

Writing from the Back Mountain

Local authors put their work on paper

Stallones analyze independence

By ERIC FOSTER
Post Staff

To Dr. James and Linda Stallone of Dallas, it seems there just aren't as many adults in America as you might expect.

When the Stallones describe an adult, they don't mean being a particular age, but being independent.

"We have 30 and 40-year-olds who can't separate from their parents," said Linda Stallone.

"We've lost the pioneer spirit," said Dr. Stallone, a psychologist, former university professor and counselor.

To address the problem they see as becoming a crisis across America, the Stallones have written a book, "On Your Own," one of three they published themselves in November. The others are "Growing Sane," a book on personal development, and "The Flood that Came to Grandma's House," a children's book.

"All three books have been picked up by Waldens, B. Dalton, and by Quality Library Distributors," said Linda Stallone. "In less than a year, I've managed to crack the national market, especially with 'On Your Own.'"

"On Your Own" discusses how to stop encouraging and dragging out dependency in the young, middle-aged and elderly.

All too often, "young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are simply not independent," said Dr. Stallone. "This generation particularly, we've protracted childhood far beyond what it should be."

"Part of the process is becoming independent parents," said Linda Stallone. "The parent role is a role many are reluctant to give up."

With two grown children of their own, Anthony 23, and Maria, 21, and a baby daughter, Kiran, one of the factors the Stallones see as keeping people from striking out on their own is that so many young people who go to college remain dependent on their parents financially.

"We feel that most colleges are not a place to learn independence," said Dr. Stallone. "You move out of home into the womb of the school."

The book gives advice on how to encourage independence as much as possible; for example by having adult children live away from home whenever it's possible and rolling up the welcome mat for family members who are capable of taking care of themselves.

While the book emphasizes how to prevent dependency in 18 to 25-year-olds, its principals apply to any age.

"It's not just 18 to 25-year-olds. Old people are also having independence problems," said Linda Stallone. "Old people who retire often expect their children to take care of them."

One of the main points of the book is that being both dependent and depended upon can be unhealthy and limit personal growth.

"We're doing these people a great disservice," said Dr. Stallone. "They lose their self respect."

The impetus for writing the book came from a television commercial for a bank the Stallones watched two or three years ago.

In the commercial, an older couple receives a telephone call from their grown children and find they've found the perfect house, but they'll need help with the down payment.



"I guess we'll be going to the bank tomorrow," says the man.

"Isn't that what parents are for?" says the woman.

"Linda and I watched the parents feel responsible for the down payment for the house," said Dr. Stallone. "Linda called the president of the bank and he said 'Don't you want to do that for your kids.'"

Dr. Stallone notes however, that they never saw the commercial again.

The book grew out of what was just going to be a paper, based on Dr. Stallone's 25 years of experience in psychology.

To write the book, Linda Stallone, who spent 15 years in advertising, promotion and public relations, interviewed her husband.

"I have experience as a writer, that's my field," she said. "He would go through it and make sure it was psychologically sound."

Illustrating key points with case studies, the Stallones leave out the jargon to make a book accessible to average readers.

"On Your Own" was submitted to a few large publishing companies. "They wrote back, said it was provocative and well-written, but we were newcomers," said Linda Stallone. So she started her own publishing company, Upshur Press.

"Growing Sane," written by Dr. Stallone with Sy Migdal, presents natural therapeutic techniques to ease the difficulties experienced during growth crises.

"Growing Sane" was written first and addresses the problems people encounter when they start a self improvement program," said Linda Stallone. "It makes more sense to read 'On Your Own' first. It backs up and takes a look at some of the obstacles that you encounter that make it difficult for you to be independent."

"On the national market, 'On Your Own' has attracted more attention, which is what we expected," said Linda Stallone. "Both books recognize that we're in a time in history where people are much more aware of why they do things and they want to grow. There's a real trend towards self-development."

"The Flood That Came to Grandma's House," is about the Agnes Flood, and is illustrated by Dallas artist Joan Schooley.

All three books are available at area bookstores, but if you can't find them, you can order directly from the publisher by calling 1-800-777-1461.

Linda Stallone says that more books will be coming in the fields of psychology and children's non-fiction.

Later chapters of the book trace the financial dynasties of families such as the Sordonis, Kirbys and Kresges.

"I like to talk about the way ordinary people lived," said Spear. "But I also like to talk about people who achieved things."

"I learned a lot because I'm not a native of this area," said Spear, a native of Brooklyn, New York. Spear has his bachelors degree in political science with a minor in psychology and a masters and doctorate in history.

One of the difficulties he found researching the book is that sometimes he couldn't find the information he was looking for.

Spear recounts how he once came across the name of a woman physician, Louise Stoeckel, who came from a Shavertown farm family and was mentioned very highly in a 1910 publication.

"I think she was the first woman physician in the area," said Spear. "I looked and looked but couldn't find anything."

He is currently working on another book with a similar format which will cover the Wyoming Valley as well as Northeastern Pennsylvania in general.

"I don't think it will be quite as biographical," said Spear, who estimates that it will be completed in the next two years.

Readers can look forward to more on politics, then the economic developments of the 1950s and 1960s.

While Spear makes a living studying the past, he does not glorify it.

"People who glorify the past are omitting many things," he said. "For most people life was miserable. Far more so than today."

Anybody who glamorizes that is misinformed," said Spear. "There were no institutions of higher education in the 1920s until Misericordia. Even the number of people who finished high school was very low. One thing you realize when you study history is how difficult it was to make a living."

CHAPTERS IN WYOMING VALLEY HISTORY



Spear seeks local history

Sheldon Spear's bread and butter is history; teaching classes at Luzerne County Community College and doing scholarly research.

In comparison to the scholarly work, writing a book gives him a chance to let loose a little.

"It's more enjoyable writing for the general audience," said Spear, of Shavertown. "It's less restricted, you can be more freewheeling. Above all you know somebody is going to read what you write."

"When you publish a scholarly article you can count the number of people who will read it on two hands," said Spear, who used to have columns printed periodically in the Citizens Voice newspaper.

Spear published "Chapters in Wyoming Valley History" in 1989. He had 1,500 of the books printed, and while there are a few left, he says they're still selling.

"A few years before I did the book, I did the Wyoming Valley Historical Calendar," said Spear. "The research on that led me to believe that a lot of Wyoming Valley history has not been written. There's a market, a limited but definite market for local history."

Spear's book tackles this area's history through biographies of key players in various time periods. In the book you meet John Wilkes, a homely 18th century British politician who won ladies' affection with a rapier wit, and who inspired half of Wilkes-Barre's name.

Lake has been focus for Petrillo

Preserving the past is something of a mission for attorney F. Charles Petrillo.

When he's not working on his own books of local history, he's trying to find people to write the books he'd like to read but hasn't had time to write himself.

"What I mostly do is try to encourage other historians to write more local history," says Petrillo.

The Wilkes-Barre native has done his share of writing. In 1983, "Harveys Lake," a 200-year history was published, followed by "Anthracite and Slackwater: The North Branch Canal 1828-1901." Last year he published "Ghost Towns of North Mountain: Ricketts, Mountain Springs and Stull," about towns in the Ricketts Glen area which have disappeared, and the Harveys Lake book was reissued with additional photos. The books have been published primarily through the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, of which he is a board member.

Petrillo takes two to three years to research a book when he's not heading up Legal Services of Northeastern Pennsylvania, but he adds,



"I write quickly. 'Ghost Towns' I wrote in five weeks.

He was interested in writing about Harveys Lake because his mother's family, the Andersons, settled at the lake in the 1840s, says Petrillo, whose great-grandfather was a steamboat captain and who still has relatives living at the lake.

Petrillo's next book will be about the steamboats which ran on the Susquehanna River, but there are lots of other subjects he'd like to read about. "We have, for example, no 20th century history of the Wyoming Valley in view," says Petrillo. "No history of coal mining in the Wyoming Valley, though we were the world's largest producer at one time. I'd like to see a history of the communications industry."

"Our rich ethnic and religious diversity leads to another subject, our immigrant history which nobody seems to be working on."

If these histories are to be written, time is of the essence.

"I find that sources are constantly dying because there's not enough time to reach everyone who could make a contribution. Almost all of the people I interviewed for the Harveys Lake book are dead," says Petrillo. "We are probably seeing in the next 10 to 15 years the passing of the last generation of coal miners. We are losing their oral testimony if they are not interviewed. The same is true of our grandparents and great grandparents who immigrated."

Petrillo is also concerned that no one is collecting photographs from the past 60 to 80 years. "I constantly run into situations where people who have photographs or manuscripts of historical significance have died and their family simply threw them out," says Petrillo.

He suggests that people donate those photos to the Historical Society or a library.

One project he'd like the Historical Society to take on is to re-print the "History of Dallas," written by the late D.A. Walters in

A Dog Named Jamie



Her Life
Her Love
Her Legacy

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
Sue Hand

1967. The Dallas history is on the back burner right now, but could get moving if a service group or company got involved in helping sponsor the project, Petrillo suggested.

Loss of pet spurs Hand

A fear of typing, typewriters, and word processors didn't stop Back Mountain artist Sue Hand from writing a book to memorialize a beloved pet.

The day after her dog Jamie died in November of 1988, Hand decided to write a book about her.

"She was dying. I wanted to have a memorial and I wanted to do something special," said Hand, who teaches drawing and painting at Sue Hand's Imagery on Main Street in Dallas.

Because the book was so personal Hand wrote it entirely with calligraphy, as well as illustrating it with drawings.

"It originally wasn't going to get so involved," said Hand, who started the book the day after Jamie died, and finished it in August of 1989. "Some days I worked ten hours on it, some days I worked one or two hours on it, but it was exhausting."

In the book, Hand describes how Jamie, one of the last pets auctioned at the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction, was her nearly constant companion for more than 16 years.

"It's a dog story that's also about my own struggles," said Hand. "Sometimes I'd cry while I was writing because I remembered something happy and she wasn't by my side anymore. It helped me accept her death. I wrote the book to exorcise my own demons, close a chapter in my life."

The book may have helped others accept death as well.

"I got a phone call from a woman crying in Pittston," remembers Hand. "Her husband died a few years ago. She'd been going to counseling, saw her pastor, but the book helped her release her grief."

Among her inspirations in creating the book are writer and artist Eric Sloane, and Frederick Franck, author of "The Zen of Seeing."

Because many of the books were bought as gifts, Hand says that they've gone far and wide.

"I've gotten letters from California and Arizona."

Though she doubts she'll ever break even with the cost of publishing "A Dog Named Jamie," Hand is planning two books on art.

She plans one on pen and ink drawing, and another of her notes and thoughts on painting and drawing.

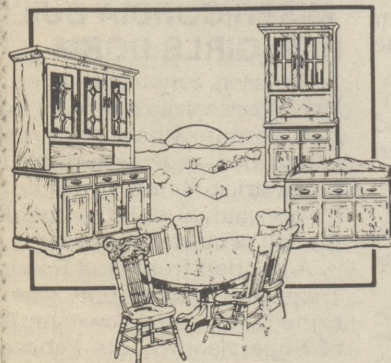
Besides the book, she's already been involved with publishing eight calendars featuring her art work.

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