

Westchester Branch

Individual New Program - Diversity - Women Making a Difference

This event moved the AAUW mission forward by illustrating the importance of accepting and understanding each person's uniqueness and diversity. By sponsoring this meeting, we wanted to bring visibility to handicapped persons and to advocate for their acceptance by others. Our speaker, Emily Kingsley, a branch member, spoke about *Forty One Years at Sesame Street*. As a writer for the show, she introduced the first handicapped children and adults to perform in realistic roles on TV. Emily has a very personal connection with handicaps. She is the mother of a son who has Down's Syndrome and at the time of his birth her doctor recommended that she place her son in an institution and tell everyone he died at birth. A suggestion that was completely unacceptable to her and to her husband. Her son has gone on to be an actor and an author! Her goal at Sesame Street was to show that individuals can be different but they still led lives in a family and could have careers. They could be independent and that was ok or they could need help and that was ok. It was alright to talk about their handicap with them and to ask questions. They should not be treated as if they were invisible. Emily used clips from Sesame Street to illustrate her premise. She shared film clips depicting Christopher Reeves and his son, discussing his accident, his wheel chair and his use of blowing air to move about, with Big Bird as they prepared to go the library together. In a clip with Itzhack Perlman and a little girl, Mr. Perlman talks about how he was sick with polio as a child and now it is hard for him to walk and especially to climb stairs. He goes on to explain that because of the polio vaccine the little girl will never get polio. Mr. Perlman says despite his handicap it is easy for him to play the violin and he plays a child's piece. The little girl picks up her violin and plays a more difficult classical piece and tells him it is easy for her too. Emily also showed us a clip of a blind woman crossing the street by using her hearing and a guide dog and a clip of a deaf woman communicating with her friends by using sign language. Emily wanted to make the public aware that handicapped people could lead happy, productive lives. She feels it is important for children to have their questions about handicapped people asked openly and answered honestly. Sesame Street is also keeping up with the new emphasis on STEM courses and the new curriculum is being presented for pre-school children. The attendees were told they could help prevent the loss of government funding for public TV by sending letters or emails to our elected representatives asking them to continue providing support for public TV programs like Sesame Street. Emily is a woman making a difference.

Members who knew Emily suggested her to the program committee as a speaker who would move the AAUW mission forward and illustrate how we can break down some of the barriers that handicapped people face. We followed a time line contacting Emily, setting a date that was ok for her and for the Greenburgh Public Library that co-sponsors our programs. We informed the Yearbook editor who includes our program calendar in the Yearbook. The program chair wrote an article for CHIPS, the newsletter editor and the website manager published the article. The hospitality chair arranged for refreshments and clean up, the membership co-chairs set up a

membership table with AAUW membership info and name tags for attendees and guests. One member managed the film clips and another member managed the lights. The library janitor provided tables, set up chairs and gave us audio visual equipment. Two members did a run through two days before the meeting to make sure the equipment was compatible with the DVD. A librarian acted as liaison to make sure everything went smoothly and a member of the library staff designs and distributes the program flier.

For community visibility we published articles on the AAUW website and in the branch newsletter, we sent the information to the Westchester Office for Women for their website calendar, and we set up an easel with the program info near the front door of the library. The library prepared a flier and included the program info on their website calendar.

Impact on the attendees was immediate and positive. The questions during the Q & A were very supportive and the group had obviously been very touched by the film clips and Emily's presentation. Emily was so gratified that she offered to come back to speak about how the show content is carefully researched, the characters developed, the cast chosen and the final version authorized.

We need to use even more publicity to attract a larger audience. We are continuing to try to find a way to increase the number of guests who become members. Our preparation and planning, especially with the audio, visual equipment is leading to more professional presentations.

Thank you for consideration of this program for an award in the diversity category

Selena Barron

**MARCH 2 BRANCH PROGRAM:
FORTY-ONE YEARS ON SESAME STREET**

We are pleased to announce that renowned speaker, Emily Perl Kingsley, is returning to address our AAUW branch at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, March 2. Many of us remember her captivating talk at our holiday luncheon in 2009, "Welcome to Holland."



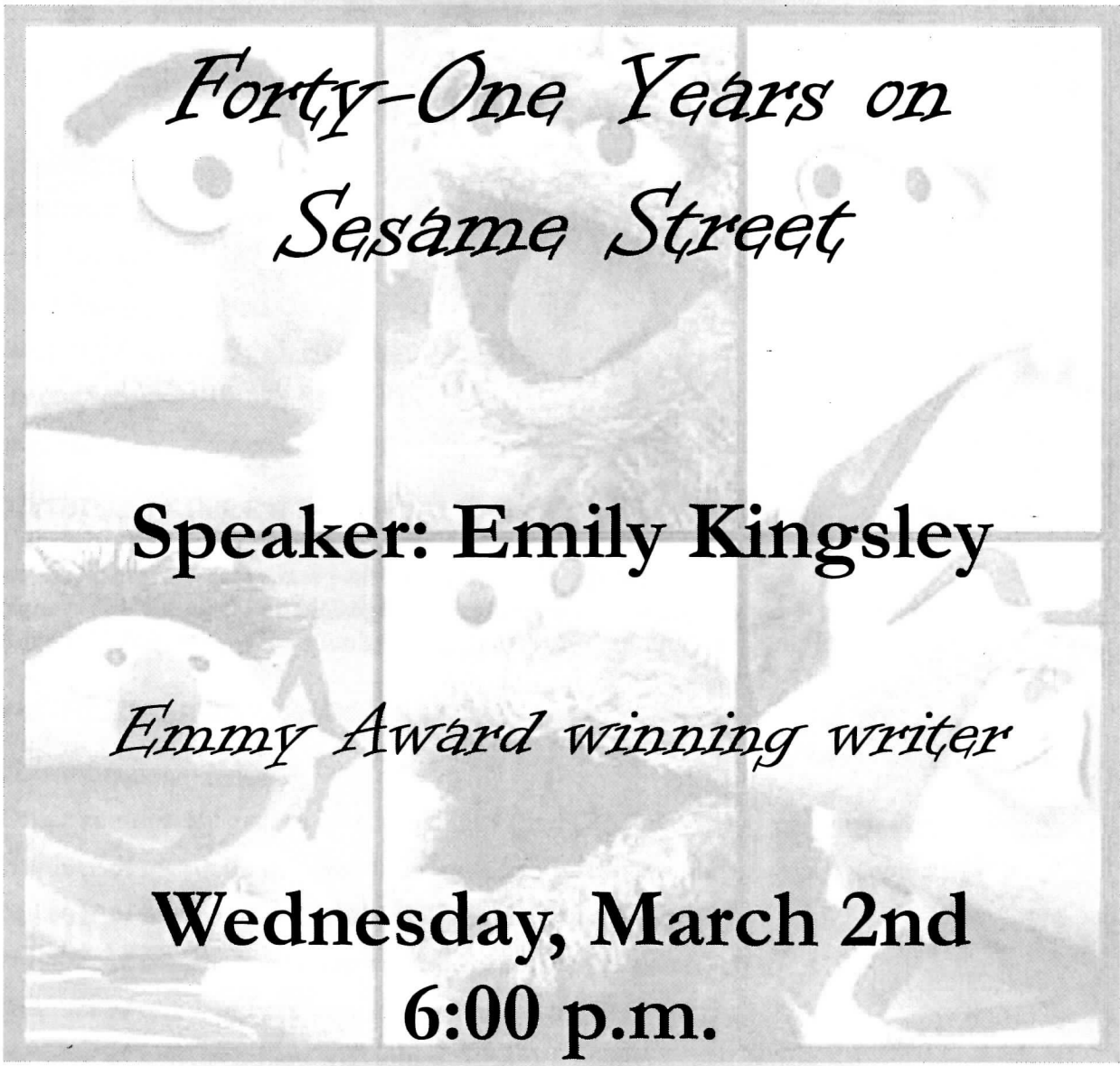
Emily Perl Kingsley broke into television in 1963 doing Script Research for the CBS series EAST SIDE/WEST SIDE, starring George C. Scott. This was the start of a series of what she calls "dream jobs" including work on John Gielgud's NBC-TV special AGES OF MAN and THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK. In 1967 she became Associate Producer of the ABC-TV game show EVERYBODY'S TALKING. Two years later, she did the film research and assisted in editing a feature-length documentary on Malcolm X, which was distributed in theaters, and the film, which was later, adapted by Spike Lee into a major motion picture.

In 1970, after a research/booking job on THE DICK CAVETT SHOW and a stint as Talent Coordinator for the 22nd Annual Emmy Awards Show, Ms. Kingsley joined the Children's Television Workshop as a writer for SESAME STREET. She has been writing scripts and songs for the popular children's television show ever since and, in addition, has written about 20 children's books, many home videos (ELMO LEARNS TO SHARE, ELMO SAYS BOO and several editions of ELMO'S WORLD) and many of her songs appear on Sesame Street record albums, CDs and tape cassettes. She has also written material for the CD-ROM versions of 101 DALMATIANS and THE LITTLE MERMAID for Disney Interactive.

She has received 17 Emmy Awards and 14 Emmy nominations for her work on SESAME STREET, and she has received many additional awards, honors, medals and commendations for her humanitarian work.

The mother of a child with Down syndrome, Ms. Kingsley is a frequent lecturer on that subject and on mental retardation and disability rights. The story of her son, Jason, was the subject of an hour-long drama special, THIS IS MY SON, on NBC-TV in 1977. Ms. Kingsley was instrumental in helping to accomplish the comfortable integration of mentally and physically disabled children and adults into the format of SESAME STREET.

We are looking forward to this engaging speaker and talented woman, who will address us at the **Greenburgh Public Library at 6 o'clock on the first Wednesday in March.**



*Forty-One Years on
Sesame Street*

Speaker: Emily Kingsley

Emmy Award winning writer

**Wednesday, March 2nd
6:00 p.m.**

Ms. Kingsley will discuss the triumphs and challenges of her illustrious career as a writer on "Sesame Street."

 **Westchester
branch**

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