

# 'Manecdotes' Lauds Fathers, Assists FSA



ON THE TOWN  
**David Laurell**

On Father's Day, while you are either enjoying a meal with your father, or thinking back on the days when you did, chances are good that the memory bank cradled within your skull will impart a few anecdotes.

As we celebrate the day, conceived by a 27-year-old Washington woman named Sonora Smart Dodd who was inspired to create a day honoring fathers while attending a Mother's Day church service in 1909, your own anecdotal memories are sure to conjure up a tear, a smile, a laugh, or perhaps a bit of confusion, gratefulness, wonderment, resentment, forgiveness, or, depending on the relationship you had with your father, a plethora of other emotions.

This past week, the seats of The Colony Theatre were filled with those who were, without a doubt, each thinking of stories relating to their fathers as nine speakers shared humorous, poignant and impactful tales of their fathers and fatherhood.

Billed as an evening of "Manecdotes,"

the event was part of an ongoing series of speakers sharing stories on various topics to benefit the Family Service Agency of Burbank. Produced by JAM Creative, under the direction of founder and creative director Suzanne Weerts, these tale-telling productions have served as fundraisers for non-profit organizations, which have raised more than \$33,000 for local charities since 2016.

Prior to the evening's main event, the audience was welcomed by Weerts who pointed out that this year marks FSA's 70th year of providing mental health services in the Burbank community and that June is Men's Health Month.

"Our society has a long tradition of men not seeking support, and yet, have you ever noticed that 'men' is in the word 'mental,'" said Weerts. "Seems to me there might be something to that."

Weerts said that because the way most men are raised, they typically don't seek mental health treatment.

"Culturally, there's a lot of pressure on men to be unwavering and to provide for their families," Weerts told the gathering. "That often creates high levels of stress and anxiety."

Sharing that men may have mental health issues stemming from trauma they experienced in their work or military service, Weerts went on to laud FSA for what they have done to help

men, including those who are active members of the military or veterans.

"The Burbank Family Service Agency has long been working to eliminate stigmas that may prevent men, young and old, from seeking help, and by making care accessible in safe, familiar and confidential places," said Weerts.

After being entertained by the musical stylings of BISHOP, a trio that features guitarist John Bishop and his daughters, ukulelists Fiona and Ivy, the evening proceeded as nine speakers presented their ancestral anecdotes in front of a backdrop that paid homage to famous television dads such as Jim Anderson of "Father Knows Best," Mike Brady of "The Brady Bunch" and Howard Cunningham of "Happy Days."

Beginning with television writer Paul Edwards, the evening's cast included screenwriter and producer Zahra Dowlatabadi, Greatest Storyteller competition-winner Frank Traynor and Sean Ewert, who serves as the director of member engagement for the Spondylitis Association of America.

The second half of the performance featured actor and writer Joe Smith, actor Rafael Clements, Cathy Dreyfuss, a Renaissance woman who is a writer, pianist, cartoonist, singer, dancer, attorney and social justice activist, and Charles Carney, an animation writer

who has written for "Bugs Bunny," "Tom and Jerry," and a book on "Space Jam," the 1996 live-action/animated film featuring former NBA star Michael Jordan.

Weerts also took her turn at the podium to share her memories of being a 10-year-old girl who, while never able to prove any outstanding ability on the baseball field, still felt that she had hit a home run due to her father's pride and appreciation of her chutzpah.

Among the notables out in support of the organization that provides counseling services and shelters for victims of domestic violence, homelessness and emancipated teens, were state Sen. Anthony Portantino, former Burbank Mayor Marsha Ramos and Jess Talamantes, former City Councilman Tim Murphy, School Board member Armond Aghakhanian and FSA Executive Director Laurie Bleick.

Also in attendance was Dowlatabadi's daughter, pop singer Em Beihold, who is best known for her hit song "Numb Little Bug," which cracked the Top 20 of Billboard's Hot 100, and who also took the top spot on the Billboard's Emerging Artists chart.

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Sharing their "manecdotes" at last week's event were Charles Carney, Rafael Clements, Zahra Dowlatabadi, Cathy Dreyfuss, Paul Edwards, Sean Ewert, Joe Smith, Frank Traynor and Suzanne Weerts.



Photos by David Laurell / Burbank Leader

The evening's music was provided by BISHOP, featuring guitarist John Bishop and his daughters, ukulelists Fiona and Ivy.



JAM Creative founder and creative director Suzanne Weerts welcomes FSA Executive Director Laurie Bleick to last week's show.



Cathy Dreyfuss recalled many of the cars she has had throughout her life, and how her father played a role in her getting those vehicles.



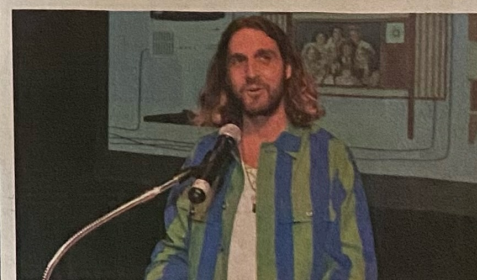
Among the "Manecdotes" cast was Zahra Dowlatabadi, an award-winning animation producer who has created for Netflix, Disney, Warner Bros. and Comedy Central.



Joe Smith, who has an extensive career in theater, film, television and stand-up, manned-up as a cast member of "Manecdotes."



Actor, drama teacher and director Rafael Clements joined eight other speakers in sharing stories of their fathers and fatherhood.



Frank Traynor, who performed at last week's FSA fundraiser, is a writer, musician, comedian, storyteller and a father to three cats and two children.