

Springfield Writer Inspires Dieters in 'Chicken Soup'

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

AREA — Since the first *New York Times* best-selling "Chicken Soup for the Soul" book was published in the 1980s, the series has inspired millions of readers with its heartwarming and uplifting stories.

The most recent edition to the series, "Chicken Soup for the Dieter's Soul: Inspiration and Humor to Help You Over the Hump," contains a story written by Springfield resident Ken Shane.

In his narrative, "Slow and Steady," Mr. Shane explains how he challenged his doctor's prediction that he was heading towards a medical catastrophe and made a personal commitment to seek good health.

When his doctor confronted him about his unhealthy lifestyle in August 2005, Mr. Shane was 54 years of age. He was overweight, had high blood pressure, high cholesterol and was a borderline diabetic. He smoked and lived on junk food.

"Hearing that you have all the warning signs for a heart attack or stroke will definitely inspire you to change your lifestyle, and quickly," Mr. Shane explained.

The author stopped smoking, be-

gan eating a low-fat diet and started exercising 30 minutes a day. Working at his own "Slow and Steady" pace, he has lost 35 pounds and, in the process, steered his blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels back towards normal.

A professional writer, Mr. Shane is a frequent contributor to *The Aquarian Weekly* and a columnist for the monthly newsmagazine *Thrive NYC*.

He mostly writes about music, but lately has been branching out into other areas, including travel writing, which he hopes to do more of in the future.

A Springfield resident for 17 years, Mr. Shane is also a songwriter who has been in the music business all his life. In 2003, he released an album of original music entitled "South

Ridgeway Avenue," and he is presently at work creating a new album.

Additionally, he manages a band from Asbury Park called Days Awake. Mr. Shane hopes readers of "Slow and Steady" come away from the story with a sense of empowerment to take control of their health.

"I hope that my story will inspire people," he said.

For more information on Ken Shane, visit kenshane.com.



Ken Shane



By VICTORIA McCABE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

I suppose Fall Out Boy has reason to brag. The band's last album, 2005's "From Under the Cork Tree," launched the boys from the Chicago punk/hardcore scene onto the main stage of emo-punk and turned them into megastars. They move units, as they remind us in lyrics past, and they have protégés (see Panic! At The Disco, signed to FOB bassist/lyricist Pete Wentz's own label).

So all eyes are on "Infinity on High," released last week, to see where the Chicago quartet will take the new brand of emo rock. And on the new album, the bragging is as loud as ever — "I can write it better than you ever felt it," Wentz boasts on "Hum Hallelujah."

Sigh. Okay Pete, pat yourself on the back. It wouldn't be quite as admirable if your songs weren't so contagious. And there's the thing about this band. Your first instinct is to laugh them off as the puffed-up boy band of this teenage generation. But when it comes down to it, their music is often too catchy to ignore.

Now, to clear one thing up, the whole "emo" label has never quite sat right with this music fan. The term, originally applied to "emotional hardcore" bands back in the mid '80's, has morphed into a loaded adjective thrown at bands as unrelated as Dashboard Confessional, Death Cab for Cutie, Bright Eyes and My Chemical Romance. The mere mention of the word is enough to induce groans in some circles, and to some it's an immediate turnoff — the frustrating thing is that the word can't definitively describe any one musical aesthetic anymore.

So, since we must, pencil Fall Out Boy into the kind of emo that blends pop-punk energy with hardcore-punk spirit. The boys infuse their music with a wild power that blows most of those similar emo-labeled acts out of the water. The band's first full-length release, "Take This To Your Grave," may be the only one that really kicks around some hardcore screaming, but echoes of that intensity carry over to "From Under the Cork Tree" and "Infinity on High."

If they are the pioneers of the mainstream's "emo rock" (and they are), the message "Infinity on High" sends to their followers and wannabes is diversity. They've got Babyface producing tracks and Jay-Z, president of

Def Jam Records, recording a spoken intro to the album's first song. "Thanks fr th Mmrs" (that's "Thanks for the Memories" to the post-puberty set) builds on horns and strings; "You're Crashing, But You're No Wave" is, of all things, a courtroom drama scene with a professional choir as the jury. "Infinity on High" has a tracklisting as varied as the tempos the band oscillates between on first single "This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race."

"Bang the Doldrums" has straight-up echoes of Green Day (lead singer Patrick Stump's vocals have an uncanny resemblance to Billie Joe Armstrong here). Stump delivers some of his best soaring lines over the unassuming rock of "The (After) Life of the Party."

Wentz's lyrics are all about puns and double entendres, simultaneously scoffing at and embracing his band's fame, the music scene and the diary-like sentiments most of their songs revolve around. And there are some great gems and jabs — "I thought I loved you, it was just how you looked in the light," he writes on "Hum Hallelujah," which lays fickle teenage love over a snippet of Leonard Cohen's now-ubiquitous "Hallelujah," which has been recorded by artists from Jeff Buckley to Rufus Wainwright to Imogen Heap and got pushed in front of the teen-pop-culture train on the sadly doomed "The OC." Nothing about Fall Out Boy's allusions is accidental, and their creation here is pretty clever.

Down tempo "Golden" is really the only doper; it's not bad, but a meditative reflection just doesn't feel like the right fit for the middle stretch of a Fall Out Boy album.

The boys save the best for last. "I've Got All This Ringing In My Ears And None On My Fingers" is a dark two-toy jam with some really gritty vocals and a great expansive chorus. "We're the new face of failure," Stump sings ironically on one standout track. But then, it's that irony that really defines Fall Out Boy — by standing on the teenage-angst soapbox, the boys have become the new face of rock success. And they know it.

This is the kind of guilty pleasure that it's hard to feel guilty about. Sure, they're darlings of the under-14 crowd, sure, they're self-important and self-indulgent writers — but they're smart, and man, can they write catchy tunes.

MS's Trailside Offers 'February Festivities'

MOUNTAINSIDE — Trailside Nature and Science Center will offer "February Festivities" adult, family and children's programs during Presidents' Day weekend, February 16 to 20.

Kicking off the annual festivities is a free history lecture entitled "Martha Washington" tomorrow, February 16, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. for adults ages 18 and older. The lecture is sponsored in part with funding from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. Space is limited, so pre-registration is required. Pat Jordan, a member of the Ameri-

can Historical Theater for more than 10 years, will recreate the life of Martha Washington dressed in an authentic costume from the period. Widowed at an early age, Martha took her two surviving children to Mount Vernon when she married George Washington.

Festivities continue on Saturday with a variety of entertaining and interactive programs for families at Trailside designed to heighten awareness of the natural world during the winter months.

Space is limited and classes fill quickly, so pre-registration is required for all programs and workshops. The fee for each program is \$4 per person for Union County residents and \$5 for out-of-county participants unless otherwise noted.

Highlighting the "February Festivities" programs are two evening classes. The fee for each evening program is \$5 per person for Union County residents and \$6 for out-of-county participants.

For a complete listing of "February Festivities" programs and children's workshops or for information on events and summer camps, call (908) 789-3670 or visit ucnj.org/trailside.

Trailside is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside and is a service of Union County.



YEAR OF THE BOAR... Union Chinese School celebrates Chinese New Year last Saturday, February 10, with a student performance at Edison Intermediate School in Westfield.

'Dueling Pianists' Perform At SP JCC Fundraiser

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The husband-and-wife entertainment team of Michael and Amy Pickering — also known as the "Dueling Pianists" — recently brought its mix of music and comedy to the Jewish Community Center of Central New Jersey (JCC).

Their performance took center stage in an evening dedicated to fundraising for the JCC.

The Pickerings joined forces as entertainers three years ago when they began taking their dueling pianos and comedy show on the road.

Currently, they perform worldwide at a lengthy list of venues that includes Fortune 500 companies, theatres, concert halls, international charitable organizations, cruise ships and places of worship.

In addition to their singing and piano-playing, which earned them an encore at their JCC performance, the couple pride themselves on making "clean" comedy a part of their act.

"We find clean humor much more funny, creative, entertaining and valuable than blue humor," said Michael.

"Our comedy is very spontaneous and genuine and our audiences respond extremely well to it. In fact, they expect, enjoy and appreciate it," he said.

Audience participation is very much a part of the "Dueling Pianists" act, and many of the selections played by the duo were suggested by the audience and performed impromptu.

"The whole JCC was abuzz the next day about how great Michael and Amy were, and how much fun people had at the event. It was definitely a huge

success," said Gale Miller, public relations director for the JCC.

Collaboratively, the Pickerings bring years of entertainment experience to their performances. Amy, who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Musical Theater Performance from the University of Northern Colorado, has worked onstage at Six Flags and Busch Gardens amusement parks, in several equity theaters in Denver, Colo. and has been featured in several national commercials.

She has also sung lead vocals across the country with various bands and hosted a pilot episode for a feature documentary entitled "America's Honky-Tonks." She is also a dancer.

Michael, who has an extensive background as a composer, director and musical director, has entertainment in his blood. He began his show-business career at the age of three months by performing in his family's trampoline act, touring nationwide and around the world at circuses and fairs. He has also entertained with the world-famous Harlem Globetrotters.

According to Michael, he began performing as an actor, musician, musical director and director with numerous professional theatrical companies in his high school in Colorado. His equity stage performances have won awards around the county.

Michael has also hosted his own children's television show in the Denver area and has appeared nationally in television commercials and various shows.

More information about Michael and Amy can be found on their website: michaelandamy.com

NJPAC Conducts Seventh Young Artist Talent Search

WESTFIELD — More than 700 applicants are expected for the seventh Annual New Jersey Performing Arts Center's (NJPAC) "Young Artist Talent Search" (YATS), a weekend for young tri-state performers to audition for spots in NJPAC's arts training and scholarship programs.

Audition applications may be obtained online at njpac.org or by calling the Talent Search Hotline at (973) 353-8009. NJPAC's Arts Education Department will offer workshops in February 2007 to help applicants prepare for their auditions.

Preliminary auditions will also be held for the NJPAC/Westfield Young Artists' Cooperative Theatre (WYACT) Summer Musical Program.

NJPAC's Arts Education Department will offer free audition workshops to all YATS applicants. Workshop instructors will offer advice on technique, presentation, material selection and other key audition elements in sessions scheduled today, February 15, and Monday, February 26.

NJPAC's Wachovia Jazz for Teens is open to middle- and high-school students, ages 13 to 18 (advanced 12-year-olds will also be considered). Approximately 75 students will be selected for two semesters of 11 classes each, September through December and February through May. Students may apply for one or both semesters.

Classes include a combination of jam sessions, ensemble rehearsal and performance, classroom instruction and concert field trips under the di-



Playwright Jonathan Citron will discuss his new play with the audience after the script-in-hand performance on Saturday at The Theater Project.

Calderone Accepts Kinder. Registration

AREA — The Calderone School of Music in East Hanover and Springfield will accept registration for the spring semester of Kindermusik, a music and movement program for children. Spring semester begins January 29.

Kindermusik enhances a child's total development by strengthening physical, emotional, social and cognitive skills at an early age.

For information, call (973) 428-0405 or visit calderoneschoolofmusic.com

rection of a faculty comprised of accomplished jazz artists.

NJPAC/WYACT Summer Musical Program is a collaborative effort to offer young people a firsthand opportunity to learn about musical theater by participating in a full-scale, professional-level musical production.

The preliminary audition of cast and orchestra applicants is in preparation for open auditions, to be held in the 2007 spring season for the upcoming NJPAC/WYACT Summer Musical Program. Students who attend the talent search may be called back in the final round of auditions in the spring. WYACT provides a quality education to aspiring young thespians in musical theater, both in the performing and technical areas.

Young Artist Institute offers talented young performers (ages 11 – 18) a place to study in an artistically rigorous environment.

Courses are offered in acting, vocal music, modern dance and musical theater on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Each discipline meets 11 times during the course of one semester. Two semesters are offered: fall and spring.

Students will achieve the sense of personal fulfillment that comes with membership in a select group striving for the highest level of artistic excellence.

UCC's Theater Project Presents Staged Reading

CRANFORD — The Theater Project, Union County College's Professional Theater Company, will present a staged reading series of original plays by members of The Theater Project's Playwrights Development Workshop, led by Artistic Director Mark Spina.

These script-in-hand performances offer the immediacy of actually sitting in on rehearsals with the members of The Theater Project.

On Saturday, February 17, at 3 p.m. The Theater Project's series presents *An Evening Of Winifred Smith* by Jonathan Citron, directed by Arlene Schulman.

Cabaret artist Winifred Smith finds that live performance and live theater can take some very unexpected twists and turns in this original play that casts the real audience as the fictional Winfred's loyal (or not so loyal) fans.

The presentation will be followed by a discussion with the playwright, director, actors and audience, in the Union County College Student Commons, located at 1033 Springfield Avenue in Cranford. Admission is free.

For more information, call (908) 659-5189 or visit TheTheaterProject.com.



One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent
By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
1 and 1/2 popcorns

Because I Said So, about a meddling mom hell bent on steering her three daughters toward happiness, no matter how it hurts them, suffers from the same conceit as its protagonist. Both mean well. But in anxious attempts to serve up a lot of froth and goodwill, they wind up foaming at the mouth.

Certainly, the script by Karen Leigh Hopkins and Jesse Nelson wants us to find Daphne Wilder irritatingly comical. But it does so to a fault. We are quickly beleaguered by her relentless intercessions. Only Diane Keaton's good name keeps us from completely hating her.

Still, we can't help but be curious. Daughters Milly (Mandy Moore), Maggie (Lauren Graham) and Mae (Piper Perabo) seem perfectly happy in their dysfunctional, Venice, California, version of *Little Women*.

In fact, they share a pretty good sense of humor about their control-freak mother. We can only assume that being alliteratively named prepared them for someone with her overweening sense of self-importance.

Otherwise, a lot of director Michael Lehmann's film seems asked. Too bad. While most movie misfires can be cited for their neglected potential, it is especially true of this one.

Philosophizing about the whys and wherefores of the omnipresent mother, *Because I Said So* rubs frustratingly close to some rather painful truths. But the masks of comedy and drama doubtlessly failed to establish ground rules before the cameras started turning.

In short, here's a comical moment, and now here's an instance of supposed deep revelation, and now here's another funny part. It's called plodding along.

As a result, any chances of the increasingly inconsistent plot winning our suspension of disbelief is lost, as is the film's prospect of being a comedy in the classical sense of the term.

The picture suffers an identity crisis. Granted, while the overall project certainly qualifies as a tragedy, the lone option remaining for director Lehmann's movie is to attempt classification as a farce. But this requires being really funny. Hence, the inn is closed to that idea, too.

Indeed, there's a laugh here and there, just as there is an occasional truth peering out among the helter-skelter contrivances. But what mostly attracts our attention is the sheer chutzpah of this misbegotten mother.

Without question, there exists in real life, we dare admit, more than one model for the monster Miss Keaton

imparts. Yet fictionalization compounds the offensiveness. Thus it confronts us that the filmmakers don't find her quite as abhorrent as we do.

Rather, they insist on the humor in it all as Daphne butts in over the top by secretly placing a personal ad in search of a boyfriend...not for her, but for Milly. Interviewing the mass of respondents in production-line rapidity at a restaurant, she settles on the buttoned-down Jason (Tom Everett Scott) as her future son-in-law.

But the process is not without its inadvertent byproduct. Watching Daphne sift through the potential suitors, freethinking, opposite-of-Jason Johnny (Gabriel Macht) has his interest piqued. This poor Milly needs saving, thinks the musician. The unintentional triangle is set in motion.

That's it for creative touches. Save for an oddly interjected segue or two, the usual stucco follows as the unwitting lass must then choose between devil and angel. Naturally, appearances can be deceiving.

Meanwhile, Mom realizes the fallout from her intervention and once more tries her fancy footwork in the backfield. All of which again dooms us to the tiresome task of judging her.

Sure, we'd give dispensation and let loose a laugh if the buttinsky were Lucy and it was the 1950s, when people smoked, ate a lot of red meat and left their doors unlocked. The 60's changed all that.

Now we're all following our own star. As should Milly. Besides, the script itself exhibits symptoms of multiple personality.

On the one hand, it beseeches sympathy for Daphne, as when the sisters Wilder accuse her of hovering. Mom launches into a reasonably touching diatribe, informing them that "God couldn't be everywhere, so that's why he invented mothers." Never mind that the sentiment came from a Hallmark card they gave her.

Yet, just as we start to empathize with the single mom, she pulls another emotional trespass. Hmm? Is Daphne a truly caring parent, or just a selfishly projecting witch?

We suspect it's a bit of both. And in the right hands it'd be a topic worthy of artistic speculation. Problem is, while spewing a conveyor belt's worth of seemingly disconnected words and feelings, *Because I Said So* is never quite sure just what it's trying to say.

Because I Said So, rated PG-13, is a Universal Pictures release directed by Michael Lehmann and stars Diane Keaton, Mandy Moore and Gabriel Macht. Running time 102 minutes.

COLUMN

Iraq, Politics, Anna Nicole - Not Necessarily In That Order

Fred Rossi, Westfield Leader/The Times

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

I don't know who should feel more embarrassed—the media for its overwrought reporting of Anna Nicole Smith's death last week or me for actually watching and reading all about it.

Anna Nicole and the media—from *The New York Post* and *The National Enquirer* to E! Television and Access Hollywood to scores of gossip websites—were a long marriage made in tabloid heaven.

Her death sent those outlets into overdrive while also sucking in pretty much every mainstream media outlet, except perhaps C-SPAN. And it shined a pretty sad light on our vapid celebrity-driven culture, in which it pays to behave like a fool and to be the long-running butt of a joke.

Last Thursday, one could be forgiven for thinking all was well in the world except for the untimely death of an attention-seeker who was famous merely for being famous.

The first headlines screamed across Internet sites in mid-afternoon, and it was all downhill from there. The cable news networks scrapped their regular programming to bring us wall-to-wall coverage of this national calamity. CNN, Fox News and MSNBC ignored the real news to broadcast live reports from around the country.

We were filled in on what had happened at the hotel, when it happened, who was there, what the rumors were, where the body was, where Anna Nicole's five-month-old baby was and what Hugh Hefner's reaction was.

Celebrity-watchers were dusted off to offer their opinions on everything from the death scene to the autopsy to who'd be getting her millions to who in Anna Nicole's circle might be in hot water.

We were also treated to informative live interviews with those who knew her best—mostly attorneys past and present—about her train wreck of a life, her triumphs and tragedies and her rise to the top of the celebrity mountain.

On CNN's "Larry King Live," the wife of TrimSpa's president and a former female wrestler reminisced about Anna Nicole. MSNBC cancelled its night-time news lineup so Rita Cosby could talk to reporters in Florida, Hollywood, Texas, New York and even London, where the British tabloids were salivating almost as much as their American counterparts.

Fox did likewise, meaning we were treated to the hilarity of watching right-wing altar boy Sean Hannity engage in a straight-faced interview with a flamboyant friend of the de-

ceased named Bobby Trendy who wore a shirt with chiffon sleeves. And no show on Fox would have been complete without an appearance by celebrity detective Geraldo Rivera, a pioneer in hyper-agitated journalism.

The networks all ran repeated footage from years past of Anna Nicole arriving, posing and preening at events, waving to the cameras, pushing through throngs of photographers and reports during various crisis moments in her life, posing some more, speaking groggily to reporters and blowing a kiss or two for good measure.

And the players came through with flying colors. There was the media, which seemed to place Anna Nicole's death on par with the President or the Pope. There was a villain of sorts in Howard K. Stern, the shady pseudo husband claiming to be her baby's father.

There were plot twists like the bizarre paternity claim by the husband of long-forgotten B-lister Zsa Zsa Gabor. There was money, like the \$500,000 paid for video footage of Anna Nicole receiving futile CPR.

We even had a character with a heavy accent, the coroner. At his post-autopsy press conference, he was asked about every possible cause of death short of aliens while one reporter distinguished herself by asking the doctor if he'd found any evidence, not of murder or an overdose, but of plastic surgery.

The only thing missing was a hero, someone claiming they'd tried to straighten out Anna Nicole. But why would anyone have wanted to do that? An Anna Nicole Smith minus the over-the-top behavior would have been far less interesting—to her gangers on, to the media and to the public.

Voyeuristic America gobbled up everything the media dished out. Perhaps these feeding frenzies surrounding celebrity deaths serve as a sort of escape for Americans from the grind of war and terrorism and nasty politics and other stresses of daily life. But what exactly are we escaping into?

Anna Nicole Smith took Andy Warhol's "everyone will be famous for 15 minutes" prediction and ran with it. But famous for what? Apparently, that didn't matter to the media as it fell all over itself to cover last week's circus.

Hours and hours and pages and pages of coverage, but why? After witnessing the Anna Nicole death spectacle, one wonders how the media will react if a celebrity with real talent and accomplishment—a Paris Hilton or a Lindsay Lohan, for example—happens to meet an early demise.