

'Magnetic' reading

John Killeen has a bone to pick with publishers who opt for blockbuster sales while sending some well written literary works off to the out of print graveyard. He talks about one such book on Page 5D.

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***10

Stan gives tinsel town 'write' stuff

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

As an 11-year-old self-proclaimed television mogul, Stan Zimmerman sat in his bedroom reading Variety, chomping on candy cigars and watching "Love American Style."

One of the segments sparked an idea for a TV series, so he programmed it on his "fourth network."

"Two months later, 'Happy Days' came on the air, and I ran downstairs yelling at my mother, 'You must have called Hollywood and told them about my idea!'" Zimmerman, now 28, recalled. "The same thing happened a couple of times. I would cast the show with stars, not kids from the neighborhood."

"It was my fantasy world."

More than a decade later, his fantasy became a reality. Zimmerman, a former Southfield resident, is now developing television programs for Lorimar in Los Angeles. He's been writing TV scripts in Hollywood for five years.

Zimmerman and his partner, James Berg, have created episodes for "Fame," "Brothers," "The Golden Girls" and "Hooperman." The team earned a Writers Guild nomination for Best Comedy Episode of 1986 for their work on "The Golden Girls," but the honor went to "Kate and Allie."

ZIMMERMAN and Berg also co-wrote and co-produced their first feature film, "The Ruthe Ruddle Story," a coming-of-age movie about a suburban housewife who tries to rescue her sister from the hippie lifestyle in Greenwich Village during the summer of 1969. They sold the movie to Universal. Lily Tomlin will star in it.

"The movie gave us a lot of confidence," Zimmerman said, while munching on turkey salad at the Beachwood Cafe, across the street from Ned Beatty's home in the Hollywood hills. (Zimmerman lives in a "hilltop hideaway" with a marble fireplace — toy marbles — a dinette set from a mental institution and sleek, European-designed couches and chairs.)

"When someone like Lily Tomlin, who we've respected since we were kids, responds to something we've created, it's exciting."

The Writers Guild strike has delayed filming of the movie and halted work on TV shows. But Zimmerman and Berg are taking it in stride.

"Writers don't have any control," Berg said. "That's why we're striking."

Added Zimmerman: "We didn't think we could get control on our first movie. But a lot of people were interested in it, and we were able to have a little leverage in negotiations."

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— Stan Zimmerman

most sought-after commodities in the industry.

"I'd like to be able to make movies like Woody Allen, to have the freedom to write, act and direct like he does," Zimmerman said.

After years of writing for other sitcoms, Zimmerman and Berg look forward to creating their own shows.

"It's hard to go in to work and write somebody else's version of a (program)," Zimmerman admitted. "When you pitch an idea, they tell you to write a show that you wouldn't necessarily watch. They keep lowering the intelligence level."

"We started turning down jobs because we thought, 'Do we want to spend seven days a week until 2 or 3 a.m. on a show that we don't believe in?'"

They both raved about the new dramatic (a new term for drama/comedy) such as "thirtysomething," "Molly Dodd" and "The Wonder Years." But they'd like to inject more comedy in that genre.

"I'd love to do a comedy that's a cross between 'Molly Dodd' and 'The Golden Girls,'" Zimmerman said.

Breaking up serious scenes with comedy is their forte.

For example, in "The Ruthe Ruddle Story," there's an emotional scene where Ruthe's sister kicks her out of her Greenwich Village apartment. While in the cab, Ruthe removes a moist towellette from her purse and wipes her brow. She forgets her purse in the cab and pulls out a dime from her shoe to make a phone call.

"We go more for the quirkiness than the ha-ha slapstick kind of joke," Zimmerman said.

THEIR zany view of life stems from their childhood.

"Neither of us were the most popular kids in school," Berg said. "We each spent time on the sidelines watching other people."

Zimmerman and Berg teamed up eight years ago, when they were students at New York University.

A 1977 graduate of Southfield High School, Zimmerman studied drama at NYU. From the time he was 7 years old, he honed his acting skills at the Cranbrook Summer Theatre School.



Stan Zimmerman may not be as familiar as Clark Gable or Alan Alda, but the former Southfield resident is making a name for himself as a script writer in Hollywood.

CONTROL and freedom are the

Please turn to Page 4

R.U. Syrlus

Karlos Barney



More proof that laughter is not always the best medicine.

Getting away — for one day or two

By Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

Q: We are two mothers with special plans for the summer. Our husbands have agreed to look after the kids while we do a series of day trips, and even a couple of short weekends.

We don't want to play golf or sun on the beach. We want something interesting and active. We've thought of an interesting class, some festivals, learning to use a camera somewhere, maybe even a little theater. Both of us are teachers.

A: Best idea I've heard in a long time. You'll love your kids even more after you've had some time for yourself.

The first thing that popped into my head when I read your letter was an image of the National Storytelling Festival held every year in Jonesborough, Tenn. It's great fun and a perfect place for women who are both mothers and teachers.

Too far for you, but the National Storytelling Institute has a number of seminars around the country, including one July 9-14 in Mount

Pleasant. Your husbands may not be accommodating enough to look after the kids that long, but if the idea interests you, start planning for another year.

Write to the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS), P.O. Box 309, Jonesborough, Tenn. 37659. Or contact Cella Goodman of the Detroit Story League at 356 8069 for other storytelling events in the area.

For example, the Michigan Storytelling Festival will take place in Crossroads Village near Flint June 24-25. That could be your first stop.

FESTIVAL! That's the big word in Michigan. Take your cameras and explore some of them. Telephone toll-free (800) 5432-YES for a main list, but you'll need to get detailed lists from all four Michigan travel associations to cover them all — Southeast Michigan, 555-8220; East Michigan (517) 695-8823; West Michigan (616) 458-8557; Upper Peninsula, (906) 774-9400.

Here are some of the festivals scheduled after Memorial Day: Midland Festival of the arts June 1-18;

Battle Creek Cereal Festival June 2-4; Festival '88, Grand Rapids, June 3-5; Mackinac Island Lilac Festival

June 3-12; Captain Phogg Balloon

Please turn to Page 2



MICKY JONES

A vacation without the husband and children could include a trip to the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tenn., where animated storytellers entertain audiences at the Swapping Ground.