

Possible Pulitzer for Burbank biographer

By GREG SPRING
Correspondent

Leona Mayer Merrin thought many things when she was first approached to write dancer Devi Dja's biography, but a Pulitzer Prize nomination never even crossed her mind.

"I wasn't sure about the book at all," she said, recalling that first day. "I was very doubtful as to whether I could do it."

Even when she received a message saying that the Pulitzer committee in New York had called, she didn't know what they were after.

She knows now.

Merrin's book, a first-person biography titled "Standing Ovariations: Devi Dja, Woman of Java," was recently nominated for a

Pulitzer Prize in Letters for biography by the Pulitzer Prizes committee at Columbia University.

"It's a thrill," Merrin said, "and it's hers," referring to the Indonesian dancer whose rise from poverty to world prominence Merrin chronicled through four years of taped interviews.

Merrin, a 10-year Burbank resident, said a friend first introduced her to the dancer, who was looking for someone to write her biography from a personal level. It was a job Merrin was eager to accept.

"It fascinated me," she said of working with a woman who had been courted by Indian princes, conductor Leopold Stokowski and author Henry Miller. "She really wanted to reach out to people who had humble beginnings to show

them that everything is possible; the American way."

But the soft-spoken Merrin maintains that Dja's life is also the story of struggle and sacrifice that included her fleeing Europe and being prevented from returning home to Indonesia once World War II erupted. Dja sought asylum in the United States, and so great was her love for this nation that she once turned down an invitation from the Indonesian government to revoke her U.S. citizenship and return to her homeland.

"She was caring, loving, humorous and an amazing combination of understanding and universal good," Merrin said, though admitting that she had no idea the book would be so critically acclaimed.

"One is in trouble if one thinks about that in advance," she said with a smile. "I had to tell myself that the joy was in the doing."

And Merrin, whose mother was also a dancer, found working on the biography to be a joy.

"I think that was the catalyst," she said, "and we were somehow celebrating people like my mother as well as Devi Dja. I found so many connecting threads in her

struggle to overcome so many incredible personal obstacles that the story become everyone's story, it had a connection to every human being who has shed tears and has ambition."

Though this was Merrin's first book, she is no way a stranger to writing. Merrin has co-authored several unpublished stage productions, worked for newspapers in both Missouri and Texas. She has worked in public relations for such notables as Irving Wallace, Studs Terkel and Barbara Taylor Bradford.

Still, she said, "Standing Ovariations" was quite a challenge. "I thought it was going to be a brief recounting of her life," she said grinning. "We then talked for four years."

Merrin said finding someone to publish the book was another struggle. "I recall that all the responses from major publishers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic, but..."

She finally found a taker in Dr. A. Lee Henderson, founder of Lee and Lee Publishing in Santa Monica, who published the book this September. Though happy

Still, she said, the results were better than she had hoped for. "It truly was a pleasure," she said. "The great joy I had is that Devi Dja did not read English, and I would read each chapter to her, and she would cry and laugh. That made it all worthwhile. There's no greater applause in the world."



Staff photo by BONNIE BURROW
For Burbank author Leona Mayer Merrin, "The joy was in the doing."



Twyla Joyce Wells

Celebrates her 14th Birthday

Twyla is an 'A' Student at Madison High School She has always been her dad's

'Ace of Hearts'

Happy Birthday Twyla

Love Dad

DRIVE RECOGNIZES NO LIMITS TO LEARNING.

Contact Office Held Open House to Welcome Staff



The Iris Court Community Contact Office, part of the Portland Bureau's community policing efforts, held an open house to announce regular office hours and welcomed two new staff members on Tuesday, October 16, at the office, 315 N. Sumner, #3 (south of Vancouver and Killingsworth).

The Police Bureau has opened three contact offices this year, one in each of the city's three precincts. The contact offices are within the boundaries of community policing demonstration projects being conducted by each precinct.

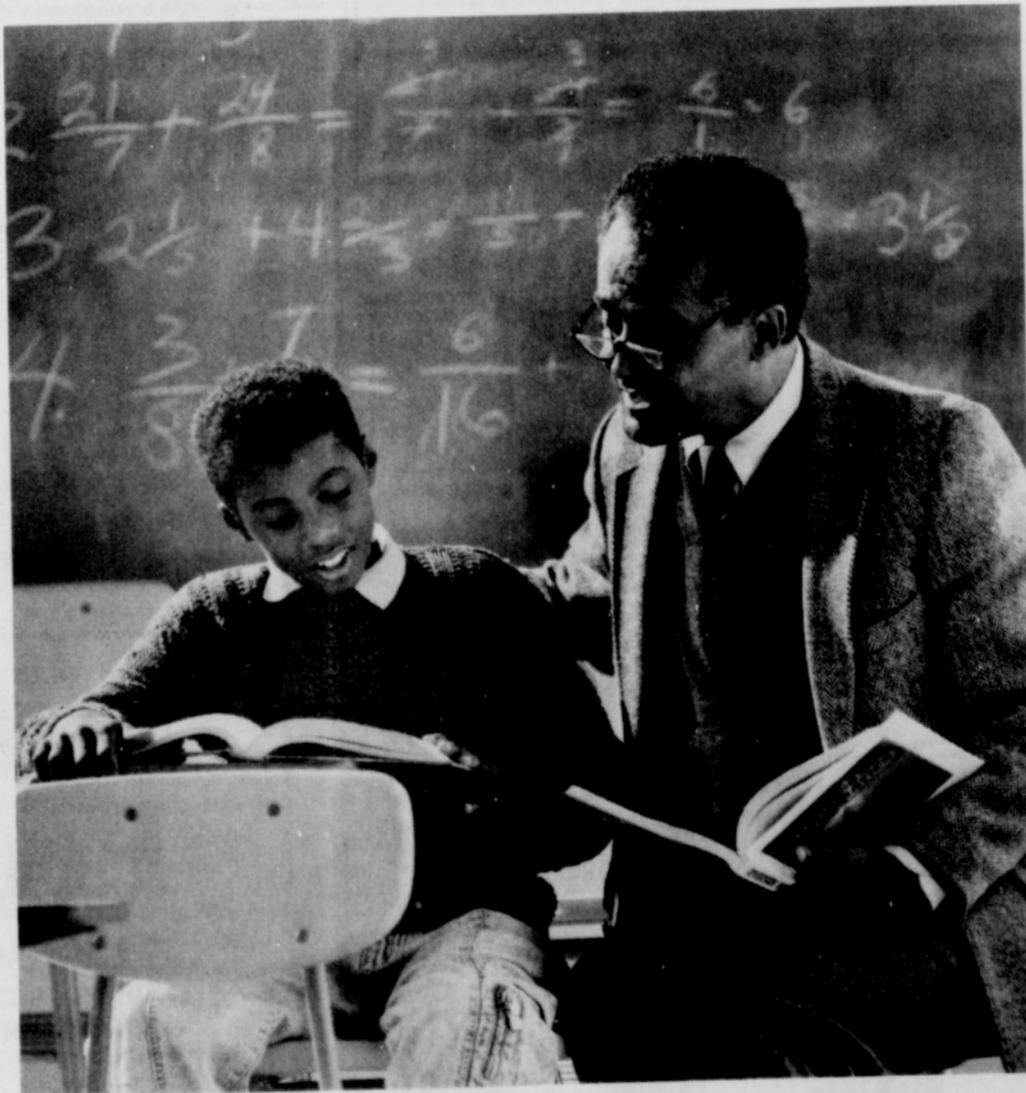
Iris Court is the first to hire staff and set office hours. Lt. Charles

Moose, project facilitator for North Precinct's Iris Court Demonstration Project, said he is pleased to welcome Ina Hart and Katie Burrell to the project. The two will staff the office from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays.

Hart and Burrell were placed through the Private Industry Council's senior employment program.

Police Bureau officials and representatives from social service, neighborhood, business and civic organizations were expected to attend the open house. The public was welcome.

"Having people here for regular hours will help us to serve this community better," said Moose.



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