

*The Award Winning*  
**Malibu Rotary Club Surfwriter**

November 28, 2012

Official Newsletter of the Rotary Club of Malibu

Malibu Rotary Club President William Wishard

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- Malibu Rotary Club Website: [www.MalibuRotary.org](http://www.MalibuRotary.org)
- Rotary International Website: [www.Rotary.org](http://www.Rotary.org)

- Rotary District 5280 Website: [www.rotary5280.org/](http://www.rotary5280.org/)
- Rotary District 5280 “Rotarians Doing Business With Rotarians” Website: <http://yp5280.org/>
- RI President (2012-2013) Sakuji Tanaka Rotary District 5280 Governor (2012-2012): Lewis Bertrand
- Assistant Governor for Malibu Rotary Club: Julie Jenkins (2012-13)

### Joan Benedict Steiger Talks about “The Loves of My Life”



**Pictured Left: Joan Benedict Steiger in front of Tra di Noi Restaurant in Malibu with Executive Chef Francesco Velasco and Maggie Luckerath, who arranged for special Malibu Rotary meeting at restaurant**

Veteran actress of stage, screen, and television, writer, and inspiring romances with three devoted men Joan Benedict Steiger was the featured speaker at special Malibu Rotary Club lunch meeting at Tra di Noi restaurant in Malibu Country

Mart on Wednesday November 28<sup>th</sup>.

For members of the Malibu Rotary Club the lunch at Tra di Noi was special, but for Joan, having lunch at Tra di Noi is a regular routine. She lives in Malibu, and when she is not travelling she eats at the Restaurant nearly every day, at a table facing the entrance where she can observe people entering the restaurant.

From her vantage point she can observe the different people who are meeting in the Malibu Country Mart. She said she has noticed distinct differences between the groups of men and groups of women that meet. Women check each other out when they get together—their hair, their shoes, their clothes. They are calculating and often quite catty. Men don't care about any of these things. They talk about the day's events and don't care what people are wearing.

Much of what Joan had to see can be found on her website <http://www.joanbenedictsteiger.com>.

Decades of work on stage, screen, and television and the love of three devoted men sounds like a full life; but in many ways, the story is just beginning for veteran performer Joan Benedict Steiger. With credits dating back to the original "Candid Camera" on television to her acclaimed solo performance as Leona Helmsley, she has lived the artistic life she first dreamed of as a child in Brooklyn, New York – and the dream shows no signs of ending.

"I always thought when I was little I would be a dancer," Joan recalls today. "I was never really built for ballet, but I was tap dancing in public at age seven when I performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I remember the first film I ever saw was with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and as I was leaving the theatre, I wanted to run back in, I knew I had to be a part of that world."

As the only grandchild in a large family – she had seven uncles – Joan grew up in her grandfather's house off Prospect Park, where she describes herself as "Eloise at the Plaza – every one of those rooms was my magic room." Encouraged by her mother, young Joan studied at the Rome Opera Ballet School, and spent time in Paris, soaking up her craft and European culture and learning French and Italian. Back in America, Joan continued her theatrical education by studying with legendary acting coaches Robert Lewis and Stella Adler, founders of the Actor's Studio in New York. That pursuit of her craft continues today, as she continues to get a charge out of the challenge that each new acting job brings.

"The theatre for me is like being in church," she says with sincerity. "When you feel the audience, and feel that communication with other souls, it's like music. As a performer, I'm always pursuing that wonderful experience where you are completely alert and clear, and yet transported through your imagination."

Her list of stage credits include acclaimed productions of contemporary offerings such as "Promises, Promises," "The Beauty Queen of Leenane," "Collected Stories" by Donald Margulies, P.J. Barry's "The Octette Bridge Club," Horton Foote's "The Traveling Lady," and Morris West's "The World is Made of Glass;" opposite Don Knotts in the comedy "The Mind with the Dirty Man;" classics like "Richard III," "The Dyubbuk," and "Dr. Faustus;" and her two

solo shows, “Leona” (about notorious “Queen of Mean” Leona Helmsley) and the recent “The Loves of My Life,” based on her own life. On screen, she also co-starred with Knotts and Tim Conway in the comedy “The Prizefighter.”

Indeed, perhaps Joan Benedict Steiger’s career is all the more remarkable for having endured through three long-term relationships, to what she describes as “three of the greatest guys in the world.” While marriages between professional actors are often fraught with jealousy and competition, Joan has found lightning in a bottle all three times. “Both of my husbands, and my lifetime partner Jeremy, were wonderful men who respected me as an actress,” she recalls. “They all died from different forms of cancer, so my memories are sometimes bittersweet, but with no regrets.”

“Strangely, I met all three of these men when I was in New York, just beginning my career while I was still a teenager,” she says. She was only 19 when she met actor Rod Steiger, who took an instant liking to her when they appeared on the same television show together. “I was in complete awe of him at the time,” she admits. “I remember walking out after seeing him in the play ‘Rashomon’ on Broadway, and seeing his face on the marquee across the street for the movie ‘Al Capone.’ I thought, what a life – starring on Broadway and starring in a movie! Knowing him at that age was like living in a fantasy.”

Though the initial romance with Rod was short-lived, given their respective dedication to pursuing their careers, Joan soon found herself in love with leading stage actor John Myhers. “He toured in ‘The Sound of Music’ for three years as Captain von Trapp, and I would take time off to travel with him,” she says. Settling in a home near Sunset Plaza in the Hollywood Hills, their marriage lasted thirty years before Myhers’ passing. Then, in the late 1990s, Rod and Joan found each other again. Rod had heard rave reviews of some of Joan’s stage work. “I got a call from him out of the blue...he’d been at a party where someone had mentioned me, and we got together again after all those years.”

Joan and Rod were nearly inseparable for the final years of his life, becoming creative partners as well as spouses. “Rod was very impressed with my acting. Whenever a script would arrive at the house, he’d ask me to read it for my feedback, then he’d say ‘Did you pick out your part yet?’” They appeared in two films together, “A Month of Sundays” and the telefilm “The Flying Dutchman.” After a long life marked by tremendous highs and crushing lows – Steiger acknowledged suffering from chronic depression for much of his professional career – the Academy Award winning actor seemed to find new confidence and peace with his newly rediscovered love. “On one of the films we made, on the last day of shooting, Rod presented me with an Oscar-like statue he had made with my name on it, in front of the entire crew,” Joan remembers. “With me he said he was another person, and the only time in his life he had such happiness. He told me I was the only woman who could bring love out of a stone.”

Steiger’s passing in 2002 was a devastating loss, but another friend from long ago was able to fill some of the void. Actor Jeremy Slate, a veteran of over 80 films and television shows dating back to 1959, was Joan’s partner until his passing in 2006. “They were all actors, writers, directors, brilliant, funny men,” Joan says of the men who captured her heart.



Throughout her life, Joan Benedict Steiger has worked simultaneously on stage, in film, and on television. She's still remembered for a classic bit from the original version of "Candid Camera," where she played a lost tourist looking for directions from passersby, making sure that her fancy hat – beplumed with a particularly large feather – would distract them at every opportunity. She was also part of the ensemble of the original "Steve Allen Show," where she did double duty as the spokesperson for Hazel Bishop cosmetics. On daytime drama, she had regular and recurring roles on "General Hospital," "Days of our Lives," and "Capitol." Her dozens of series guest appearances include classic series like "Fantasy Island," "T.J. Hooker," "The Incredible

Hulk" and, most recently, Fox's "Dollhouse." Perhaps one of Joan's most unusual jobs is one where she was asked to "fill in" – in a manner of speaking – for a Hollywood legend. "I had been bothering the casting director at MGM for a while when he finally told me, 'I have something for you.'" MGM was preparing to make the film "Butterfield 8" starring Elizabeth Taylor; the star had been reluctant to cooperate because she was eager to begin work on the epic "Cleopatra." GM wanted to shoot the film in studios in New York and Taylor wanted to remain in Los Angeles. Joan was asked if she could go to New York to rehearse the film – playing Taylor's part – with director Daniel Mann and the rest of the cast. Joan worked for weeks reading Taylor's lines, and her dedication paid off when she was awarded a small part (a single line) in the film – for which she still earns residuals.

The role won Taylor her only Academy Award, but curiously, their paths would cross again years later through their mutual acquaintance with Rod Steiger. "When Rod and I were first dating, he went to see Elizabeth about working on a new project," she says. "This was a period when she wasn't feeling well, and Rod was one of the people who really encouraged her to get well and return to public life. That led to speculation that Rod and Liz were dating and he was going to be her next husband. Rod and I were on an airplane to Spain, and he liked to read the tabloids: when I saw the headline saying Liz and Rod were going to wed, I said, 'What's this all about?' And he smiled at me and said, 'Joan, I'm sitting next to YOU!'"

For now, Joan Benedict Steiger keeps busy preserving the legacy of her late husband, as well as continuing her stage, film, and television work whenever the right opportunity presents itself. ‘There’s still so much I can do, I’m still learning after all these years,’ she explains. “I have a regular table at my favorite restaurant in Malibu and it faces the door, because I want to watch everyone walk in, I want to observe the way they use their body, because that’s so much a part of my process as an actress.” She’s also collecting materials for her memoirs, but still knows that there are more chapters of her life left to live, and many more roles left to play.

### **Other News and Guests from Last Malibu Rotary Club Meeting**

**Veera Mahajan**, Publisher of MalibuChronicle.com, was again a guest at the Malibu Rotary Club meeting November 28<sup>th</sup>. She brought with the beautifully printed program of the 2012 Mrs Asia USA Cultural Pageant in which she represented India. Her picture and biography from the pageant appears to the right.



*Veera Mahajan*

INDIA



Veera was born in Shampur, Punjab, India. She came to US 1982. She is representing India in the Mrs. Asia, USA Cultural Pageant. Veera came to Michigan, USA in 1982 with her parents and her 3 brothers. She finished her B.Sc in computer science. She got married 1985. She is the mother of two grown sons. Three years ago she broke the cycle of domestic abuse. She moved to Malibu, CA in January of 2011. She is the owner of Malibu Chronicle publication. [www.malibuchronicle.com](http://www.malibuchronicle.com) Veera is proud to be an Indian woman because that means she believes in integrity and principles. Indians honor and respect education and hard work. She is an example of a woman who is living life on her own terms. Veera is a business woman, a writer, actor and a mother. She is a philanthropist and a volunteer. She promotes the fight against Domestic Violence.

## The Mysterious Poison Pen Letter that was Sent to Malibu Rotary Speaker

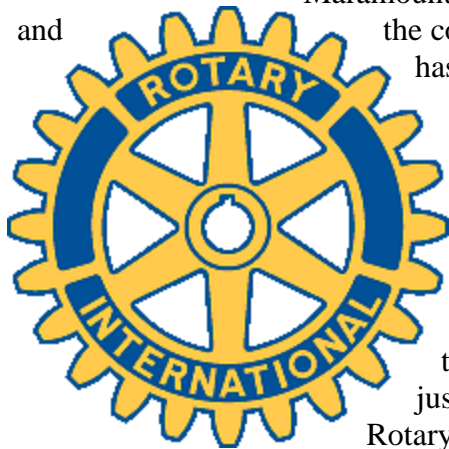


Following Joan Benedict Steiger's presentation at the Malibu Rotary Club meeting at the Tra di Noi Restaurant she received an insulting e-mail from someone. It was signed "John McKay." There was no named John McKay at the Malibu Rotary Club meeting, and everyone who was at the meeting enjoyed Ms Steiger's presentation. She was of course taken aback by this letter, and a subsequent one sent by the same person.

We don't know if "John McKay" is a man or a woman or the motivation for sending such a letter. Malibu Program Chair and Malibu Rotary Club Surfwriter Editor John Elman and Maggie Luckrath, who arranged for the presentation at the restaurant, assured Joan and her publicist Lori De Waal that the letter did not come from anyone connected with Rotary. Lori advised Joan to call the police. The culprit could have been someone in an adjacent room of the restaurant, or someone who read about Joan's appearance at the restaurant in Malibupatch.com. Lori and Joan think it could possibly be a woman because there were a lot of catty comments. So far the sender is unknown.

### Rotary District News New Generations

The Rotary District 5280 high school Speech, Music, Art and Dance Competition will be held March 9 and prizes of \$1,000, \$500, and \$250 will be awarded in each category. Entries are due in by February. Members of Rotaract can win \$1500 at an Ethics Forum to be held at Loyola Maramount University March 29. RYLA camp will be held April 26-28 and the cost is \$190.00 per student. Typically the Rotary Club of Malibu has sponsored 2 students. The deadline for entrants is Dec 20.



### Other Rotary District Events:

April 6<sup>th</sup> will be a Rotary Day of Service. Melody St John, President of the Hollywood Rotary Club, is heading up this event. She and Paul are again hosting a Rotary High School Exchange student. The student is from Germany and was able to converse with Malibu Rotarian Hubert Luckrath who had just returned from a month in Germany in time to attend the Rotary District Breakfast in Los Angeles.

The Rotary Global Peace Forum Conference will be held January 25<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup> in Honolulu. Young adults are especially encouraged to attend, and Rotarians who can afford it are encouraged to sponsor young adults. Malibu Rotarian Barbara Riley is planning to attend.

Rotary District 5280 is having a Group Study Exchange (GSE) this year with Rotary District 2620 in Japan. The Rotary Foundation's Group Study Exchange (GSE) program is a unique cultural and vocational exchange opportunity for businesspeople and professionals between the

ages of 25 and 40 who are in the early stages of their [careers](#). The program provides travel grants for teams to exchange visits in paired areas of different countries. For four to six weeks, team members experience the host country's culture and institutions, observe how their vocations are practiced abroad, develop personal and professional relationships, and exchange ideas.

Please see Malibu Rotary Club Website [www.maliburotary.org](http://www.maliburotary.org) for latest Calendar and future speakers and facebook pages for other news.

Like Rotary Club of Malibu on 

## Calendar

**(all Malibu Rotary Club meetings are held at 7:30 a.m. Wednesdays in Fireside Room of Pepperdine University unless otherwise noted)**

**Dec 05, 2012**

**Bill Wishard**

**"Malibu Rotary Club Planning Assembly"**

**Dec 12, 2012**

**Holiday Party**

**"Holiday Party 6:00 p.m. at Kristys Wood Oven & Wine bar, 6506 Westward Beach Road(no morning meeting)"**

**There will be no morning meeting of the Malibu Rotary Club on December 12th. Instead there will be a Holiday Dinner Party 6:00 p.m. at Kristys Wood Oven & Wine bar located at Malibu Country Inn, 6506 Westward Beach Road.**

**Dec 19, 2012**

**Livia Giordano**

**"Experiences as Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar Studying at Pepperdine in Malibu, CA USA"**

**We met Livia Giordano this past July when she first came to Malibu as Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar newly arrived from Zurich Switzerland just before she was about to start her classes at the Strauss Institute for Dispute Resolution. At the December 19th Malibu Rotary Club meeting she will report on how her first half year in the United States.**



