

# Sing-along with Susan proves learning is fun

By KATIE KERWIN

"Now be honest: how many of you out there thought I lived in your television?"

More than a dozen of the 50-odd youngsters gathered around the stage at Oakland Mall waved their hands in the air.

"Will you stop staring at me like: 'How did she get out of there? ... and how's she going to get back in?'" Loretta Long instructed her audience in a mock-serious tone. "I don't live in your TV set."

Ms. Long is known to most children as Susan, of Sesame Street. Her performances at Oakland Mall early this week combined touches of Bill Cosby, Don Rickles and Mr. Rogers. Bouncing through songs and games designed to encourage audience participation, Ms. Long had local kids clapping, dancing, singing and cheering along.

"Let me see you hop on one foot," she urged, bringing them to their feet early in the show. "Watch out for you mom — she's got to drive you home later."

"I do this instead of jogging, because I can do it in a hotel room. People often call the desk clerk, though. I guess it sounds pretty funny from downstairs."

Hopping on one foot or shaking hands and a foot to the music never stowed her conversation with the audience. Some of her asides are directed more to the parents in the crowd, as were her Rickles-style insults.

"Some of those faces out there are kind of grim," Ms. Long remarked. "Some of those dads look like they were thrown into the car with the spare tire — they didn't even know where they were going."

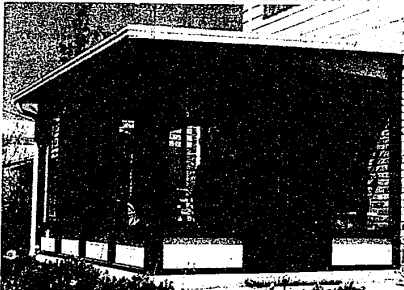
## 'Hiding Place' film at church

"The Hiding Place," the true story of Corrie ten Boom, a former Nazi prisoner, will be presented at 5:30 and 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 2, at the Troy Baptist Church, 3193 Rochester Rd.

The ten Boom family became involved in the Dutch Underground during the German occupation in World War II by hiding Jews in a secret room built in their house. Corrie's family was taken prisoner after a raid by soldiers, and Corrie was sent to the concentration camp called Ravensbrück.

Julie Harris and Eileen Heckart star in the film, a World Wide Pictures production.

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**'I can't see leaving the Rolls Royce of public television to go to the Volkswagen of commercial television.'**

— Loretta Long

THE SESAME STREET actress said she is frequently recognized on the street — more often by children than by their parents.

"Many of them get dragged away by mothers who are saying, 'Leave that lady alone,'" Ms. Long said, smiling. Away from the live audience and the TV camera, the warmth remains, but the attitude is more serious.

A teacher-turned-actress, she said she felt right at home on educational television.

"I dealt with the initial interview as if I were talking to kids in the classroom," she said. "I looked directly at the camera. Kids think you're actually looking at them."

The interview films were shown to pre-school children and the actors most popular with that group were hired for Sesame Street, Ms. Long said.

Her classroom experience came in five years of teaching, one of them in Detroit. Ms. Long was raised in Paw Paw, Mich. and graduated from Western Michigan University. She completed her doctorate in education at the University of Massachusetts since beginning work on Sesame Street.

"I SEE MYSELF as a total communicator," she said. "That can take any form: singing, talking or whatever."

"We're all educators," Ms. Long said. "Everyone has input in a child's education, because he's always learning."

"If we realized that, we might approach children differently." Concern about the impact of television on youngsters should extend beyond shows aimed specifically at children, she added.

"Producers, directors, people who sponsor television shows — if they thought about themselves as educators, they might be more careful about the things they're showing," Ms. Long said.

"I would like to see them use kiddie prime time for better things than just reruns of adult programs."

Children's television may have some catching up to do with today's youngsters. "We have children that are citizens of the 21st century," she said.

"These kids have been to the moon via TV."

EXPANSION AND UPDATING have been a challenge for Sesame Street in its 10 years on the air, Ms. Long said.

"The show grows and changes and so do we," she said of the cast. "It's up to (us) to keep it fresh."

New residents have come to the street over the years, including representatives of bilingual culture and of special education. The additions also keep her job from becoming dull, Ms. Long said.

"Every time we add a new aspect, that helps make the job interesting," she said. "It's not like commercial television, where you get one concept and ride it off into the sunset, until it's thrash and blows up."

The Children's Television Workshop program also allows the Sesame Street actors greater creative contribution than they find in commercial television, Ms. Long said.

"There's a lot of input for actors. It's not normal for actors to have a lot of input," she explained. "Some directors don't want actors to do anything but act. Luckily, our director isn't like that."

The actors meet regularly with the director and writers, she said. "We can submit story ideas, which I do," she added. Objections to scripts, scenes or characterizations can also be freely voiced, Ms. Long said.



Playing Susan, her Sesame Street role, usually comes naturally for her, Ms. Long said. "I created Susan, so it's pretty much who I am." (Staff photos by Charlie Kidd)

But problems with her role are rare, she added. "I created Susan, so it's pretty much who I am. It's mostly the result of hiring individual personalities, rather than employing actors to fill pre-determined roles," she explained.

ALTHOUGH MS. LONG said she doesn't feel her acting career is limited to children's programs, she added: "I think I'm kind of inexplicably tied up with children."

Continuing care for the public image she presents is one responsibility of her celebrity status with youngsters, she said.

"I believe one must take responsibility for the image one puts out on the screen." But she also admitted a personal preference for keeping her act clean.

"Everything I do in business, I want my family to see and be proud of," she said.

"For me the next extension is to go into producing. Let's face it: for black women today, there are just not that many roles."

She also voiced reluctance to leave the freedom of public television.

"I can't see leaving the Rolls Royce of public television to go to the Volkswagen of commercial television."

Appearing as a talk show host also

interests her, Ms. Long said. "I'm naturally curious — which is a nice way of saying I'm nosy. I'd like to expand from a show being just for children to one for the whole family."

Her rapport with the older, as well as younger, segment of her Oakland Mall audience was evident Monday. Parents cheered, sang and clapped along.

"It's really interesting to see her work with the kids," said Noreen Reichs, watching her children enjoying the show.

"Sometimes you see actors on TV and wonder if it's only staged or if it's real," she said. "But she's great."

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You would use the tools and parts available in the household.

The Livonia Mall Merchants Association is sponsoring such a contest with cash prizes being awarded for the five creative and original machines that are judged best on the basis of safety, originality and craftsmanship.

It is now an "Incredible Machine" contest. One rule of eligibility on reverse side and fill out the accompanying entrance form.

The "INCREDIBLE MACHINE" Contest

The rules for entry follow:

1. Persons of any age are eligible.
2. Your machine must run by self-contained power such as water, gravity, or batteries. No open flames, flammable fuels or animal power will be permitted. No electrical outlets will be available for any machine.
3. Overall dimensions may not exceed 6x6x6 ft.
4. All entries requiring attendants must provide them or become ineligible for judging.
5. A moisture-proof covering must be provided beneath the machine to protect the mall floor from oil, water or other possible damage. Entries not in compliance will be ineligible.
6. Deadline for entries is September 1, 1979. An entry fee of \$5.00 (Five Dollars) \* is required to guarantee display space for your entry. Your entry fee will be refunded if available display space is filled.
7. Contestants should enter the Livonia Mall at the "H" entrance, 9:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 17, 1979. Contestants will remove their "Incredible Machines" after 5:30 p.m., Sunday, October 21. Entries not picked up Sunday will be discarded.
8. Judging will be conducted at 3 p.m., Sunday, October 21, 1979. Prizes will be awarded on the basis of originality, craftsmanship and safety.
9. The following prizes will be awarded:

1st Prize - \$500.00  
2nd Prize - \$300.00  
1st Honorable Mention - \$100.00  
2nd Honorable Mention - \$50.00

10. To become an "Incredible Machine" contestant fill out the accompanying entrance form and mail to:

Livonia Mall Merchants Association, Inc.  
29514 W. Seven Mile Road  
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\*ALL STUDENTS EXEMPT FROM ENTRY FEE

The "INCREDIBLE MACHINE" Contest

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
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Entry fee of \$5.00 (Five Dollars) is enclosed.  
Deadline for receiving entrance form is September 15, 1979.

Mail form to: Livonia Mall Merchants Association, Inc.,  
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