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Thursday, May 26, 2005

timesheraldonline.com

BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP



David Pacheco/Times-Herald

ST. BASIL'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THIRD-GRADERS Marissa Estrada, 9, left, and Hannah Molinar, 8, center, role play with Anita Goldstein of El Cerrito during a presentation by Stagebridge in their class Wednesday morning.

Kids win contest for grandparent stories

By **ROBERT MCCOCKRAN**
Times-Herald staff writer

Two St. Basil Elementary School third graders were awarded Wednesday for their submissions to Stagebridge's annual Grandparent Tales Writing Contest.

Aaron Cadiz told how World War II affected his grandfather's family in the Philippines. He said jobs were hard to find and that Japanese troops slapped people around.

"The war also affected my grandma because her brother was a Filipino soldier and he was taken hostage and died at the concentration camp of hunger," Aaron wrote in his winning entry.

Stagebridge is an Oakland-based senior theater group that strives to bridge the generations through impro-

visitation and theater.

The other winner, John Stone, meanwhile, wrote about his grandmother, "Nonny", who was born in Vallejo.

John also wrote about the war and sacrifices his grandmother made. At the same time, he also provided a remarkable description of the dolls she played with as a child.

"They were named Cinderella, Jill, Little Red Riding Hood, Alice, Snow White and other names from stories. These dolls were about six inches tall, and they were made by a lady named Madame Alexander," John wrote.

"They cost about 50 cents to one dollar. They had porcelain arms, head, legs and bodies. Their arms moved, but their legs didn't. They had fancy hairdos. They wore beautiful cloths and came in fancy white boxes cover-

with pink or blue polka dots."

Aaron and John are both students in Gretchen Del Rosario's classroom. They received books for their winning entries. Everyone who participated received a certificate.

Stagebridge co-director Linda Specor brought 14 volunteers to the classroom and involved the children in several improvisational exercises.

In one situation, a woman alone in the park feeding the birds — and wants to be left that way — is bothered by a young interloper who claims she doesn't have any friends.

It was apparent, from their response to the exercise, that the children were thoroughly enjoying the experience.

One volunteer, Lynn Jones, said: "It

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gets the kids and other seniors together and, it's fun."

Jones said he'd performed in little theater productions in high school and college. But his chosen career had him traveling constantly, and he didn't return to the stage until after he retired. For 32 years, he said, he was a journalist, working for the Associated Press and then, broadcast news services, including ABC-TV.

"We basically focus on trying to bring young and old together," Barbara Johnson said. "We're trying to bridge the generations through improv and storytelling."

"I run the schools program and I send these people out to different schools to do improv and storytelling," Johnson said.

Stagebridge is in its 26th year. This year, 25 schools were involved in the writing contest, and Stagebridge received 350 entries, Johnson said.

"Some of the schools pay, some of the schools are funded through the Department of Education in Washington D.C. We got a grant from them for \$586,000 to do a three-year intense storytelling program," she said.

There also is a Stagebridge program funded by various Bay Area foundations called Seniors Reaching Out, and a program where nursing students are "engaged on how to treat the elders in the hospital. A lot of young nurses going into the trade have never really dealt with an elder," Johnson said.

Regarding the Grandparents Tales program:

"I think it really helps to improve the students' writing skills," she said. "Some of the teachers take it upon themselves to do first and second drafts of the children's writing. When we receive the stories we send them out to different agencies to have them judged."

Among the judges have been Oakland City Councilmember Nancy Nadel, Oakland Tribune columnist Brenda Payton and Susan Stone, a KPFA-FM programmer.

"You see progress in the students with the teachers that are really good teachers who are doing things. And then again you get a teacher who says she's going to try to do this, but doesn't do anything with the kids and you see how poorly their writing is," Johnson said.

"A fifth-grader is writing four lines or a paragraph — no beginning, no middle and no end.

"It's a way for us, since we have a federal grant, to know and to judge what's happening in our schools."

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