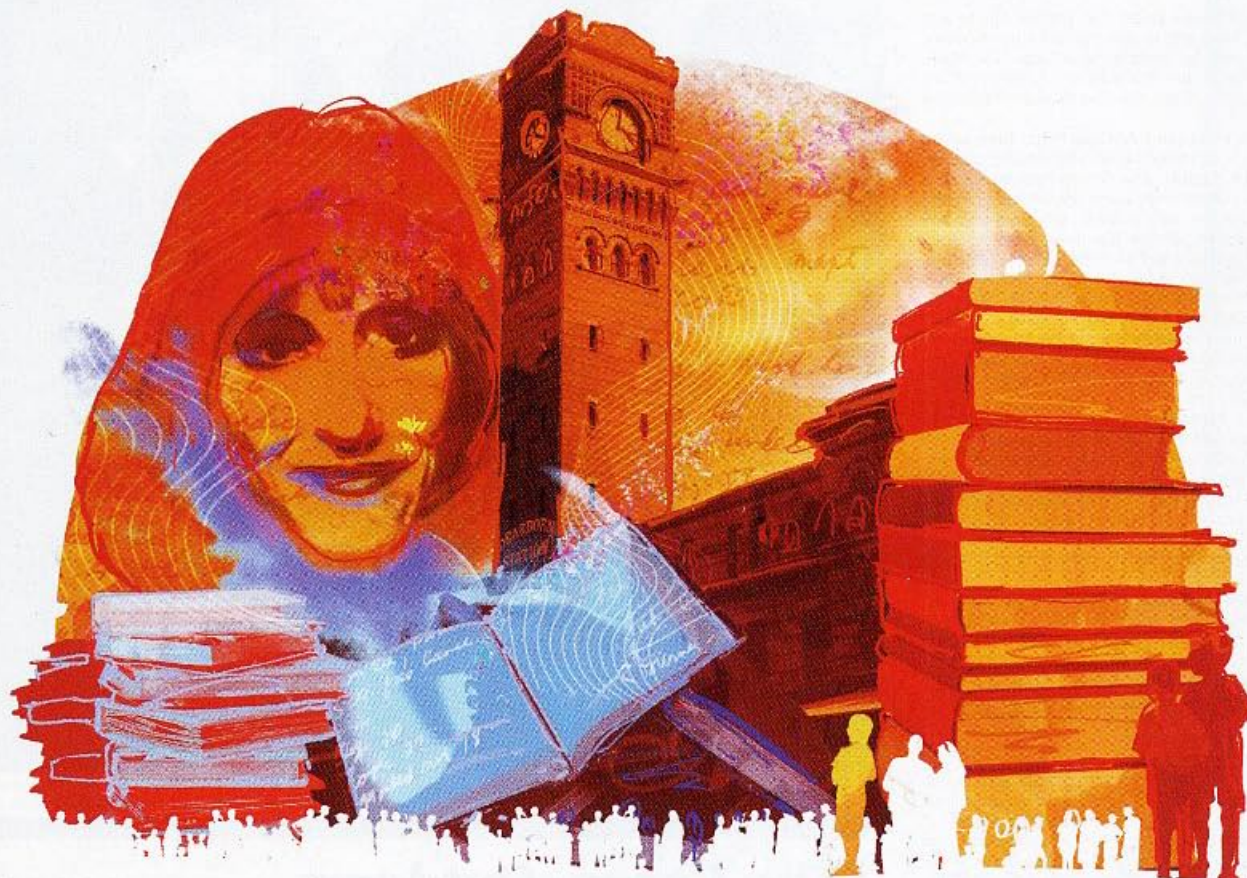


Datebook

INSIDE Wine and Dandy p.22 | Street Cred for Shakespeare p.26 | Holding Court in Winnetka p.32 | RSVP p.40

Edited by Jeff Cockrell



And She Lived Happily Ever After

How a Wilmette resident changed course and opened up a whole new chapter in her career.

You have to appreciate the irony of Wilmette's Nili Yelin finding large crowds — like the one she'll draw this month when she returns for the second year in a row to host the children's stage at the Chicago Tribune's Printers Row Book Fair — by focusing on small audiences. Or rather, make that small audience members.

Because Yelin didn't start out looking to become "the Storybook Mom." Didn't count on finding celebrity as a "sit-down comic" for the sandbox set. A graduate of Northwestern's theater program, at one point Yelin had regular gigs at Zany's Comedy Club and recurring roles on *Saturday Night Live* and an MTV's *Half Hour Comedy Hour*. But even with that success Yelin found money was tight — and throwing motherhood into the mix didn't help. "I quit stand-up," she recalls, "because working nights simply wasn't an option."

But turning the page on stand-up didn't mean closing the book on her performing career. She concentrated on voiceover work and commercial acting and eventually found her way into storytelling.

Now Yelin's animated renditions, personalized asides and topical ad-libs keep young audiences in stitches at kid-friendly locales such as libraries, school auditoriums and the Field Museum's Family Play Lab.

For the book fair, an outdoor event taking place June 7 and 8, "I'll be reading stories, plus introducing a bunch of wonderful children's authors," says Yelin. As master of ceremonies for the children's stage Yelin will host a full crew of kindertainers, including Chris Fascione, Mr. Nicky, and Evanston's own Justin Roberts and the Not Ready for Naptime Players. Because the children's area is sponsored by the Shedd Aquarium, youngsters can also expect to hear stories of water animals and perhaps even meet a few reptilian-types up close and personal.

"The kids love it," Yelin says. "We make it all about them."

-Dawn Margolis Denberg

June 7-8, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., free. Dearborn and Polk streets, Chicago.
Call 312/222-3986 for more information.