

FRONT PAGES



Recipe for Success

SAM ZIEN RECALLS the day he pulled over on the side of the road and made the desperate call. He'd just finished a phone conversation with his brothers, whom he'd previously told about his plan to leave a "miserable" job in biotech to pursue his dream of hosting his own travel show on television. Again they told him he was crazy to abandon his job. They asked what he'd do after he failed. The weight of their doubt was suffocating, crushing. So Sam called his friend and life coach Allison Maslan.

"I used Allison like someone in AA uses a sponsor," says Zien, known today by TV audiences as *Sam the Cooking Guy*. (The show concept was tweaked along the way.) He credits Maslan, developer and president of the Blast Off! Life Coaching Program in Leucadia (myblastoff.com), with helping him overcome the self-doubt and fear that prevented him from living the life he envisioned. "Allison helped me sort myself out and see my potential," Zien says. "She helped me find the clarity and the guts to take the leap. Now I have my own national television show on Discovery Health, 11 Emmys and my first book."

In the past six months, Maslan, an entrepreneur

for the past 25 years (her business ventures range from advertising to homeopathy), has helped eight clients take the leap and start a new business. In this economy? Certainly, she says.

"It might seem counterintuitive to start a new business when the economy is flailing, but a recession can actually be the ideal time for launching a new enterprise," says Maslan, citing numerous Fortune 500 companies—Disney, Johnson & Johnson, Intel—founded during an economic downturn. "Often the worst of times can end up being an opportunity for the best of times," she writes in a MyLifestyleFitness.com article titled "Losing Your Job May Be The Best Thing That Ever Happened To You!" A job loss, she asserts, may open the door to pursuing a true calling or passion. (Her book, *Blast Off! The Surefire Success Plan to Launch Your Dreams Into Reality*, is available through her Web site, amazon.com and at select bookstores.)

"It is never going to be the perfect time to go after your dreams," writes Maslan. "But if you don't do it now, years could pass, and you may find yourself saying, 'Why didn't I?'"

That's a question Sam Zien doesn't have to ask.

—JULIA POLLORENO



Perry's Planet

ASK PERRY CHEN what he wants to be when he grows up, and he softly and politely replies, "An explorer, a biologist, a scientist, an artist or a movie critic."

At 9, Perry is already three of these. His artwork—exceptional birds and dragons, mostly—litters a work table in the family den and is collecting into a 2-foot stack on a coffee table. His exploring keeps him in constant motion. His discoveries pour out of him, in words and visuals. Minutes to Perry appear to represent pockets of discovery, opening one by one and beckoning him forward in his growing universe.

But in the community beyond his Torrey Hills front door, Perry, a charming, soft-spoken third-grader, is establishing a reputation as a movie critic. He started publishing his reviews of kid movies on his Web site, perrysreviews.com, early this year, and by April, area newspapers were picking them up, and television and radio were exhibiting interest. In April, after he reviewed *Monsters and Aliens*, Perry was officially certified by a movie publicity service and was provided schedules of critics' advance screenings.

The audience for his reviews—which originate as pencil print in lined notebooks (he's not into cursive yet)—is his peers. "I write my reviews to show everyone they can write their own reviews," he says. His are straightforward, with splashes of depth ("Friendship is contagious and beyond species") and cinematic flash ("The princess was agile and ran fast, like a ball of delight with legs!"). He rates the movies with starfish, five starfish meaning the movie was "Perrific."

Perry's mom, Zhu Shen—herself a noted figure in the life sciences industry here and



in China—says her son's review path began at a conference last fall with Joli Harris, his third-grade teacher at Torrey Hills School, who had recognized what she calls

his "unique abilities and perspective."

"We were hoping to provide him with a challenging and stimulating project that would interest him," Harris says.

Perry likes the work, even though, he says, "I don't get paid." He has also begun drawing the storyboard characters for his own movie, *The Sky Dragon*. He looks at the sheet of characters, and then, in his vision, a new pocket opens. In five minutes, with scissors, stapler and a sheet of white paper, he has fashioned a dragon whose drooping isosceles wings rise and fall in Perry-powered flight, casting sensational shadows on the terrain in a new corner of Perry Chen's universe.

—MICHAEL GRANT

ALLISON MASLAN AND SAM ZIEN: LAUREN RADACK; PERRY CHEN: ZHU SHEN