

# Observer & Eccentric SUBURBAN LIFE

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(FPA)

## At Orchard Ridge

### Children's theater accents imagination

By LORAIN McCLISH

A line from a children's story book that reads "gathering sun rays for cold winter days" may well describe the work of the members of the Orchard Ridge Theatre Guild who bring live theatre to children's groups throughout the area for nothing more than the request.

They'll be seen next in Farmington with skits from three stories at the Farmington Community Library on Tuesday and Thursday, Feb. 11 and 13. Curtain time is 7:30 p.m. for each performance.

"We don't have to get paid," volunteered one member of the cast, "its priceless just seeing the kids' reactions."

In addition to working without money, they also work without props, without scenery, in street clothes, and not much more than a grease pencil for make-up.

For the three skits the crew is preparing now, one bench will serve as a table, a wall, a bed, a stage within a stage, a car, a merry-go-round and a ferris wheel.

WALLACE SMITH, a speech and theater professor at Oakland Community College is faculty advisor for the student operated guild.

He is producing the plays, will take a part in some children-participation storytelling, and thinks of himself as "helper I help them clean it up."

make a tighter production out of it if it needs it," he says.

Of the bare stage format the guild uses, he says, "Our imagination is given to us through the television set and we're losing what little we have left, so we're trying to bring it back to the kids, through theater."

"We let the action and the stories stimulate the imagination and it never fails. We've proven that you don't need fancy costumes and fancy props."

ALL OF THE stories that are in the repertoire now stemmed from the Gaslight Festival held on the campus last spring when the touring idea of bringing the plays into the community got under way.

They were chosen on the basis of three hard rules Smith is adamant about: non-sexist, non-violent and non-racist.

The guild was booked for two performances a week throughout the fall term and expect to be able to do more this spring.

"The hardest thing we had to cope with was scheduling. So many in the guild work part or full time, go to school during the day or in the evenings," Smith said.

The expected upped number of performances will come through an idea Smith managed to put into effect by having three different companies (of about ten persons each) all involved in the same repertoire.

"We've got it now so that most of the actors know all of the parts and many of them can double or interchange roles in one performance," he said.

The group has performed in Children's Hospital, several times, in nursery school and elementary schools and in day care centers. All of the performances are geared for those from pre-school to about third grade level.

SMITH TALKED highly of the guild members: the enthusiasm they had for the work they were doing and how they were able to convey that feeling to an audience. It wasn't hard to understand what he was talking about.

We looked around the room to see a young man perfecting a juggling act, and a group of four or five improvising how to "get a good feeling that jumped out of your pocket."

The cast will produce "Frederick," the story of a field mouse; "What's the Matter with Carruthers?" the story of a grumpy bear; and "The Brute Family" who are converted from Brutes into Nice People.

The guild will be joined by the Candyman Group from the Kendallarks on the bill that will make up the library's Valentine Day party.

Registrations are necessary for the performances are being taken now by the library staff, by phone, 477-1313, or in person.



Photographed  
by  
Harry Mauthe



## Death takes Rhoda Niss; foundation asks aid

By MARGARET MILLER

A valiant seven-year battle against kidney disease ended Feb. 6 with the death of Rhoda Niss, Livonia wife and mother who captured the heart of a community.

She and her family had made it through several years of using a kidney dialysis machine, then a kidney transplant and ensuing complications, then two strokes. As her friend and neighbor, Dianeline Brennan, put it, it was "one catastrophe after another."

A liver disorder finally took the life of Mrs. Niss. Funeral services were held Thursday at the Hebrew Memorial Chapel in Oak Park.

THROUGHOUT HER LONG illness Rhoda Niss had inspired, and been inspired by, many in this area determined to help in her fight to live.

A number of these friends, on Brewster Street, headed by Mrs. Brennan, formed the Home Dialysis Kidney Foundation, a non-profit organization which had as its sole aim financial support for Rhoda and her husband, Sidney, in their medical expense needs.

To finance the needed kidney machine, and then the supplies it required, and later the transplant, many neighborhoods, businesses and clubs in Livonia, Farmington and all through the area have pushed collections and contributions.

AND NOW, with unpaid bills amounting to about \$7,500, Mrs. Brennan is asking that friends of the Niss family make a final effort to help.

"It's hard to realize how so many things could go wrong with one person," Mrs. Brennan said. "One that there could be so many complications in the financing."

"There were problems all along the way—things like if she had been on the machine a little sooner a certain program might have been able to help, or drugs that might have been covered under slightly different circumstances."

Many contributions have come in, of course, Mrs. Brennan said. "But we'd like to close the books and disband the foundation with everything paid."

THROUGH ALL the problems, Mrs. Brennan said the spirit of the Niss family never failed to amaze her. From Rhoda herself, "there was never a complaint," she added.



RHODA NISS

Sidney Niss, employed by Diamond Automation in Farmington Hills, has managed his work there and long hours beside his ill wife. "The people at the company have been wonderful to the family," Mrs. Brennan said.

In recent years, Sidney has been active in Little League and other athletics with his "all sports" junior high son, Michael.

"That's what has kept Sidney going recently," Mrs. Brennan said.

The oldest Niss daughter, Susan, is a January graduate of Clarenceville High School. She's been working three years at Botsford Hospital on a part-time basis and is hoping now to get fulltime work to finance studies at Michigan State University in the fall. Debbie is busy in the ninth grade at Clarenceville High.

"They are daughters anyone would be proud of," Mrs. Brennan said.

THE CHILDREN all were in elementary school when Rhoda Niss first became ill. One kidney had failed when Susan was born, but that didn't slow her down too much. In 1968 the second failed.

The neighbors pitched in to help with the home duties and the bills, and in the process learned a lot about kidney disease.

One thing that became apparent was that Rhoda could qualify for use of a home dialysis machine, which is attached by tubes to the patient so that it can take over the function of the kidneys, cleansing the blood of impurities.

After a stay in Wayne County General Hospital, Mrs. Niss became the hospital's second patient to get a machine for home use.

The Veterans Trust Fund paid for the machine, and the Pharmaceutical Ladies Auxiliary took over supplying medication. Rhoda and Sidney and the children and the neighbors on Brewster trained in the use of the machine.

THE HOME DIALYSIS Foundation also redoubled efforts, because it turned out there was a great deal more operating expense.

"We just never realized how much it would cost to keep things going," Mrs. Brennan said. "That went on for four years, with

Rhoda spending several hours each day on the machine. Then with kidney transplants being performed successfully more frequently, the decision was made to remove both non-functioning kidneys and await a donor for a transplant.

The operation was performed in 1972 in University Hospital at Ann Arbor, and for a time there was hope for recovery, though progress was slow.

But numerous setbacks, including a slight stroke, got in the way, and in the last few years Mrs. Niss spent a great deal of her time in a hospital bed. There was another stroke about two weeks before her death.

HER BATTLE is over now, but her friends have a final fight ahead.

"We hope people will remember her and help us finish what we started," Mrs. Brennan said. "Contributions to the Home Dialysis Kidney Foundation are tax-exempt, and we have memorial cards if people would like to make them that way."

Contributions should be mailed to Mrs. Frank Brennan, 3215 Brewster, Livonia, 48152.