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A Literary Life

By Ryan McKinley



Jeff Chon Photo Ryan McKinley

Saint Mary's College adjunct professor Jeff Chon is something of a renaissance man. Chon is equally knowledgeable in baseball and comic books as he is in Alice Munro's use of the retrospective narrator. At heart Chon is a writer, and he holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Non-Fiction Writing from Saint Mary's. In between teaching and writing Chon's newest venture is as the editor in chief of *The East Bay Review*, an up and coming literary journal.

Like many storytellers Chon started writing at an early age, "I remember being eight and writing Spider-Man fan fiction," Chon said. However, it wasn't until high school, when he read "The Stranger" by Albert Camus, that he knew he wanted to be a writer. "The simplicity of the language really hooked me. Until then I thought writing was really complicated poetic language

[but] seeing a story told straight forward like that opened my eyes."

After graduating from Washington State University, Chon moved to Los Angeles in hopes of becoming a professional writer but his plans fell through. "I was working in a museum warehouse processing invoices in a tiny cubicle."

Several years later Chon decided to apply to graduate school. "I realized maybe it's time to shift gears and do what I want to do," he said. Initially planning on studying in LA, a last minute trip changed his mind. "I was visiting Northern California and on a lark I came [to Moraga]." He walked around the Saint Mary's campus and met the creative writing faculty. "This area it gets in your blood and by the time I left I knew I was coming to [Saint Mary's]."

Chon graduated in 2013 but continued a close relationship with his classmates. "The program gave us these valuable resources, the most important of which is each other," he said. This past winter, Chon and his former classmates joked about founding a literary journal. "Which I imagine is how a lot of journals start," he said with a laugh. And *The East Bay Review* was born.

The staff of the journal is made up of a dozen graduates of Saint Mary's Creative Non-Fiction MFA Program. Along with Chon, the main editorial staff includes Maria Judnick, Michael Sakoda, Alex Herrington (all class of '13) and Michael Caligaris ('14). "It's a great group of people and they're all great writers in their own right," Chon said. "We see this journal as an extension of the MFA program for us."

Like any business, collaboration is a big part of what makes the journal work. "We have such different sensibilities and skill sets," Chon said. "There is a diversity of ideas that we've managed to make cohesive. We trust each other intensely and we know we can work together to make something great."

The East Bay Review, subtitled "this is the epicenter," is designed to showcase the East Bay and beyond. Aside from the stories, essays, and poetry there is also a section of the journal, titled "dispatch," that aims to focus on East Bay life and culture.

Currently published online, the first issue was released in June. The second issue will be released later this year featuring writers from places as far as Quebec and close as Berkeley, as well as a greater number of female authors. The staff is also in talks to create a print version of the journal.

In the end Chon hopes that The East Bay Review will help the public discover new authors and foster the local literary community. "When you read The East Bay Review, if you like these authors please go buy their books. These are local writers, I feel like we should support the local literary community the way we would support any local business."

To read, and submit manuscripts to The East Bay Review visit <http://theeastbayreview.com>.

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