

Arts & Life

Community

The Arts

## Former Baltimorean Beth Ellen Fromm Honored on Palm Springs Walk of Stars

April 19, 2023 By Caryn R. Sagal



*Beth Ellen Fromm: "The fact that I was nominated, and then approved, to receive a star totally surprised me. This is something I never dreamed about, but will treasure!" (Provided photo)*

Beth Ellen Fromm spent most of her youth in Northwest Baltimore watching Saturday movie matinees, with no inkling that she would be celebrated later in life alongside legends of the silver screen.

Fromm, who now lives in Rancho Mirage, California, was recently honored with a star on the Palm Springs Walk of Stars. Since 1992, the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce has awarded stars to celebrities and local notable personalities.

A Milford Mill High School graduate who attended the University of Maryland, Fromm joins a long list of walk honorees including Bob Hope, Rudolph Valentino, Shirley Temple, Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, Gen. George S. Patton, Marilyn Monroe, and Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan.

Fromm's star — the 458th so far — is located between those of John Phillips of the 1960s vocal group The Mamas & The Papas and actor/comedian Larry Storch of "F Troop" fame. The honor was awarded on behalf of Fromm's work for Palm Springs' thriving film community.

As a founding member and executive director of the Desert Film Society since 2002, Fromm has coordinated the screenings of nearly 500 American and foreign independent films, while previewing more than 5,000 movies to select for local premieres.

She also conceived and produced Palm Springs' first French film festival, Cinema Francais Palm Springs. For the Palm Springs Cultural Center, of which she is an original board member,

Fromm negotiated with foreign film distributors to provide virtual screenings, allowing members to continue watching two new films a month during the pandemic.

*Jmore* recently caught up with Fromm, who is sister of local food writer Dara Bunjon, host of “The Food Enthusiast” weekly broadcast on *Jmore*’s social media platforms.

***Jmore*: How does it feel to be immortalized on the Walk of Stars?**

**Fromm:** The fact that I was nominated, and then approved, to receive a star totally surprised me. This is something I never dreamed about, but will treasure! Ceremony day was ‘Beth Fromm Day’ in Palm Springs, and I had a glow on throughout. The kind thoughts expressed by [Desert Film Society] members, ex-mayors of Palm Springs and Rancho Mirage, and other VIPs brought tears to my eyes.



*Beth Ellen Fromm with her star on the Palm Springs Walk of Stars (Provided Photo)*

One of my friends from Baltimore who now lives in St. Augustine, Florida, drove here to share the day with me. The fact that he did this was another way my heart was deeply touched. I’m still in contact today with friends I met at School No. 18, Garrison [Junior High], Forest Park and Milford Mill High School.

**Where did your love of cinema come from?**

For fun, I frequented The Ambassador and The Forest Theatre. My aunt and uncle owned the Ben Franklin 5 & 10 [store in Forest Park] across the street from The Ambassador. When I stopped by, they would they would give me 25 cents to cover the cost of my movie ticket.

I loved how movies gave me the feeling of being whisked to places I had never seen. I could escape for 90 minutes to see beautiful people and wardrobes, sometimes to cry but know what I’m seeing isn’t real, to learn more about the world and where I wanted to go, and to dream.

**Did you plan to go into the film industry?**

Not at all! At the University of Maryland, College Park, I majored in elementary education and minored in math. After teaching second grade at Cross Country and then Edgecomb Circle elementary schools, I managed a temporary office service in Baltimore for a few years. At my request they transferred me to L.A. in the early ’70s. Soon after, I was coding spread sheets and training staff at a computer timesharing company.

In ’75, I returned to Baltimore and provided training and R&D services for a word processing company. I also ran Color Magic from my home studio to teach women what colors of clothes and makeup they should wear. Then came Sunshine Doctors, a temporary service for cosmeticians. I sent manicurists, hair stylists, masseurs, etc., to hospitals as gifts to patients. I also worked as an

outside travel agent, traded Beanie Babies on the internet and twice a year sold a ladies clothing line of Armani knockoffs.

After moving to Palm Springs in 2000, my husband, Ronald Sharrow, played golf six days a week. I never was a country club person so I became a concierge at La Quinta Resort and loved it. But after establishing the Desert Film Society, I didn't have time to continue at the hotel.

### **What led you to the Desert Film Society?**

After the annual Palm Springs Film Festival in 2001, someone approached Camelot Theatre Manager J.P. Allen about starting a group that would gather monthly for quality foreign films like those shown at the festival. A local newspaper article mentioned a meeting at the theater to discuss forming such a group, the DFS. I attended just with the intention of joining, but ultimately offered to write a monthly press release because no one else volunteered to do PR. Several weeks later, the person who was going to book the films dropped out, and J.P. suggested I step in. I reminded him I wasn't from L.A. and had no studio connections and no idea how to find films. He assured me I could figure it out.

I went home, wrote a letter, found a list of distributors on the internet and began emailing them. Neil Friedman from Menemsha Films sent me my first DVD to preview, and that's how it all started.

### **How did Cinema Francais Palm Springs come about?**

DFS members and other local film enthusiasts had embraced French films, and that inspired me to create a festival that would introduce all of Palm Springs to award-winning, new French-language films and filmmakers. The Palm Springs Cultural Center was happy to partner with me, contribute the screening rooms and sell tickets.

### **What do you enjoy most about your career in film programming?**

I love the challenge of searching the world online for what appears to be a quality film that will appeal to our audiences, negotiating price if I like the film, making sure the film gets to Palm Springs and returned to the distributor, writing copy for our website and, most of all, listening to the applause as the film ends and hearing people's comments and thank-yous on their way out.

### **How often do you watch movies?**

I get links to movies daily and try to watch one a day. Sometimes I skip a day, and there are days when I watch two. During the Sundance Film Festival, I stream as many as three a day. Film watching is still my way to relax and get away from everything else in the world that needs my attention.

### **What's your criteria for a good movie?**

A film with unpredictable twists and turns will always catch my fancy. Overall, if a film keeps my interest and I continue to think about it hours and days later, then I consider it an excellent film and will tell others not to miss seeing it.

### **Favorite films?**

My favorite film that I booked is [the 1999 Hungarian-German film] 'Gloomy Sunday.' Last year, I was smitten with the documentary 'The Automat,' which pushed my memory buttons from my childhood. Among all the commercial films, 'Dirty Dancing' and 'Pretty Woman' come to my mind as films I can watch repeatedly.

### **What's next for you?**

I plan to continue to create a unique cinematic experience for all film enthusiasts in Palm Springs at affordable prices for years to come.

*Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based public relations consultant and freelance writer.*