

Author Takes a Comic Approach to GMO Issue

Weil to Speak at Palisades Branch Library on Feb. 19

By JACQUELINE PRIMO
Reporter

Sharon Weil, local WGA screenwriter, producer, director and now author of the wacky, yet gravely serious romantic mishap-adventure *Donny and Ursula Save the World* will be speaking at the **Palisades Branch Library** on Thursday, Feb. 19 at 6:30 p.m.

Weil will read from her novel and talk about the issues it addresses like GMOs (or genetically-modified foods), passion, fear and bravery, all in what she describes as “a comic book approach to a serious topic.”

“It’s a funny book, a really, really funny book. But it gets serious,” Weil said in an interview over coffee and tea with the *Palisadian-Post*.

Weil is a 13-year resident of the Palisades and her resume includes screenwriting and producing credits for the TV movie *Reel Love* starring LeAnn Rimes. Weil said that prior to this novel, her first, she has primarily written romantic comedies and family dramas.

But Weil said this story had other plans.

“This did not want to be a screenplay. It didn’t want to be confined into that form,” she said. “Often the approach to writing a screenplay is more structured than the approach to writing a novel. You have to be more economical and concise. You don’t always have to write in full sentences or even use proper grammar and you have to convey fast action. But with novels you have the freedom to use different character voices, have more play with form and it’s very character-based.”



Palisadian Sharon Weil, author of ‘Donny and Ursula Save the World.’

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

Weil said she has been writing *Donny and Ursula* over the course of eight years while working on an assortment of other projects, but that for the past two years she has really focused her attention on writing the novel.

“I worked on it until it let go of my ankles,” Weil said.

Weil, who has always had an interest in gardening and healthy eating, said further research on the current status of GMOs and organic foods inspired her to put a spin on what started as “just another romantic comedy.”

Character Donny is a comedy writer whose outward display of total apathy is hiding his belief that he has the potential to be a comic book hero, should the need arise. Ursula is a nature-loving travel

agent. As luck would have it, the unlikely pair quickly fall in love.

“When an agribusiness giant threatens to control the world’s food supply through their toxic GMO freedom seeds, Donny and Ursula join forces with outlaw guerilla gardeners...and even Mother Earth herself—to rise up and save the day,” Weil describes.

“I set out to write a book about a reluctant activist,” Weil said, describing her book as “speculative fiction.”

“The U.S. is interested in agribusiness, and agribusiness is interested in GMOs,” Weil told the *Post*. “Anytime you’re talking about GMOs, you’re talking about pesticides. Seventy-five to 80 percent of common grain crops are genetically mod-

ified and at least 60 countries (not including the U.S.) have outlawed GMOs. So why not label [GMO foods] and let consumers make their own choices at the very least?”

Although Weil said GMOs have not been around long enough for any long-term studies to have been conducted that could shed light on any potential health risks, she said the consumption of genetically-modified foods has been linked to an increase in asthma and allergies in both children and adults.

“The book is sexy, funny and playful but it also has this message,” Weil said of the novel’s foodie theme. “The book is my activism and my own call to action.”