

2501 Harrison Street, Oakland, CA 94612
510/444-4755 www.stagebridge.org

STAGEBRIDGE

Spring 2006



Stagebridge Earns National and International Recognition

Stagebridge programs in schools and hospitals are attracting widespread interest and recognition. As the number of elders increases, there is more and more attention to ways in which older adults can give back to younger generations — particularly for inner city children, who rarely interact with grandparents, and health care workers who only see elders when they are ill.

Nurses Program Honored

When we began our “Healthy Aging (See Me!)” program a year and a half ago, we knew we were reaching a really important community need, but never thought we would attract international recognition. Last month we received word that our program of training nurses to be more compassionate towards older adults was being honored by the 2006 Blair Sadler International Healing Arts Competition. The awards recognize artists “for their exemplary visual, performing or multi-disciplinary art projects that have a measurable impact on the quality of the health care experience for patients, visitors and staff.” According to their review of our programming, Stagebridge demonstrates “one of the most innovative integrations of arts into health care that improves the quality of the health care experience for patients, their families and care givers.” On April 27, Stagebridge co-founder/director, Linda Spector, went to Chicago to accept the honor at the international conference of the Society for Arts in Healthcare.

School Programs Honored

Three years ago Stagebridge’s application to the U.S. Department of Education Arts Model Development Program was ranked 12th in the nation. Since then the company has run an extensive storytelling program in the Oakland schools. Senior storytellers mentor at risk children, professional storytelling teachers instruct students in the skills of storytelling and teachers receive training to incorporate storytelling into their curriculum. In March, Stagebridge director Dr. Kandell was invited to make a presentation in Washington D.C. at the national gathering of grantees in this program.

Then, on April 5, the manager of the Federal program, Diane Austin, made her first site visit to personally see the work that Stagebridge has been doing. In the morning she visited Rosa Parks Elementary in Berkeley. This program (funded by the West Berkeley Foundation) has been bringing 4th grade students and elders from nearby Strawberry Creek Lodge together through storytelling. Austin watched Stagebridge instructor Ruth Halpern



(L-R) Elaine Stanley, Ruth Halpern, Diane Austin, Liz Nichols, and Barbara Johnson — at Hoover Elementary School

coach students in storytelling. This prepared them for a visit by the elders, at the Lodge where she has also been teaching. In the afternoon, Austin traveled to Hoover Elementary in Oakland to see the finale of Stagebridge’s year long work. Students from two 4th and 5th grade classes told their grandparent stories that they had gathered from their families or from interviewing storytellers from Stagebridge. Austin met with school staff and was “quite impressed” at the quality and depth of work.

*The time you spend
with us is like a
family tradition.*

— a 5th grader

ABOUT TIME

A Conversation with Liz Nichols, Stagebridge Storytelling Director

by Linda Spector



Becoming a storyteller was realizing that I could be a performer. I felt the adrenaline rush that's about giving to your audience and getting back understanding and appreciation. It's personal communication on a very special level.

Liz Nichols, our delightful Storytelling Director who has a story for each of her experiences, comes from a long line of English teachers who were not storytellers, but readers. As a child in the Bronx, her parents read stories, folk tales and mythology to her and she loved passing them on to her two children, now 17 and 20. One day, her daughter surprised her by saying, “Now, tell me a story from mind, Mommy.” Liz was “blown away — we just didn’t do that in my family. I owe the discovery of my storytelling self to my daughter.” Four years later she received her storytelling certificate from Dominican College.

Liz has many other “selves.” East Asian Civilization was one of her early passions. She holds a B.A. from Brown and a M.A. from Stanford, both in Asian Studies, and speaks conversational Japanese. She spent two years in Japan when she was 25. “When you visit Japan, you soon come to the conclusion that *we* are the backward people. Americans aren’t aware of how much Japan influences us. We’re an incredibly young country. Japan is centuries beyond us.”

Between Asian Studies and Storytelling, Liz enjoyed raising her children and worked part time for international student exchange organizations. She also became a Special Project Director for the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education. She returned to school three years ago at 47 and received her elementary school teaching credential from San Francisco State University. “There was a certain amount of self-consciousness about my age, but my fantasy was to combine my two loves, storytelling and teaching.”

Liz has been involved with the storytelling community for more than a decade, teaching and participating in workshops for adults and children, serving on the Board of the Storytelling Association of Alta California, and volunteering at the Bay Area Storytelling Festival. She speaks passionately about the power of storytelling.

Stories, whether they be from mythology, folklore or our own experience, are an important way to understand that, yes, each culture is different, but basically we’re all the same. There are so many universals. Each culture has its “three impossible tasks” or its very own Cinderella. Stories are not necessarily intellectual. They become something we bring to our hearts.”

Liz began attending Erica’s Storytelling class last fall.

It was with a sense of privilege. I responded to the wisdom of those who have lived longer than me, and watched students become transformed when they told their stories — even though they were in pain, the story gave them power and strength.

Liz clearly enjoys her work. “When we visit a school and do an assembly, I love listening to the stories ... I’m like one of the kids in the audience.”

And we love listening to your stories, Liz.

New Shows

THE DREAMERS, a vocal trio featuring Stagebridge musical director Scrumby Koldewyn on keyboard and singers Cindy Carrico and Linda Wilson, premiered in San Francisco in March. The group grew out of Scrumby’s popular “Find Your Voice” singing class. The three dreamers received rave reviews from Bay Area audiences for their new arrangements of familiar songs from the 1920s through the 1960s.

SNAPSHOTS, directed by Linda Spector, resident playwright and co-director of Stagebridge, opened in Mill Valley in May. The scenes and monologues are based on photographs from the players’ history. “They are memories — fleeting memories that move across our inner vision, sometimes unexpectedly, reminding us of moments we’ve never really forgotten.”

Making Sense of Medicare Part D

By Wendy Peterson, Director, LifeLong Medical Care – East Bay Benefits Initiative

Seniors in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties lost over \$97 million in uncollected benefits in 2000. This amazing statistic is the reason that East Bay Benefits Initiative (EBBI) was established, and why its staff and partners are working to ensure that older adults can access the benefits for which they are eligible.

Early in 2005, EBBI staff realized that the coming launch of Medicare Part D, the new prescription drug benefit, would mean tremendous change in the system of benefits for older adults and people with disabilities. It was clear that the new benefit was complex and confusing. “Our response was to look for ways to communicate complex messages effectively and Stagebridge was the obvious solution,” said Deborah Workman, EBBI Program Director.

In fall 2005, a collaboration was formed and work began. The goal was to create three 20 minute DVDs covering: the basics of Plan D, how to make choices and consumer rights. The series would be available at no cost to senior centers, community groups and the media. Members of the Stagebridge ensemble and Linda Spector, company co-director, used EBBI’s Plan D information as a springboard for their work. The actors improvised likely encounters between consumers and healthcare providers. From those early improvisations, scripts were developed to communicate key information. “Those first skits were full of frustration and confusion as we experienced what individual consumers all across the country were experiencing,” said one of the ensemble members. “But, by the time we were ready for taping, we

really knew that we had crafted clear messages — down-to-earth, humorous, and memorable.”

The first part of the series aired recently on “Bay Area Business Today,” Channel 26. This show is on 5:00 – 6:00 P.M. each Saturday. The complete broadcast schedule for the Medicare Plan D series has not yet been released.

EBBI provides technical assistance to providers of healthcare and social services to assist their clients in obtaining benefits. They also offer information and assistance to individuals and family members who are trying to navigate the maze of public benefits. *For further information, please call Wendy Peterson for services in Alameda County, (510) 428-4544, or Deborah Workman for services in Contra Costa County, (510) 428-4517.*

Training Student Nurses

Jennifer Winters, Geriatric Nurse Practitioner and Samuel Merritt College Assistant Professor of Nursing

As a member of the nursing faculty of Samuel Merritt College, I teach a course entitled “Healthy Aging” to baccalaureate nursing students. Given the work of Stagebridge and the topic of my course, it seemed natural to form a partnership.

In the fall of 2004, Stagebridge gave their first performance for the nursing students in my course. The impact was dramatic. The students were completely engaged and enthralled by their performance. As a teacher, I have never seen a group of students react in such a positive way to a classroom activity.

Since this initial success, Stagebridge has performed every semester for the students in my

course. The impact is always the same, powerful, positive, and in some cases, life altering. This is the kind of experience and insight that students cannot possibly receive from a textbook. The students were not only able to witness first hand older adults in an active, creative and positive way, but also interact with them on a personal level and learn from them directly.

Given the emerging demographics, nurses will be caring for an increasingly older population. Yet, studies indicate that nurses, like the general population, not only continue to subscribe to negative stereotypes of older adults, but also harbor negative attitudes towards older adults and the care of them. However, studies also indicate that

there is a positive relationship between students’ attitudes toward and their knowledge about the elderly. Thus, it is critical to the nursing student’s learning process and professional development to be exposed to a curriculum that breaks down stereotypes and increases understanding and knowledge of aging adults and their needs.

Thus, Stagebridge has become an integral part of the curriculum of my course. Furthermore, I firmly believe that every nursing program needs a group like Stagebridge to work with students. This increased knowledge and understanding can only improve the quality of nursing care for elders.

Stagebridge Happenings in Review

By Maryann Maslan,
Marketing Director

Stagebridge leaped into spring adding new shows, students and projects that reached broader audiences locally and nationally. Major Bay Area press praised the “Civil Rights Tales” community performances, and the national “Storytelling Magazine” featured our storytelling programs with an article and photo essay. Our 11th Annual Grandparents Tales Writing Contest drew more than 400 stories from local students. The Healthy Aging Nurses Training Program premiered at two San Francisco universities. Highlights since the last newsletter include the following.

“Civil Right Tales” had its greatest season to date. Bay Area audiences of all ages were moved by the stories that recounted a slice of American history. Performances in Menlo Park and Danville were featured in the community newspapers *San Mateo Times*, *San Jose Mercury News* and the *Contra Costa Times*. One Clayton eighth-grader read about the show in her local paper and called Stagebridge to see if she could interview Jim McWilliams for a school assignment — another bridge between generations.



Andy Montgomery and Kate Frankel in “Civil Rights Tales”

“Strega Nona Festival,” Stagebridge’s 15th Annual Family Matinee with an ice cream social, played two days at Arts First in Oakland, mid March. The delightful event brought lots of new faces to Stagebridge in the audience and on stage. The show featured the Chapman brothers Willie, 19, who played Big Anthony, and Raushon, 9, who made his theatre debut with this show. Audrey Goodfriend, 85, a Stagebridge member for more than 25 years, has played Strega Nona in past productions. This year she decided to charm audiences in the roll of Grandma Concetta. The show toured to school audiences and played to packed houses in Redwood City and the Federal Building in Oakland.

“Never Too Late” was the featured entertainment at the University of San Francisco’s Spring Gala 2006 presented by the School of Nursing. The Crawford Event is held annually to honor alumni and friends. The performance received a standing ovation and after the show the performers were stars at the “tented” reception. This was the first public performance for new cast member Dwight Jones, a San Francisco resident, and a new premier for returning Stagebridge performer, Bill Lutkenhouse.



Dolores del Barco, Tim Hannon, Willie Chapman, Cindy Carrico, and Joanne Grimm

“Never Too Late – 2006” is all about money. This year’s show previewed in Berkeley and Oakland in May where the troupe fine tuned the new skits and musical numbers. They will take it on the road this summer to the San Francisco Theater Festival July 23.

Stagebridge Storytelling Newsletter was launched via e-mail this spring by Liz Nichols, our new Storytelling Director. The monthly letter keeps storytellers and future storytellers updated on what our tellers are doing. Anyone can sign up to receive the newsletter which also includes information about classes, workshops and events that feature Stagebridge tellers.

“Vietnam Stories,” a collective reminiscence of an era, was broadcast on KPFA-FM in May. It featured tellers Ken Foster, Joanne Mueller, Jim Parsons and Elaine Stanley. The 60-minute program was hosted by Erica Bridgeman, who placed the stories in a political and social context.

Improvisation — Keeping The Mind Alive

By Linda Spector, Improv Instructor

Taking part in an improv class can be a challenge. At first, your imagination seems to be working overtime, but you're relieved there are no stories or script to memorize. The laughter in the class is infectious and the variety of drama games seems endless. The students come up with hilarious ideas. Will you ever be able to think like that? You don't participate the first day because you're afraid you'll draw a blank, but other students tell you "We've all been through it." The next week you gather your courage and surprise — it's a rush to hear what comes out of your mouth. You can't wait for class the next week and you love improvising with 4th and 5th graders, nurses, and other seniors when the class does workshops. When you start seeing life as one big improv, you know you're hooked.



*Colleen Houlihan,
age 60*

Stagebridge improvisation has improved my mental health. Using imagination, instantly, encourages one to just "go with the feeling" that comes to mind immediately, when interacting with someone else. This encourages me to do this in "real life," like when I am asked what do I want to eat? Where do I want to go today? Which movie would I like to see? It has helped me to be *aware* of my own feelings, and to be sensitive to the feelings of folks I interact with every day. Grandkids are very good at this, too! It allows me to play with them, and they love it, and I have fun!

Cindy Carrico, age 58

I retired before I was 50. One day, in September 1999 I read an article about Stagebridge in the Oakland Tribune. I went to check out the improv class taught by Linda Spector. I was shy at first and awed by the veterans in the class. They were funny and dramatic and friendly. I decided I liked it from the start and now I've become a "veteran." This was the start of a whole new career full of fun, excitement, challenge, and friendship.

My confidence and self-esteem have improved two-fold. I have improved my ability to deal with life's little uncertainties through developing my spontaneity. The

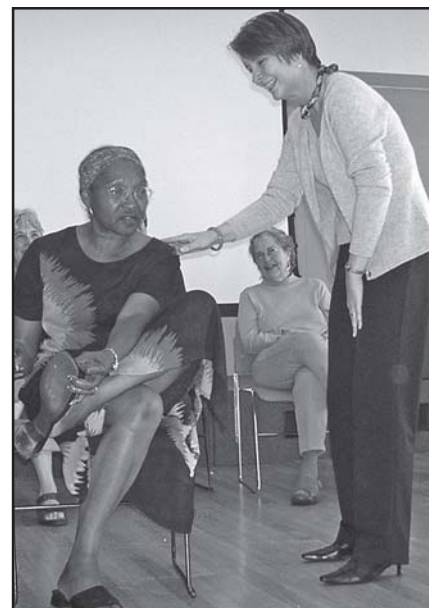
class has given me a freedom to be a clown in a supportive and nonjudgmental environment. The friends I have met there are funny and lively and warm. My life wouldn't be nearly as rich without Stagebridge. I am eternally grateful that I found this organization.

Sondra Neiman, age 67

When I retired, the first thing I looked for was an Improv class and was overjoyed to discover the Stagebridge class! Right from the start, the fit was perfect for me and the class became the high point of my week. Being able to participate in a creative and fun way with a great group of my peers has added tremendous enjoyment to my new life. As a retired educator and seasoned grandmother, I love the outreach we do in the schools. Working with the kids in their classrooms is rewarding and very enjoyable. I also find the work we do with the nurses to be most satisfying and try not to miss any of our times with them. All in all, Stagebridge improv is challenging me to keep my mind and imagination keen and fresh, and is proving to be tremendously advantageous in the maintenance of a healthy attitude towards growing older. It's helping to keep my inner kid alive and well! Stagebridge Rules!

Isabel Ferguson, age 90

Yes, improv is a little scary at first. I know I felt rather nervous being up there! But, the very fact that you *did* it and really you weren't too bad, builds confidence. That is truly the value of improv.



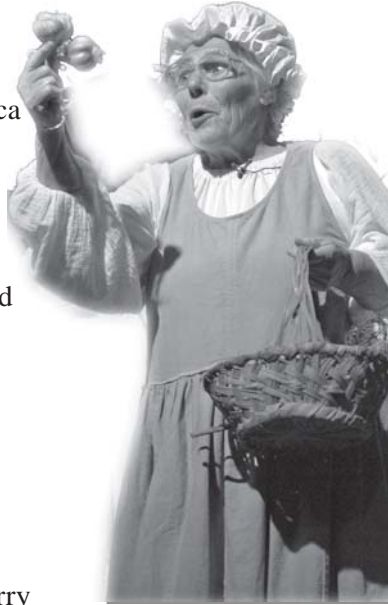
I was a 115 pound weakling before I tried improv. I'm still a 115 pound weakling, but a confident one. Stagebridge offers us a fine class in improv. Improv is liberating! Improv is *fun!*

Olithia O'Toole and Jennifer Winters, R.N.

Friends Give Generously to Stagebridge

Thanks to our many “Friends of Stagebridge,” we have raised over \$9,000 during our 2005-06 season to support our programs.

Betty Kipp	Miriam Mellen
Sally Holzman	Robert Maynard
Raymond Barglow	Bill & Gloria Broder
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Bill Liebman	Rena & Nat Simons
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Barbara Finkle	Sylvia Fortenberry
Richard Riffer	
Stephen & Patricia McMahon	
Kim Takemura	



Audrey Goodfriend in “Strega Nona”

Moonlighting

Stagebridge office manager **Jim Jenkins** performed with his rock band **ARIEL** at the world-famous Knitting Factory in Hollywood, California on January 20th. The band debuted songs from their new CD “Sure Thing, You Bet!” to a sold out audience. Jim is lead vocalist, guitar and keyboard player and principal songwriter for **ARIEL**.

Stagebridge storytellers have been entertaining throughout the Bay Area. The Marsh, a theatre in San Francisco dedicated to solo performance, featured **Jeanne Haynes** in “The Stove is White” in April. “Tell it on Tuesday,” a monthly storytelling program at the Julian Morgan Center in Berkeley included Stagebridge tellers **Kate Frankel**, **Ruth Halpern** and **Jeanne Haynes**. The “Contra Costa Tale Spinners,” were featured in the *Contra Costa Times* and included Stagebridge tellers **Kathy Cabral**, **Ken Foster**, **Sally Holzman** and **Kim Takamura**. **Erica Lann-Clark** previewed her new show “Make It One For My Baubo” at The Marsh.

Dottie Kay, long-time improv and acting student, sends greetings from Thailand where she is serving in the Peace Corps. Her assignment is to a village eight kilometers from Uthai Thani where she is learning the language and adjusting to the climate, food and social customs.

Olithia O’Toole, improv and storyteller, placed Number 92 out of 235 runners at the Monterey Bay half marathon in April. Board president **Tom Flynn** continued to broaden his acting career in “Beauty and the Beast” at the Dean Lasher Center for the Performing Arts in Walnut Creek.

We are also very grateful to our foundation and corporate supporters for helping us bridge the generations.

Alameda County Art Commission	Mechanics Bank
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Creative Aging Matters

by Dr. Stuart Kandell

On my recent 57th birthday, the checker at the bakery offered me the “discount” (carefully not saying “senior”). I exploded and told him I could pay the full amount! While I often think of myself as an “enlightened” person regarding aging, I often find myself upset and fearful.

My antidote has been to find older people I can look up to. People who are still doing what they want to be doing and enjoying life. Fortunately, I don’t have to look far. The Stagebridge family of actors, storytellers and students is ripe with role models. At the same time, it’s also helpful to find models of older professional artists — people who have been creating art all their lives and continue to do so in “old age.” I’ve had the honor recently of being in the company of three “greats.”

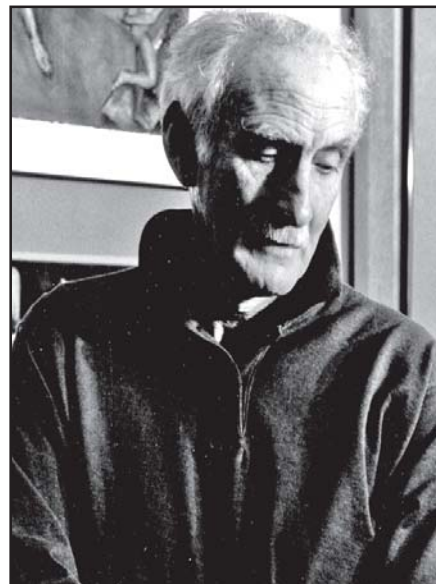
Frankie Manning – Dance Genius

I had the great fortune to take a master class with the “Ambassador of the Lindy Hop” who is still dancing at 92. Not only *still* dancing and teaching, but doing it all with such grace, humor, charm and energy. No one has contributed more to the Lindy Hop than Frankie Manning — as a dancer, innovator, and choreographer. Originally touring with Whitey’s Lindy Hoppers in the 30’s and 40’s, he helped spread the popularity of the Lindy Hop through three continents. And again, with the swing dance revival that started in the 1980s, Frank Manning has been a driving force worldwide with his teaching, choreography and performances. His own love of

swing music and dancing has been as contagious as his dazzling smile. Demonstrating moves with his 30-something Swedish partner, Frankie starts each class by walking around looking at “all the beautiful ladies” and had the 100 or so students sweating, but wanting more after an hour and a half!

Eartha Kitt – Sex Dynamo

She has still got it and in a big way! From the very moment she struts out on the Masonic stage, she commands it. And for the next two hours (with no break), she plays the audience with such skill, finesse, elegance, and humor, you don’t want her to ever leave. It’s not enough that she’s wearing a slit skirt so she can easily reveal her to-die-for legs; or that her voice is still polished, smooth and satiny; she brings a young man out as a “waiter” with a bottle of champagne and when she finds out how old he is says “Twenty – what a stupid age. When I get finished with you tonight, you’ll be ninety!” After a lifetime of performing on stage, screen, television and clubs, she keeps going. Last year she made her



debut at *The Mohegan Sun Casino*; appeared at the famed Ravinia Festival, followed by an appearance at *The Grand Hotel* on Mackinac Island and brought her one-woman show to the Newport Jazz Festival. Not bad for any entertainer, particularly one who just turned 80.

Julius Hatofsky – Abstract Expressionist

When I first met Julius (Linda Spector’s longtime partner) almost 25 years ago, his huge loft in the South of Market was filled with his oil paintings and sculptured wood tables. The scale of his imagination and paintings was huge – some over 12 by 30 feet, all filled with rich bold colors and always full of emotion. You couldn’t ignore his paintings.

Julius, himself, was a contrast to his powerful bold work. Shy, quiet, gentle, loving, with a biting humor, he eschewed the limelight throughout his long career as a painter and teacher at the San Francisco Art Institute. He rarely showed his work, maintained uncompromising standards and insisted on putting his energy into painting and not promoting. Noted art critic, Hilton Kramer, said of Julius, “He was a real master whose work almost nobody knows.”

Julius continued painting into his 80’s despite five years of dealing with the after effects of throat cancer, having to feed himself through a tube, being forced out of his loft and moving to a small Victorian in Vallejo. Ironically, on January 1, the final day of a retrospective show at the Triton Museum, he died, an inspiration to anyone who knew him.

Mentor a child through storytelling!



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*Special Summer Classes in July
(Call the office for a schedule)*

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Upcoming Events

Sunday, July 23 at 1:30pm — *Never Too Late*
premieres at the San Francisco Theatre Festival at
Yerba Buena Gardens. *Free!*

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