

[PEOPLE IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD]

Author Anna Hays

By Colleen Paeff, Ledger Contributing Writer



Silver Lake resident and author Anna Hays sees a story in just about everything. In fact, she’s managed to create a career out of telling stories in the most unexpected—and a few expected—places.

She started her journey as an assistant director with the theater company, the Wooster Group, in New York City. Then, as a graduate student at Columbia, she began writing film reviews. “Once I started writing,” she said, “I knew that was something that interested me. But it didn’t feel complete. That’s why I came to Los Angeles.” Soon, Hays landed a job with B-movie king Roger Corman. For three years she directed, wrote, edited and distributed and exhibited films. But then, “As much as I had learned, I was starting to lose my sense of humor about the content,” she said. “I was still into the process and ideas, but I needed to connect to the story.” Hays continued to work in film and theater, but after attending a life changing conference she shifted her focus to the storytelling possibilities brought about by the emerging technologies of the early 1990s. She landed a job at Nintendo, where she worked on educational games, picture book CD-ROMs and video games. During this time she created the character of Portia Avatar, the 12-year-old, self-described “Girl Psychoanalytic Detective” and lead character in Hays’ middle grade novels *Portia’s Ultra Mysterious Double Life* and *Portia’s Exclusive and Confidential Rules on True Friendship*. Portia’s journey to publication was long. Back in 1997, a television show, starring Portia, was in the works. Steven Spielberg was involved. People were hired, fired, and then the whole thing fell apart. But, the experience led Hays to take her storytelling ability in a new direction—as an Experience Designer. For ten years, she honed her craft in the arena of theme parks and retail stores, creating consumer experiences for companies like Disney and the Fashionology store in Beverly Hills. But Portia lingered at the back of Hays’ mind. So, she started to work on

the manuscript again and sent it to a literary agent. A few weeks after Hays' twin sons were born in 2006, she learned Simon & Schuster wanted to publish her book. Becoming a published author hasn't stopped Hays from telling stories in less traditional ways. She continues to design retail and theme park experiences (and just finished designing a doll line) even as she works on her next novel. (hint: it's about a girl magician).