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Young Pearl Vet Shares Memories

By Cathy Dausman



From left: Renee Fleming, Tom Marnane, Diana Van Gilder and Victoria Christensen

Photo provided

Tom Marnane is a Pearl Harbor survivor who was in uniform awaiting his bus at Oahu's Wheeler Army Airfield Dec. 7, 1941. He and his friends were strafed by enemy airplane fire. Fortunately, they all survived, although no one had any idea what was going on. Marnane was 7 years old at the time; his "uniform" was a child's costume. His father was a U.S. Army captain, and his family lived on base near Wheeler.

Marnane spoke to seventh-graders at The Saklan School in January before the class of 17 traveled to Hawaii to study World War II history firsthand. The trip included a tour of Pearl Harbor. "It's an experience worth thinking about, but not worth repeating," he said. "I was alive waiting for a school bus to come and they shot up my street and my house and I watched all the airplanes get blown up. I say that because there aren't very many of us (Pearl Harbor survivors) hanging around these days."

This year's students felt more personally connected to the events at Pearl Harbor after hearing Marnane talk, wrote Saklan middle school Dean Kim Parks. Seventh-grader Victoria Christensen was "touched by the sheer amount of destruction" and "most impressed by his [Marnane's] feelings today towards the Japanese forces."

"It was a fast in and out," Marnane said of the Japanese attack, but "there were always airplanes around," so he was not really afraid. He did notice the rising sun symbol on the fuselage, and noted a "line of planes" flying in formation. The boys ran to collect spent cartridges until Marnane's father dragged him back to his house.

The family (father, mother and Marnane's younger brother) and everyone else on his street were spared. In the hours after the attack, the army evacuated its civilian population to pineapple and sugar fields in the center of Oahu where they remained for three or four days.

It was "great fun" being there with the other children, Marnane said, because they didn't have school. When they returned to Wheeler, it was a Wheeler with fox holes and air raid drills. "Dad took my brother and I on a (Pearl Harbor) tour, where we saw battleships burning, and (damaged) planes and midget subs," he said.

The family boarded a ship bound for San Francisco's Fort Mason on Christmas Day and relocated to Oklahoma for the duration of the war while Marnane's father stayed behind. When asked by the students how he felt about the Japanese, Marnane said he was mad then, only because the war necessitated his father living away from his family for four years.

"It's all gone by the board (now)," he said, noting that since then he has lived in Japan and worked with and for Japanese firms.

Marnane became a career naval officer, and returned as commander of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard (which oddly, was never bombed) in 1980 for his final posting. Marnane said when a foreign ship entered the harbor at dawn that ship would play its country's national anthem and the shipyard would answer with "The Star Spangled Banner."

He admits to having felt "a little tug" when the exchange involved a Japanese ship.

You Want to Become a Filmmaker?

ShortDocs Film Fest helps young and older test their talent

By Sophie Braccini



Jason Friedman about to start filming his documentary
Photo Kal Deutsch

The Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest was born from the imagination of an 8-year-old Lamorinda child, and it is nicely taking shape through the leadership of the Lamorinda Arts Council (LAC). Amateur documentary filmmakers of all ages have the opportunity to be trained this month and partake in a friendly competition that will culminate with a festival presentation and awards ceremony in May.

Meredith Friedman was driving with her son, Jason, in the car one afternoon when he asked why there was not a program for children to compete in filmmaking. "I responded that this was something I may be able to help make happen," she remembers answering. Friedman is on the board of LAC, the local nonprofit that facilitates community events such as the Art of Mixology, Lamorinda Idol, and the Visual Arts Competition. "We already have a lot of programs for children," says Friedman, "so as we talked with fellow board member Kal Deutsch, who has filmmaking experience; we thought that it would be a good idea to have all ages engaged in this new program."

The LAC board and its president, Lawrence Kohl, immediately embraced the idea and decided this would be a worthwhile project for the nonprofit to fund.

"We decided on short documentaries, maximum six minutes, because we thought that would be easier for beginners to master, and also because we did not want to compete with the Iron Filmmakers competition put on by the California Independent Film Festival," says Deutsch. The Orinda resident believes that with today's tools, such as the iPhone and iMovie, and some basic training, anyone can start creating interesting documentaries. "You can say a lot in a very short time," adds Friedman. "Just take a look at the news and you'll see some powerful stories told in just a few minutes."

The competition's unique element is beginner training offered by LAC. "Creating a good documentary is about telling a compelling story; it is not just running a camera," says Deutsch. "There are fundamental techniques that will

empower kids and adults to make better films, such as composition, editing, how to get music, how to do narration, that we will teach and that will raise the bar of what will be produced."

LAC has planned a free educational seminar that covers the basics of producing a documentary film at 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28 for elementary and middle school filmmakers and at 2 p.m. for high school and adult filmmakers. The seminar will be at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

The four competition categories are based on age: Elementary School, Middle School, High School and Adult. "The competition is open to anyone aged 5 and older who lives, attends school or works in Orinda, Lafayette, or Moraga," says Friedman. "Submissions will be accepted March 1 until April 24 and be judged by a panel of professionals."

LAC asks that films be G-rated and it reserves the right to not consider a movie that would be considered inappropriate. Two to four films will be selected in each category and presented at the festival on May 15. After the screening, winners in each category will be announced, and the audience will be invited to vote to select the public award winner.

Lamorinda filmmakers Vicki Abeles ("Race to Nowhere," "Beyond Measure") and Julie Rubio ("East Side Sushi," "Too Perfect"), and film editor David Santamaria (Early Man Productions; Instructor, Bay Area Video Coalition) will be on the judging panel as well as Los Angeles filmmaker Jon Gun ("My Date with Drew," "Like Dandelion Dust").

"I'm looking forward to being one of the judges," says Rubio. "I hope this festival will help guide the filmmakers on to a special new path of new discoveries, of self awareness and creativity." She adds that in judging the movies she will be looking for films that tell a heartfelt story. "This is, ultimately, what this is all about - storytelling," she says.

"This is our first year and we do not know what to expect," concludes Friedman, "but I am pretty sure that we are going to be blown away by the creativity of the people in the community."

Other LAC volunteers are supporting the project, such as Susan Garell and Lois Mead, who are reaching out to schools and are spreading the word about the competition. More information and registration can be found online at lamorindaarts.org.

LAC free educational seminar on Sunday, Feb. 28 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center:
1 p.m. (elementary and middle school filmmakers)
2 p.m. (high school and adult filmmakers)