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My name is June Adams and my story is set to the tune of growth and a desire to keep opening new doors. I was attending outings to the New Jersey symphony with Arbor Glen before I was even a resident! That's how comfortable I felt and why I chose it as my community. I can tell you with confidence that life has been a sweet song ever since.

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## Arts & Entertainment

### Redemption in the Desert in Kean Premiere Stages' Production

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

UNION – Do coincidences just happen? Or are “chance” meetings and events predetermined? The winner of the 2016 Premiere Stages Playwright’s Contest Winner, *Las Cruces*, by Vincent Delaney, raises those questions and a boatload of other philosophical/theological musings in this powerful new play.

Las Cruces, New Mexico, is the second largest city in size only to Albuquerque. It is, coincidentally, the very hometown of John Wooten, Producing Artistic Director of Premiere Stages and the director of the season opener for the professional theatre at Kean University. Like the 11 yearly winners before it, this 80-minute play that is presented without intermission, has

gone through staged readings, rewrites, revisions and tweaks to emerge a fascinating, poignant piece of thoughtful art.

The lights go down in the intimate Zella Fry Theatre and on the side of the major set piece—a dilapidated camping trailer - appears a home movie type video of Robbie, an adorable towheaded boy of about three who is gambling on green grass. He runs, spins, falls down and is the epitome of irrepressible joy. The scene immediately turns black with a middle aged man, Sheridan, (Brian Sutherland) flashlight scanning the darkness with a sole flashlight beacon. He finds the trailer and breaks in.

We have no idea why he’s there or what his motive is to be out in the desolate desert. Neither does a sassy, sarcastic teenage girl, Soledad, (Diomargy Nunez) who is squatting in the ramshackle trailer. Sheridan tells her he is there is for research. No internet connection or cell phone connection, so how can he research, she asks him. Paranoid and skeptical of the man who claims he has rented the trailer, she nevertheless hastily gathers her things and leaves. As the story unfolds, we see he is running away. “I get screwed all the time – I played fair all my life and got screwed,” he says.

She finds reasons to return to the trailer and the unlikely pair bicker, fight and eventually settle into a comfortable relationship. A dance of lies, truth and half-truth on both sides ends with them

eventually coming to understand how they came to be where they are in life.

Multiple flashbacks throughout involve Sheridan’s wife Jane (Charlotte Cohn) who, in one scene, tries to comfort their crying infant son Robbie with hand puppets. Later, in another flashback, she lovingly places items in a box, which include a sports trophy, a baseball mitt and one of those hand puppets...typical mementos that a typical mom might keep from a typical kid’s early life. But the events in the play are anything but typical. They may be found in our nation’s headlines, but never in our backyard.

Marvelous scenic design by Patrick Rizzotti, lighting design by Brant Thomas Murray and sound design by Janie Bullard combine technical and functional expertise to place the audience in the desolate location. Director Wooten keeps the pace lively so that any thoughtful pauses or breaths accentuate a moment poignantly. He places enough physicality in the performance to keep momentum and visual interest. Playwright Delaney’s credible characters are portrayed by three actors who know their craft well, very well. Teenage Robbie played in a cameo on video by Connor McKenna is eerily real.

*Las Cruces* does exactly what good theatre should do: touch our souls, make us think and ask us to start a discussion. These characters don’t find the all the answers they need in the New Mexico desert, but see there might be redemption they seek.

For the performance schedule, visit [www.kean.edu/premierestages](http://www.kean.edu/premierestages) or call (908) 737-SHOW.



**FAMILY TROUBLES...**Brian Sutherland as Sheridan and Diomargy Nunez as Soledad in the Premiere Stages production of *Las Cruces* by Vincent Delaney.

### Hist. Soc. Presents the Lives and Art of Harry and Wende Devlin

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Historical Society and the Devlin family will present an exhibition of the lives and art of Harry and Wende Devlin at the Reeve History and Cultural Resource Center at 314 Mountain Ave. in Westfield, New Jersey. The exhibit will be opening on Saturday, September 17 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. continuing on Sunday, September 18, as well as Saturday, September 24 and Sunday, September 25 at 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment during the week. There is a suggested donation of \$5 per person.

Residents of Mountinside since 1950, the late Harry and Wende Devlin were beloved and multi-talented artists whose 28 children’s books made them famous worldwide. Their storied union began at the fine arts college at Syracuse University and they married in 1941. Harry began his career as a magazine illustrator at the end of the golden age of magazine illustration. When World War II broke out, Harry enlisted in the Navy where he created illustrations of enemy aircraft used by members of our armed forces. After his service, Harry worked at *Collier’s* and other magazines in advertising and other illustration and also became a political cartoonist - with a conscience. After landing a job at *The New York Daily News* he was asked to do a pro-Joe McCarthy cartoon. He refused, and was promptly fired. With a growing family with six children and a seventh on the way, Harry turned to book illustration. Noting that the artist took away only a fraction of what the author earned, Harry enlisted Wende to write children’s books which he would illustrate.

Wende was already enjoying artistic success with her beautiful portraits, mostly of children. She had also begun writing humorous poetry

for *Good Housekeeping Magazine*. In the mid-fifties Wende and Harry created a comic strip, entitled “Fullhouse,” inspired by the antics of their growing children in their large Victorian farmhouse, plus a barn, sitting on three acres of idyllic hilltop. Adding to the “creative chaos” were pets which included a pet donkey, a

Their most successful books were the *Cranberry* series. Their first book was *Cranberry Thanksgiving*, which remains the biggest seller of twelve *Cranberry* books. Four *Cranberry* books are still in print (published by Purple House Press) including *Cranberry Thanksgiving*, *Cranberry Halloween*, *Cranberry Valentine*, and *Cranberry Christmas*. The latter was made into a half-hour cartoon by Ocean Spray *Cranberry* for ABC’s 25 Days of Christmas.

On view will be their original paintings, comic strips, children’s book illustrations, military illustrations, and books.

Wende and Harry’s partnership of love and creativity continued for 60 years of marriage. They had seven children, and many inherited their artistic talents. Artworks and books of five of their children will also be on view. A short movie about the Devlins will play in a separate room.

Twenty-eight children’s books, which have sold in the millions, portraits and fine art remain the Devlin legacy in our local history. They loved Westfield and Mountinside and the state of New Jersey, contributing significantly to arts advocacy and to community causes. Harry drew a wonderful series of illustrations of downtown Westfield which are permanently housed at the Westfield Historical Society. Remembered for their gracious, generous hospitality locally, and for their influence on the children they continue to touch through their books throughout the world, Wende and Harry Devlin were consummate artists in an extraordinary marriage.

For more information, please contact the Westfield Historical Society at [westfieldhistoricalsociety.org](http://westfieldhistoricalsociety.org) or call (908) 654-1794.



Harry and Wende Devlin

pair of geese, and poodles.

Harry began painting fine art, focusing on his love of American architecture, rendering realistic portraits of historical treasures. In the late fifties, he gathered his paintings to illustrate and write his first book, *To Grandfather’s House We Go*. Later on, in 1991, these and many other paintings would be featured at the Morris Museum, as well as in countless other museums and exhibits. Harry’s magnum opus was “Portraits of American Architecture: Monuments to a Romantic Mood, 1890-1900,” featuring 95 of his original paintings.

*Old Black Witch*, written by Wende and illustrated by Harry, was this talented couple’s first collaboration and it was a runaway success. A movie called *Winter of the Witch* was based on this book and became a cult favorite in the ‘60’s, appearing on PBS for many years.

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