

Calendar

Coronado Spawns Woggle-Bug

Oz-Related Events

I'm coming to San Diego for the Dr. Seuss birthday party," Michael Patrick Hearn said by phone from New York City last week. "The organizers wanted to include other writers associated with the Hotel Del, and L. Frank Baum spent his winters there from 1904 to 1909, with one break in 1906, when he was in Europe."

Hearn is editor of *The Annotated Wizard of Oz*, published in 1973, then revised and sumptuously repackaged in 2000 for the centennial of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the first of the 14 books by Baum that he set in Oz.

LOCAL EVENTS

"Chicago winters were pretty hard on him, and he wasn't in great health. In 1903, he and his wife went to Florida and didn't like it. In 1904, they toured California, and Coronado was their favorite place." It became Baum's favorite place to work too, said Hearn. "He wrote a number of books there. You can see from the introductions; he signed them 'Coronado,' beginning with *The Land of Oz* through *The Road to Oz*."

As Baum developed the series, the Emerald City took on the physical attributes of Coronado and the social milieu of hotel living. The Del, in turn, took advantage of the celebrity in its midst. "The hotel would have special dinners, and Baum was like its poet laureate. He would give little speeches and write little silly poems."

Eventually Baum wrote about Coronado directly. "He described how it was enchanted by a band of fairies. He also wrote, under the name Edith Van Dyne, a series of girls' books called *Aunt Jane's Nieces*, and one of them takes place at the hotel. A feminist friend of mine said

Baum was probably the first important American male writer who ever used a female pseudonym. His mother-in-law was Matilda Joslyn Gage, one of the great 19th-Century American feminists."

Hearn said that Baum invented at least one character on the beach in Coronado. "The story goes that one day he and a little girl spotted a fiddler crab, and she asked him what it was, and he said the first thing that came into his mind: 'Woggle-Bug.' Later that night, he told his wife the story and decided he could evolve a character from that incident. It became the Woggle-Bug in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*."

La Jolla also impressed Baum, and two of his non-Oz books are set there, *The Sea Fairies* and *Sky Island*. A third, *The Scarecrow of Oz*, is a hybrid. "It begins in La Jolla, where Captain Bill is an old retired sailor and Trot is a little girl that he befriends. Then they get caught up in a whirlpool, and from there they go to Oz."

The Oz books' enormous influence on children's literature has been "both good and bad," said Hearn. So, too, is the industry they begat. Hearn was asked if he passed judgment on it. Were some events worthier than others? Were some good for Baum and others not? "Oh, certainly. Some don't have anything to do with L. Frank Baum. They're really celebrating the movie. They're more about Judy Garland than Baum."

For many years, Hearn has been writing Baum's biography. Its publication is still years away. "I keep finding new information.



Art for Baum's first Oz book

Baum left a lot of thumbprints and trying to decode them takes time."

In the course of his research, he has befriended many Baum family members, including Gita Dorothy Morena, who lives in Lakeside.

"He's become part of the family; he's the historian of the family, if you will," said Morena, a psychotherapist who uses the Oz story in her workshops and is author of *The Wisdom of Oz*.

The family was not from Kansas; Baum was born in 1856 in New York State. "At one point, he was the publisher of a newspaper in South Dakota," said Morena. "A tornado came through there that lifted up a house and dropped it two miles away, and he wrote editorials about it repeatedly for months. In my book, I tried to show that some of his images and ideas may have come from life experiences, and that was one of them."

Born in Los Angeles in 1947, Morena was originally named Dorothy after her grandmother, the wife of Baum's youngest son and coincidental namesake of the Oz heroine, Dorothy Gale. ("If you believe in coincidences," said Morena.) She took the name Gita in 1982 after she embarked on what she calls a "spiritual quest."

"I was given my new name by an Indian spiritual teacher here in San Diego. Then I went to Oregon and was in an ashram with him there. I

left everything behind." When she returned, Morena said, "I could see that I had done exactly what Dorothy did, which was to go on my own trip and discover who I was."

— Jeanne Schinto

Book signings:
Michael Patrick Hearn,
author of *"The Annotated Oz,"*
and **Gita Dorothy Morena,**
author of *"The Wisdom of Oz"*
Thursday, May 15, 7:00 p.m.
D.G. Wills Books
7461 Girard Avenue, La Jolla
Free
Info: 858-456-1800

"The Land of Oz" in San Marcos
Saturday, May 17,
Munchkin Parade:
9:00-10:00 a.m.
Build Your Own Oz Puppet:
10:30-11:30 a.m.
Discovery Lake
Foxhall Drive & Poppy Road

Screening of "The Wizard of Oz"
(Live characters perform during intermission)
1:00-3:00 p.m.
San Marcos Community Center,
3 Civic Center Drive,
moviegoers and paraders, free;
puppeteers, \$1 per person.
Info and pre-registration:
760-744-9000



Gita Morena



L. Frank Baum

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