

# ~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

## “The Menopause Monologues” at Town Hall breaks culture of silence

By Elaine Borden Chandler



Photos provided

The cast of “The Menopause Monologues” at their all-cast read-through party on Sept. 27.

“The seed was my dying ovaries,” drawled Carrie Vanhouten with ironic relish when asked what the seed for “The Menopause Monologues” was, to the visible amusement of Lisa Anne Morrison and Lulu Braunstein. These three women — Vanhouten, the creator; Morrison, the director; and Braunstein, the producer — are the driving forces

behind the new play at Lafayette’s Town Hall Theatre.

“The Menopause Monologues” is a collaborative play with fifteen different vignettes on menopause, ranging from traditional monologues to poetry to puppetry. It follows the format of “The Vagina Monologues,” the groundbreaking 1996

play by Eve Ensler that opened up discussions about a previously unmentionable subject.

Morrison, Braunstein, and Vanhouten have the same goal with “The Menopause Monologues.” They were inspired by their own and others’ experiences — sleep loss, irritability, hot flashes, brain fog, memory difficulties, struggling with getting medical treatment — all of which were hidden and associated with shame.

“For me, it’s about sharing it and taking away the taboo,” said Braunstein. “Everybody has a story of their own or of a family member, and so many stories really needed to come out.”

Menopause, the time when people with uteruses permanently stop having periods, is

rarely acknowledged publicly beyond jokes about hot flashes. So when Vanhouten entered perimenopause, the years long process leading up to menopause, she was unprepared for it. She was soon frustrated by how stories about menopause, so common and so central to life, were never discussed beyond small groups of friends.

“I wanted to create a place where we could share our stories, get them in the everyday vocabulary of human existence, and break the generational silence,” she said.

Vanhouten contacted Morrison and Braunstein and asked them what they thought about doing a “The Vagina Monologues” style play about menopause; they responded enthusiastically. They started brainstorming together and established that they wanted more than a play — they wanted a movement.

They were soon in full gear: sending out a call for submissions and receiving dozens; hosting a lively workshop where suggestions and laughter bounced back and forth; doing interviews, including three older women whose stories reshaped the play’s structure; and editing, rearranging, and honing the chosen monologues.

At last, they had the final play, something they were proud of and excited to share. They chose to end it with a Q&A on menopause with Dr. Chiruba Prabakar. In the process they had

learned and shared so much, and they wanted the play to kick off discussion and acceptance in the audience — perhaps even empowerment and joy.

“For years and years, I thought this was going to be the time of life where I felt like I’m not going to be worth anything anymore,” said Morrison. “And it has

proven to be totally the opposite. I feel more strength and more license to take care of myself and put myself first than I have in my entire life.”

“The Menopause Monologues” is currently sold out. Contact Lulu Braunstein at [lulu-braunstein@me.com](mailto:lulu-braunstein@me.com) to be put on a ticket waitlist.

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Three of the puppets featured in “The Menopause Monologues.”

## "Guardians of the Formula" -- a real story of humanity and hope

By Sophie Braccini



Photos provided

The movie presented this October by the International Film Showcase in Orinda tells a real story that happened under the radar of the Cold War. It is a story of courage and selflessness, of how the human spirit can manifest at its best, even in times of turmoil. It is definitely an optimistic story, an ode to humanity.

“Guardians of the Formula” takes place in 1958, in the middle of the Cold War. Yugoslavia, under Tito’s dictatorship, was communist but had strayed from the orbit of the Soviets. It was a leader of the non-aligned movement (the founding countries were Indonesia, India, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and Ghana). So, when a group of Yugoslav scientists get irradiated when working on a secret nuclear project, they are not sent to the

U.S.S.R., but to the Curie Institute in France.

There, under the direction of Professors Mathé and Jammet, a race against time is engaged, until no other hope is left but attempting an untried and completely new treatment.

This real story was kept relatively secret during the Cold War, and is still largely ignored in France and now Serbia-Croatia-Bosnia Herzegovina. Serb movie director Dragan Bjelogrić is revealing both a historical mystery and the tale of a huge medical advancement that has had an impact on millions of people all over the world since.

The movie is mostly in French with English subtitles, and features a mixed cast of French and Serb actors. The film is shot like a thriller, with flashbacks taking place in

both Yugoslavia and France, that unwind the events that have led to this dramatic situation. Meanwhile, the tension increases behind the hospital closed doors where all non-essential personal has been removed. The location - large cathedral like volume, sparking whiteness everywhere - creates a dramatic effect, like a classical tragedy. This formal and sober approach, even in the way the actors play, give a simple and solemn grandeur to the acts of bravery that will manifest in the middle of the tragedy.

It is the extraordinary solidarity that can unite people beyond borders and ideology that is the main strength of this film. In the press documents released in France, the movie Director said that as he neared his 50s, he started losing

his faith in humanity. He then decided to look for good in humans, and to show it in films, whatever the harsh reality we might be living in. “In this film, I explored how a formula of death can become a formula of life,” he said.

The treatment that the scientists received has become a staple of the cure for leukemia. The fact that this extraordinary break-through was barely publicized was probably due to the political context of the time. Bjelogrić repaired this omission with talent, giving us hope through this extraordinary movie that has received acclaims all over the world.

The movie will open at the Orinda Theater on Oct. 18 for at least one week. Times and tickets at [Orindamovies.com](http://Orindamovies.com), more information about the non-profit International Film Showcase at [internationalshowcase.org](http://internationalshowcase.org).



**STRIVE PATH**

**College Coach’s Corner**

WITH Sunny Grewal

Welcome to Coach’s Corner, where we address questions asked by local student families. If you have a question you’d like us to address, please email us at [contact@mystrivepath.com](mailto:contact@mystrivepath.com).

**Question:** My son is interested in getting recruited for swim, and we have no idea how best to navigate. I heard you recently recruited an athletic advisor - what does this process look like for us, and timelines?

**Answer:** Thank you for reaching out! Navigating the college recruiting process for swimming can be a bit complex, but we’re here to help guide you through it.

With Jennifer Jamison on board as our athletic recruitment advisor, she brings a wealth of experience from her years as a collegiate athlete and coach. She helps families understand what to expect from the recruiting process, timelines, and how to prepare.

Here’s a brief overview of the process and timeline:

**1. Assessing Fit**

The first step is determining where your son might fit academically and athletically. Division 1 programs often come with more rigorous training schedules, while Division 2 and 3 schools may offer a better balance between academics and athletics. It’s important to have a realistic understanding of which schools might be the right fit for him.

**2. Timeline**

- The recruiting process for swimming generally starts in sophomore year:
- **Sophomore Year:** This is the time to start reaching out to coaches with a brief introduction, some stats, and video highlights. While coaches can’t respond until June 15, it’s good to be on their radar early.
  - **Junior Year:** After June 15, coaches can respond to communication. This is when recruiting really ramps up, and it’s important to maintain regular updates with both academic and athletic progress. Campus visits can also begin around this time.
  - **Senior Year:** This is the time for official visits, final offers, and potential commitments. National Letters of Intent (NLI) are typically signed during this year if your son receives an offer.

**3. Highlight Video & Resume**

A well-organized video showcasing your son’s strengths in swimming is important, along with a resume that lists his key stats, academic performance, and coach contact details.

Throughout the process, ongoing communication with coaches is key—keeping them updated on your son’s academic and athletic progress can help maintain interest.

If you’d like to dive deeper into any part of this process, feel free to reach out.

Best regards,  
Sunny

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StrivePath empowers students and families with personalized academic and college advising, market insights, and community resources, ensuring holistic development and better outcomes. Happier students. Less stressed families. Better admission outcomes.

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