

Work? You'd Best Not Mention It

By DON RIGHETTI
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Cecil and Erna Yorke will tell you they are retired — really militantly retired to the point their fur gets ruffled when somebody mentions something that sounds like work. Don't believe it.

Between the two of them they have enough projects going to put a whole production staff in a sweat.

Cecil, an ink-stained veteran of four decades of journalism and publishing activity, currently has four novels and a stack of shorter pieces under consideration by various publishers. He also teaches an adult education class in creative writing at Aptos High School.

Erna, former costume designer for the Ziegfeld Follies, is writing a comprehensive history of the world's millinery fashions. And she is doing the 400 color illustrations for the book herself.

The living room of the Yorkes' Capitola home is decorated with several of Erna's outstanding watercolor and pastel works.

A native of Pittsburgh, Pa., Erna attended Carnegie Institute there to study design and ballet. A short tour with the old Russian Ballet convinced her she wanted to be a dancer. So when she graduated in 1916 she made the trip to New York to fulfill her dreams.

She found, she reported, that "dancers didn't eat very regularly."

Incidentally, she noted that today's television dancers are "great artists," and that dancers in TV chorus lines are

better than the principal performers were in the old days.

Abandoning her short-lived career as a dancer, Erna took a modeling job from Lady Lucile Duff-Gordon, famed costume designer who did most of the costumes for the movies of World War I vintage.

When Lady Duff-Gordon returned to England after the war, her New York fashion house was at a loss to continue without her talents. Then other members of the firm remembered the famous designer had made most of her creations using Erna as a model. They found Erna had learned most of the techniques the designer had used, and so, barely out of her teens, Erna became a designer for the largest fashion house in New York.

Among her tasks was the creation of the magnificent costumes for the Ziegfeld Follies. Of the famed showman, Florenz Ziegfeld, Erna remembers, "I got along with him very well, but a lot of people didn't."

She said of the Follies that other stage productions have since topped them in opulence, but "they were the epitome of magnificence for their time."

Erna also designed for the movies, creating costumes for such stars as Gloria Swanson, Theda Bara, Marion Davies and Billie Burke.

"I didn't do the Gish sisters, though," she commented. "They wore lady-like things and I did exotic stuff."

Erna stayed with the fashion house for eight years, until it was closed by bankruptcy. Then she decided to strike out on her own and opened a fashion

and design shop in Pittsburgh.

It was there she met Cecil when he rented a room from her above the fashion shop.

That was the end of the fashion business. Erna closed the shop as soon as she and Cecil were married.

"I married him and decided I couldn't stand women another minute," she declared.

The fashion shop was something less than a get-rich-quick operation anyway, and Erna was having to work long hours just to make ends meet.

"As a designer, you were and probably are great," Cecil commented to his wife, "but as a businesswoman..."

"I was lousy," she finished the sentence for him.

Cecil started life 66 years ago as the son of a Boston minister.

He went to Muskingum College at New Concord, Ohio, for three years as a student of English and philosophy. But he had made the mistake in his early years of hanging around the weekly newspaper office in Caldwell, Ohio. And he found out that printer's ink is impossible to wash off once it gets under your skin.

He joined United Press news service in Columbus, Ohio, in 1925 and was later transferred to the service's Pittsburgh office.

That's where he met Erna and, as he puts it, "got married to avoid paying rent."

He later worked for a Pittsburgh radio station as an announcer and publicity director. In fact, both he and Erna were working for the station when

NBC did its first network shows.

After leaving the station, Cecil put in a hitch with Associated Press, then became manager of the state of Pennsylvania for International News Service.

But by that time the writing bug had a firm grip on him, and he left INS to move with Erna to Greenwich Village as a full-time freelancer. He specialized in blood-and-thunder crime stories that were gobbled up by pulp magazines as fast as he could write them. On one occasion he shared table-of-contents billing with mystery master Erle Stanley Gardner.

Cecil takes no special pride in the blood-soaked epics, and writes them off with the comment, "It was all done for money."

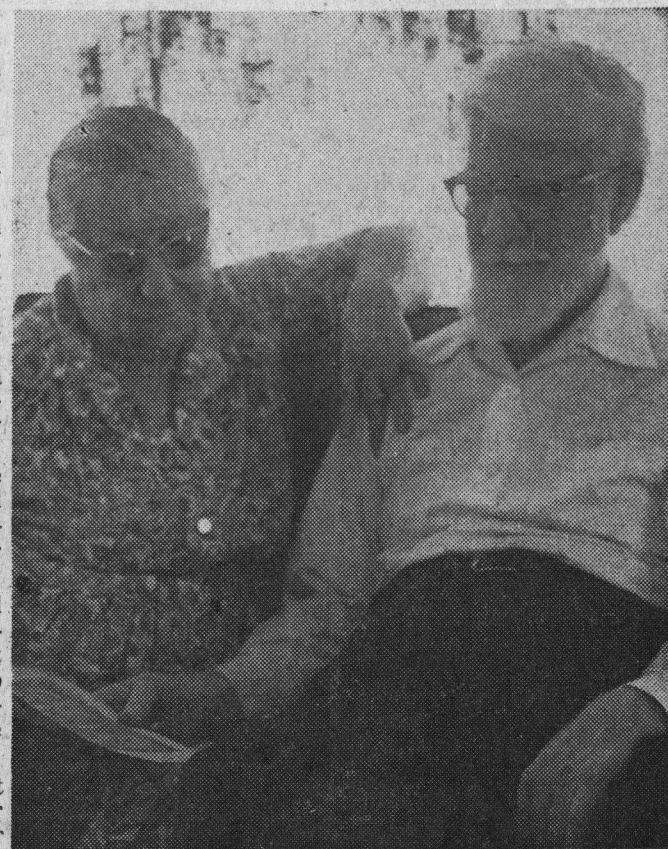
By 1934 the depression had descended on the publishing industry and the magazines that used Cecil's stuff started to go broke. So he gave up freelancing and turned into a trouble shooter for United Press.

Three years later he quit to become a publicity man for Fortune magazine and later worked for Time-Life in the same capacity.

He worked for Time-Life until 1944, then started his own business as a magazine consultant, breathing new life into ailing publications.

He later became a publisher in his own right and established a printing composition firm during the early days of "cold type" for offset lithography printing.

In 1960, with their son out of college, the Yorkes decided



Erna and Cecil Yorke examine one of the many costume designs Erna created while she worked for a famed New York fashion house.

they were working too hard. They quit their publishing and type composition ventures and Cecil took a job with a publisher of technical and science textbooks as a production editor.

He was transferred to the firm's Palo Alto office in 1965 and retired two years later.

They scouted all along the coast for a place to live and decided they liked Capitola best. And that's where they settled down for their years of retirement.

Some retirement. They work harder than lots of people who claim they haven't retired yet.