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SMC Fall Reading Series Features Local Talent

By Andrea A. Firth

"We have a full lineup of Bay Area writers-poets, memoirists, and fiction writers-who, taken together, demonstrate how deep our local literary waters run," states Marilyn Abildskov, the director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Saint Mary's College (SMC) which organizes the Creative Writing Reading Series. "To go to the readings, which are all free, is like spending a night in city but without the hassle of having to get yourself to the city," she adds.

Among the writers on the Fall Reading Series roster is Rachel Howard, a former dance correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle turned novelist, whose memoir *The Lost Night* delves into the unsolved murder of her father in the family's home when she was 10-years old. "I was really haunted by what happened to my dad," says Howard. "My real drive [to write the book] was to make some understanding of what little facts I had." While Howard was not able to solve the mysteries surrounding her father's death, she was able to bring it to a resolution. "If you are writing your own story, even with parts that are unresolved, eventually the writing catches up with the living, and you truly get to write your own ending," says Howard.

Jack Marshall, a well-known Bay-area poet and memoirist, will also read at SMC later in September. "I recently read Jack Marshall's memoir, *From Baghdad to Brooklyn: Growing Up in a Jewish Arabic Family in Midcentury America*, and was struck by its beauty," says Abildskov. "His is a poet's memoir—a lyrical and loving picture of growing up in a Jewish-Arabic family in Brooklyn. He captures a time and mindset that has all but disappeared..." Marshall is the son of an Iraqi father and Syrian mother. "[In writing the memoir] I enjoyed giving into those memories and making them come alive," says Marshall. "It gave me more compassion for my mother, and my father, and their situation."

The readings, held at the Soda Activity Center at SMC on select Wednesday evenings, last about an hour and include a question and answer session with the author. "Most of us like to stay in to watch TV on weeknights, which I totally understand," notes Abildskov, but she adds, "Going to a reading is like putting your head down on your desk the way you did in grade school for story time. It's completely alluring and wholly seductive, losing yourself in language and story."

Rachel Howard

September 23—Howard is the author of *The Lost Night*, a memoir about the emotional aftermath of her father's unsolved murder.

Jack Marshall

September 30—Marshall is the author of several collections of poetry, the memoir *From Baghdad to Brooklyn: Growing Up in a Jewish Arabic Family in Midcentury America*, and his latest book *The Steel Veil*.

Chris Abani

October 14—A poet and novelist whose books include *The Virgin of Flames*, *Hands Washing Water*, *Daphne's Lot*, and *GraceLand*. Abani is a professor at the University of California Riverside

Susan Steinberg

October 28—The author of the short story collections *The End of Free Love* and *Hydroplane*, Steinberg currently teaches at the University of San Francisco.

Rebecca Wolff

November 11—Wolff's books of poems include the award-winners *Manderley*, *Figment*, and *The King*.

SMC 2009 Fall Creative Writing Reading Series

Readings are held on Wednesdays in the Soda Activity Center and start at 7:30 p.m.

Matthew Zapruder

September 9—A poet, translator, and editor, Zapruder teaches in the low-residency program at UC-Riverside-Palm Desert.

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

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