

The show features favorite holiday classics and is a heartwarming story of love, hope and holiday cheer the whole family will enjoy. Showtimes and ticket information can be found at www.peterpanfoundation.org.

What's inside my backpack

By Karen Rosenberg

The things I carry in my head, in my hands, on my back, on my shoulders – both mentally and physically – all add to the heavy burden I drag through each and every day.

Everyone has things that weigh them down. As a high schooler, my backpack represents my life and the things that are important to me, mirroring my livelihood and ideals. Take a peek inside and you'll find my keys, my textbooks and my lunch – three things that heavily influence my life.

My keys represent my home and family. Growing up in an affluent society always caused me to be self-conscious of my financial situation, and I felt ashamed of living in a small, cluttered apartment. While many of my peers don't even know what it's like to share a bedroom, I struggled to share a bed with my mom, niece and sister. My two-bedroom apartment never seemed to live up to the million dollar houses around every corner, but I realize now that the size of my house doesn't mirror my character.

My textbooks are another symbolic item hiding in the pocket of my backpack. While carrying all my school supplies can be physically exhausting, the mental burden weighs heavily on me. My mother grew up in a third world country and life got in the way of college. My father grew up in a time where education was not necessary to be successful and was reserved to the wealthy few. My siblings never managed to make it through college. Normally this would lower expectations, but instead it pushes me to reach new heights and make a name for myself, something my family never dreamt possible for themselves. But while my family claims to be proud of who I am today, somehow my best never seems to be good enough. I set unrealistic standards, trying to make up for whatever my loved ones have lost, thus causing me to fail in the end. Knowing I am still young gives me hope that one day I will find my true calling and focus on goals I set for myself, rather than on goals set by those around me.

And then there is my lunch. To many, this may seem simple and quite insignificant, but for me, my lunch represents something that I have struggled with my entire life: my body. My friends have said I'm beautiful, my relatives have called me gorgeous, but that is not what I see when I look in the mirror every morning. Instead, I see someone who

is overweight and mediocre. I analyze my body, making an account of all the imperfections: my "too Asian" eyes, "thick" thighs, short stature, flat filipino nose. But most of all, I see someone who is not happy with her body. Someone who, at times, isn't confident enough to go to school without makeup. Someone who is ashamed of going swimming in public, in fear that she doesn't look like the girls plastered on billboards or magazine covers.

My friends try to comfort me, saying social media is just a bomb of Photoshop, good makeup skills, and the right lighting, but it's hard to listen when the people telling you this look like supermodels themselves. What hurts most is not seeing those around me with perfect bodies and flawless skin, but hearing from someone you love that "you're pretty, but you could always lose a couple pounds," or "are you sure you want to eat that?"

Every time I go and get boba with friends, or binge eat popcorn at the theater I think about how much I will have to work out to burn this off. Is it worth it? And at some point, I just give up and don't care anymore, thinking, Why am I so ugly? Why am I so fat? This societal expectation has plagued many young women my age, and, sadly, I have not yet figured out how to overcome it.

These are among the many things I carry. The expectations I've grown up having and the expectations I hope to one day diminish. We all have things that we aspire to be, to do and to have, but differentiating this from what others expect of you is the hard part.

What do you carry?



Karen Rosenberg is a junior at Acalanes High School. She is the president of the Acalanes Key Club, participates in Track and Field, and is a tutor for Mathnasium in Lafayette.

In Memory

Prudence "Prudy" Mary Mack

Sept. 17, 1947 – Nov. 15, 2017



Prudence "Prudy" Mary Mack, 70, of Pleasant Hill, died too early in life at 10:44 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2017 in her son's home after a sudden bout of aggressive cancer. Prudy died peacefully in the arms of her son, Thomas Mack, and daughter-in-law Edy Hayashi-Mack. She was born Sept. 17, 1947 in Brooklyn, New York, to Anna and Joseph Fiore. She married young and had three children who became the center of her life. As her children grew up, her passion was the love of her family and her relationship with Jesus. She moved to Florida in 1989. Then, in 2003 and after 37 years of marriage, she started a new life in California. Prudy was a strong, radiant, joyful, Jesus loving woman.

Prudy is survived by and will constantly be loved by her children (Frederick Charles Mack, Deborah Ann Comstock, Thomas Joseph Mack), seven grandchildren (Tyler Comstock, Briana Grether, Kaitlyn Comstock, MaKayla Comstock, Kai Mack, Emily Mack, and Frederick Mack), her extended Hayashi and Comstock family, Sue Laird and Camille Miller, and her friends of which there are just too many to name.

Professionally, she assisted in the school district in various positions in Florida and then again after her move to California until she finally became the Accounts Receivable Technician for Acalanes Union School District for the past eight years.

There will be a Celebration of Prudy's life on Jan. 21 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building from noon to 3 p.m. for family and friends.

In lieu of sending flowers, please give thanks and consider donating to the American Cancer Society.

In Memory

Carl Joseph Weber

April 19, 1928 – October 19, 2017



Orinda resident, Carl Joseph Weber passed away peacefully on October 19, 2017 surrounded by his family. He touched the lives of many with his dedication and commitment to serving, welcoming others and by his easy style of communication. He was a wealth of knowledge and shared it effortlessly with those around him.

Carl was born in Evanston, IL on April 19, 1928. He graduated from Evanston Township High School then served in the US Army in Japan following World War II. He studied at the University of Heidelberg in Germany and at the University of Paris and earned a degree in mathematics from Northwestern University in 1952. On September 6, 1952, Carl married Florence (Flo) Woodman. Always adventurous, the two immediately moved to New York where he worked for a bond trading firm. Following his passion for law, he earned a JD degree from DePaul University in Chicago. In 1959, he moved his family to Orinda and initially began working for Kaiser Aluminum in Oakland. After passing the California Bar, he began practicing Worker's Compensation Law and was a longtime partner with the law firm of Hanna, Brophy, MacLean, McAleer and Jensen. All the while, he was a steward of the Orinda Community. He was vital to securing the formation of the Orinda Community Center, the incorporation of the City of Orinda, the preservation of Orinda Theater and the formation of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. He also served in many civic capacities including the Orinda Association, chairman of the Planning Commission, the Trees Committee, and the Historical Society. He was selected Citizen of the Year in 1970 and volunteer of the year by the Orinda Association in 1989 and again in 1998. Carl was an enthusiastic supporter of the arts, and was a faithful attendee of Cal Shakes, A.C.T., Berkeley Rep, the SF Symphony, the SF Opera, and the Lamplighters. Carl, as an Eagle Scout, was also dedicated to scouting, and served as a counselor for the Citizenship merit badge. He was deeply involved in the daily lives of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and most Saturday mornings he could be found at Geppetto's in Orinda with various family members.

Carl is survived by his loving wife Flo of 65 years, devoted children Joe (Judith) of Portola Valley, Wendy Thorpe of Walnut Creek, Nat (Jill) of Moraga, Liz Witbeck (Ray) of Orinda, Gretchen Latimer (Jim) of Orinda and his grandchildren: Natalie Munoz (Rene), Elle Koleckar (Kevin), Joanna Warden (Jamie), Matt Weber, Andrew Thorpe, Ted Weber, Allie Weber, Sam Weber, Tim Witbeck, Katie Latimer, Nick Latimer, Hannah Witbeck, and Jay Latimer. Carl also had 6 great grandchildren: Grace, Shepherd and Carpenter Koleckar, Lucas and Michael Munoz, and Avery Warden. Just five weeks earlier, Carl was predeceased by his brother Peter (Regina). He is also survived by his sister Natalie of Sierra Madre. His welcoming and friendly presence will be missed by all who knew him.

A celebration of life was held at the Orinda Community Center on Saturday November 25, 2017.