

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Caring for the Children of Chernobyl: A moral imperative

Lining against the exam table in one of the maze of rooms at the pediatricians' office where she works, Phyllis Meer of West Bloomfield appears as a pushover. Maybe it's her perpetual pleasantness, and the images of cuddly bears on her work jacket. Maybe it's because she's surrounded by wallpaper of smiling moons, happy suns and colors so bright that they cause a spontaneous upturn at the corners of your mouth. But then, step-by-step, word-by-word, another side of Meer emerges. Who would expect that in the same soft tone that makes stubbornly reluctant children melt, Meer would sound less like a nurse and more like a social activist?

Meer, president of the Michigan Chapter of Chabad's Children of Chernobyl, is speaking next Sunday's benefit concert at the Southfield Centre for the Arts.

Children of Chernobyl is a worldwide medical relief program organized from Kfar Chabad, a village outside of Tel Aviv, to help those suffering the toxic effects from the world's worst nuclear disaster.

Silence is deafening
In the early hours of April 26, 1986, the seeds of despair, disease and death spread as an unfolding cloud from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Today, that ominous cloud continues to poison thousands of children living within several hundred mile radius of Chernobyl. Radiation has seeped into the grass, which is eaten by the cows, whose milk is imbibed by the local residents. "The levels of radiation are dangerously high," said Meer. "People really don't have a choice. They eat the food and drink the milk in that region because it's their only resource." During a recent trip to a forsaken and dilapidated playground not far from the Chernobyl reactor, Vice President Al Gore asked if anyone knew where the children had gone. The silence, apparently, has been deafening.

Advocates for children
With lead news stories following the latest turn of the stock market or that absurdist play being performed in the U.S. Congress, the continuing saga of the victims of Chernobyl has fallen from the nation's short-attention span.

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Staff photo by Jerry Zolynsky
Focused: Phyllis Meer, a nurse practitioner, sets her sights on the health of children worldwide.

Critical, popular acclaim seem surreal to first-time author

Now world: 'Memoirs of a Geisha' unveils the hierarchy of Japanese culture.

By FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
sprovenzano@ec.homecomm.net

Arthur Golden figures that his comprehension of reality has about a six-month lag time.

All things considered, Golden just isn't more honest than the typical denial-induced American male. He's on another plane altogether. "Reality," for Golden, is akin to a Hollywood-

produced version of the ultimate writer's fantasy. "I was in an airport and two people came up to me and said, 'You're a famous author, aren't you,'" said Golden. "It was a surreal experience. Most days, it's like I'm in a daze." That sounds uncharacteristically modest for an author whose first novel, "Memoirs of a Geisha," has nestled on *The New York Times* Best Sellers' List for the last year, and is the source of Steven Spielberg's next film.

Before Golden heads off to the less traveled roads of Massachusetts to finish writing his sophomore literary enterprise—which, he says, has nothing to do with Japan—he will arrive Thursday at Barnes & Noble in Bloomfield Hills to read excerpts from "Memoirs of a Geisha," and sign copies of one of the top five sellers of the year at the store.

His arrival is part of the chain book store's 4th annual Writers Harvest

program. Proceeds from sales at nationwide Barnes & Noble stores on Thursday will benefit the Food Research Action Center and First Book. Locally, these programs provide food to the hungry, and reading materials to destitute and lower-income families in metro Detroit.

"There's been great word of mouth to 'Memoirs of a Geisha,'" said Kim Divine, spokesperson for the Barnes & Noble on Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Hills.

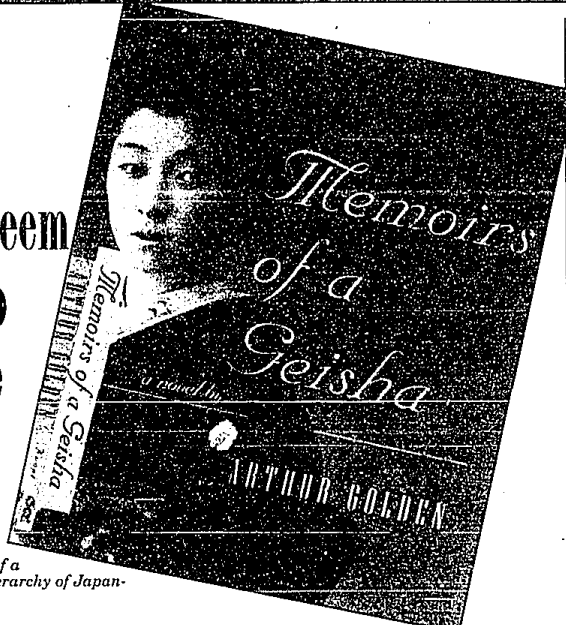
"The most common complaint among customers is they hate it to end," she said. "If there was a better book this year, I haven't read it."

Ideal material for fiction
Not since Robert James Waller stunned the literary world with his 1992 mega-seller, "The Bridges of Madison County," has a first-time author gained the type of overnight success as Golden, except perhaps for Charles Frasier, author of "Cold Mountain," which won last year's National Book Award.

Fraser like Golden had struggled with their first novels as they eked out a living teaching English. (Golden, by the way, is the great grandson of Adolph Ochs, who bought and reinvented *The New York Times* in the early 1900s.)

Unlike Waller and similar to Frasier, Golden's emerging popularity can be measured alongside a long list of impressive reviews in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *Washington Post* and *The Boston Globe*.

Of course, "overnight success" took Golden about nine years, and endless rewrites. The direction for the book became clearer three years ago when Golden said he took a "leap of faith," and changed the story from third- to a first-person narration about a



Midas touch: Novelist Arthur Golden translated his knowledge of Japanese history into a compelling story of ambition, love and the mysterious rituals of a Far Eastern culture.

geisha named Sayuri, later renamed Chiyo.

That may not seem odd if Golden had Japanese ancestors, or even dressed in drag as he sat at his word processor. But a Harvard-educated American male who never had intentions of being a novelist?

"The reason I came to this story is that it strikes me as the ideal material for fiction," said Golden, who has a master's degree in Japanese history from Columbia University.

"It was an undiscovered and misused world."

Presenting an exotic world with many Dickensian plot turns, Golden

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Dance companies share stage for common good

LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@ec.homecomm.net

Two years ago Laurie Eisenhower asked Peter Sparling to dance. Now, he's returning the invitation. In an effort to expand audiences and performing opportunities, their dance troupes, Peter Sparling Dance Company and the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble, take to the spotlight of the Media Union Video Studio in Ann Arbor Nov. 13-14.

Sparling's company goes solo with performances of all new works Nov. 6-7 in the same space. Based in the EDE Center for Dance in Rochester, Eisenhower's company recycles dances ranging in themes from Celtic to earthy and primal.

"We shared the stage at Oakland University now it's our turn to reciprocate," said Sparling, a former Plymouth resident. "We wanted to develop more performing opportunities and new audiences. It's a good education for the audience to step in

Peter Sparling Dance Company

What: Presents two weekends of performances featuring new works, and two evenings of shared programs (Nov. 13-14) with the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble. For information about the Peter Sparling Dance Company, call (734) 761-4764.

When: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, Nov. 6-7 and 13-14. In collaboration with the Ann Arbor Committee for Psychoanalysis and the Arts, there will be a pre-performance panel discussion about creativity and dance and a post-performance afterglow with the artists and committee members 7:15 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 14.

Where: University of Michigan, Media Union Video Studio, Ann Arbor.

Tickets: \$17 adults, \$10 for students, and available by calling the Michigan League Ticket Office at (734) 764-0450. The League ticket office also can provide directions to the Media Union Video Studio.

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Sharing the stage: Stephanie Pizzo is one of the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble members performing 'Celtidh,' one of the works on a joint program with the Peter Sparling Dance Company.

ART EXHIBITS

Project arts exhibit spotlights brightest, best

Canton Fine Arts Exhibition

What: Canton Project Arts presents a display of more than 90 art works including painting, pastel, printmaking, jewelry, and photography.

When: Saturday-Friday, Oct. 31 to Nov. 6. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and until 8 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday.

Where: Summit on the Park Community Center, 46000 Summit Parkway, east of Canton Center Road, Canton. For more information, call (734) 397-6450.

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

It's no accident that well-known artists are entering the Canton Project Arts exhibit. Co-chairs Linda Shapona and Banks Dishmon planned the sixth annual event with the goal of attracting recognized artists to move them a step closer to the goal of making the exhibit a regional one with the reputation of "Our Town" or "Celebrate Life." Dishmon, publisher for the Observer Newspapers, streamlined the process of putting together an exhibit of this size by writing a computer program. The data base of artists who exhibited in past shows ensures entries will continue to be drawn from the best in the region. Some of the area's most respected artists including Leslie Masters, a long-time instructor at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center; Suzanne Bauman of Bloomfield Hills; Jeri Felwick, Farmington Hills; and Jim Nawara, a Beverly

Hills resident were juried into the exhibit running Oct. 31 to Nov. 6 at Summit on the Park.

The show almost doubles in size to 91 pieces this year. From 189 entries, juror Marjorie Chell-storp, a Farmington Hills artist and professor at Madonna University in Livonia, selected 57 artists, up from last year's 32.

"We want to make it a regional art show of recognition," said Dishmon, who's co-chairing the exhibit with Shapona for the second year. "I'm excited because it's going to be the biggest show ever. The entries have grown every year and I'm looking forward to next year being even bigger and better. We hope eventually to hang 110 pieces."

Shapona left the jurying process for this year's exhibition smiling. Held to coincide with the celebration of October as National Arts and Humanities Month, the exhibition includes painting, pastel, printmaking, jewelry, and photography by



Off the wall: Donald Danald recaptures the magic of the Lascaux cave paintings in France.

Michigan artists from as far away as Saginaw.

"It's a fun show," said Shapona, Westland Chamber of Commerce executive director. "I'll make you smile. It made me smile. Art sort of has a mood to it. The exhibit is different moods and different

styles. It's colorful, a good mix of abstract and realism."

The \$1,500 in cash prizes awarded in the competition caught the eye of Nawara, an art professor at Wayne State University.

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