

# ON ENTERTAINMENT

by Steven Libowitz

## "Book 'em!"

Writers love to write. And they also love to talk. Especially about their own writing. But recently in Santa Barbara those latter opportunities have dwindled. The Santa Barbara Book & Author Festival took a hiatus in 2009 and the Santa Barbara Writer's Conference - which is in bankruptcy and up for grabs - has been canceled for a second straight year.

But CALM's Celebrity Authors' Luncheon is still going gangbusters, with the 24th annual event slated for this Saturday, at the late Fess Parker's DoubleTree Resort.

As always, local celeb Jack "Chicken Soup for the Soul" Canfield serves as emcee, with former KEYT anchorwoman Debby Davison reprising her role as the author interviewer alongside William Hermann, senior writer for the *Arizona Republic*. The four main out-of-town writers who will appear on stage - two veterans and two newcomers to the publishing world - have all notched major accomplishments.

Sandra Brown can boast of having logged 58 entries on *The New York Times* bestseller list, including thrillers such as "Smash Cut." Her latest novel "Rainwater" was inspired by her grandfather's experiences of honor and sacrifice during the Great Depression. The other experienced author is Elizabeth Berg, who has written many bestselling novels as well as works of nonfiction and a highly acclaimed short story collection called "The Day I Ate Whatever I Wanted."

On the other hand, Kate Jacobs is new to the publishing world, but her debut novel, "The Friday Night Knitting Club," became a runaway bestseller in just fourteen days, and plans for the movie starring Julia Roberts are underway. Her new novel is called "Knit the Season." Finally, Carol Leifer, the veteran stand-up comedian and an Emmy-nominated writer and producer whose credits include "Seinfeld," "The Larry Sanders Show," "Saturday Night Live," and the Academy Awards, finally got around to the book world with her brand new series of personal essays called "When You Lie About Your Age, the Terrorists Win."

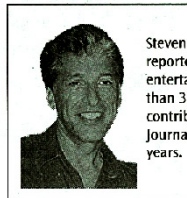
Leifer talked about the book and more over the telephone last week.

Q. You've given birth to TV shows, scripts, a marriage, not to mention a change in sexual orientation. Why now for finally giving birth to a book and putting it all down on paper?

A. It really was more because I couldn't not do it. There were so many



Author and "Seinfeld" writer Carol Leifer, who will speak at the CALM Celebrity Authors' Luncheon this weekend (photo by Harry Langdon)



Steven Libowitz has reported on the arts and entertainment for more than 30 years; he has contributed to Montecito Journal for nearly ten years.

things that happened in my life that I wanted to write about. I noticed once I started that it was cathartic for me and revelatory as well. I knew something more about the experiences after writing about them. And even better than that, when I read them aloud they really connected with people. As a comedy writer and comedian I'm used to making people laugh, which is always a great feeling. But to connect a little more deeply and emotionally has been very fulfilling. I've been getting messages from people saying "I laughed but I was also touched" or "I'm still laughing but I'm also crying." That wasn't why I wrote it, but it's been a happy result.

In the book you're awfully obsessed with age and aging. Is the writing helping you come to terms with it?

It is. And I hope the message was clear: I'm all about loving and embracing your age. It's so not the doom and gloom that causes most people upset. So it's been great, because I've gotten

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feedback even from younger women in their twenties who see it as a handbook of how to approach life.

Yeah, so what happened?

I got thrown under the bus. That's what happened. What else can I say?

You're obviously opinionated in your writing, but you're also quite open. Did you have any qualms about delving into such deeply personal stuff and throwing it out there for the world? How about the people you write about, how are they with it?

I'm stealing a question from the junior high school journalists from the Santa Barbara teen press, who asked every celebrity at the recent film festival: "What's your life philosophy?"

You know, it's all good. I didn't share anything I had second thoughts about. It's personal, but any good writing is personal without going too far. It's all necessary to the story. I don't throw details out there just for the moment. It's integral to my story. And the feedback from my friends and family has been nothing but positive.

It's really the message of my book: just love and embrace who you are every day, and don't bemoan the years (laughs) that you accumulate. Celebrate them. This is a brief ride. It's important to be present and love every moment you're here.

(Admission to the luncheon is \$125. Book signing begins at 10 am, lunch is served at 11:45, and the interviews start at 12:30 pm. Call 682-3925 for reservations).

The book tour-/speaking engagement thing is all brand new for you. It's not like you're always stuck behind the scenes like most writers. But how does it compare to stand-up?

Oh, I'm loving it. I love being back out in front of people talking about the book, discussing it, taking questions. And from what I've heard, I can't wait for the festival there.

Are you still doing stand up? I mean, is it like Jay Leno, and you'll hit a club every weekend to polish new material?

I go out about once a month if I don't have a gig, just to keep my muscle up to date.

So I'm always still doing it, yeah.

You wrote or co-wrote seven "Seinfeld" scripts. What it was like to work on the show about nothing, the greatest sitcom in history.

I don't think I'll ever work on a show that has as much lightning in a bottle. Those kinds of things come across once an eon. I feel so privileged to have been a part of it. It was really exciting.

Can you tell me about "The Hamptons" episode, with "shrinkage" and all those other brilliant moments. How much of that was yours versus Peter Mehlman. How did you come up with this stuff?

Peter was just a great writer. The beauty of that show was that any script we turned out, Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld did their pass on it. That whole shrinkage idea was Larry's. How fantastic to have those two take a run at what we did. We'd sit in the room and talk about everything. It was great.

What are you working on right now?

I have a pilot for Showtime. It's a project for Marlee Matlin and Mario Cantone, who both worked at Showtime before. She plays a high-powered Gloria Allred-type of attorney and he's her assistant. And then of course I was just fired on Sunday from "The Celebrity Apprentice."

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