

PERFORMING POLLY

BY MEGAN WALDREP
PHOTOS BY AHRON R. FOSTER

A crowd gathers at Buttonwood Farm Winery & Vineyard in artist Seyburn Zorthian's studio, a last-minute refuge from the rain. Chairs are filled as fast as they are set out and wine bottles emptied. In fewer than 10 minutes, artist Polly Frost will take the stage to perform her one-woman show *We Only Get One Father – So Why Was I Given Mine?* It's a straightforward, emotional narration of one daughter's relationship with an egocentric father.

Lights dim as I hustle to find a spot. Polly's husband, former *Newsweek* arts reporter Ray Sawhill, waves me over and we settle into two stools in the back, the last seats in the house. At that moment, the song "This Is A Man's World" by James Brown melts through the speakers and Polly strides down the aisle, commanding the room with each step. After a poetic pause Polly recites, by memory, a slice of life poised between heartache, hope, and acceptance.

Within the course of 75 minutes, response from the audience varies between bursts of laughter and gasps of disbelief. Her monologue resonates. Nerves are touched. Art is made. The performance ends to a standing ovation.

Much of the material in *We Only Get One Father – So Why Was I Given Mine?* is set during her childhood in Goleta during the free-love backdrop of the 1960s and 70s. Eccentricities of the times permeated her life. Even the house she grew up in was built by Frank Robinson, one of the rowdy Mountain Drive scenesters who, as she recounts, once showed up for work clothed



only in a pair of pirate boots. Polly's interest in wordplay began as early as age seven when she composed short stories and plays mimicking books she read. Even teachers couldn't help but notice her penchant for humor writing.

But as a teen, with dreams to become a horse trainer or fashion designer (she also modeled and sewed her own clothes), the young wordsmith shelved the idea of writing as a livelihood. It wasn't until after some time at Santa Barbara City College, UCSB, and taking five years to explore other career options that her talent for humor and satirical writing could no longer be suppressed. Polly went for the top, submitting works to *The New Yorker* and, in a major career highlight for any writer, was published.

So Polly did what many brave young artists yearn to do: she made the jump to New York City and, in a fairy tale in its own right, was able to support her life through writing movie reviews. Her interest in film – which she credits partly to horror movies and Ingrid Bergman films seen at Santa Barbara's Riviera Theatre – garnered more than money for rent. Famed *New Yorker* movie critic Pauline Kael savored her work and the ladies became fast friends. Pauline even played matchmaker, introducing Polly to writer, native New Yorker, and now husband, Ray Sawhill.

With her talent embraced, it was clear versatility was a strong point. Beyond film reviews, her journalistic works covered music and food, and