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New LLLC Series Presents Authors of Note in Conversation

By Lou Fancher



Bestselling author Joyce Maynard chats with fellow author Joe Loya at Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Photo provided

Home in the World," her well-known memoir about her relationship with J.D. Salinger, and "Labor Day," a best-selling novel that in 2014 became a Paramount film starring Kate Winslet and Josh Brolin. For the legions of readers who discovered her 42 years ago through a cover story she wrote for the New York Times at age 19 - or at any time thereafter - Maynard's magazine columns, articles, essay collections and a blog opened the window on her turbulent, torrid, tender life. A mother of three adult children, long-divorced from a first husband, married to estate lawyer Jim Barringer and a teacher of popular writing workshops (and pie baking) at her home in the Oakland Hills, Maynard has taken temporary hiatus from writing to care for Barringer, who was recently diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

"It's an uncomfortable sensation," Maynard said. "I was raised to believe I didn't exist if I didn't create. I've been writing for 43 years. I'm taking (time) off for cancer. I'm talking about it because there's no way I can separate my life and my work."

Loya's dramatic life as a bank robber-turned-writer could, if it were to become a play, be cleanly divided into Act I (criminal) and Act II (journalist and author). Growing up in Southern California, the first "half" of his life see-sawed from highs - happy years before his mother died, crime sprees amounting to 24 bank robberies - to lows: stabbing his father, seven years of incarceration and violent behavior that landed him in solitary confinement for two years. Act II is mostly highs: corresponding from prison with Mexican American writer Richard Rodriguez, writing for The Pacific News Service upon his release from prison, forgiving his father for past abuse, completing his biography, "The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell: Confessions of a Bank Robber," published by Harper Collins in 2005. Now married and a father, Loya is working on a book inspired by his young daughter, tentatively titled, "Tell Me a Zombie Story."

Contributing organizer and Lafayette Library Foundation board member Karen Mulvaney said the idea for a series presenting authors in conversation about their craft and their lives arose from a positive kind of group-think consensus.

"It just emerged," she said. "It's time to utilize technology. If it develops, the program will be broadcast, put on YouTube, live-streamed and generate a digital library of the series."

Foundation Executive Director Beth Needel said the conversations are a natural extension of

Folks at the Lafayette Library may have found a book world equivalent to illusionists Penn & Teller or NPR's "Car Talk" hosts, brothers Ray and (the late) Tom Magliozzi.

A new pilot program pairs New York Times bestselling author Joyce Maynard and San Leandro author Joe Loya in conversation with authors-of-note.

Launching the series on Feb. 27 and flying duo without a guest author, Maynard and Loya provided exactly what a "talk show" requires: hosts with heft, good humor, and a touch of scandal.

Of course, any Lamorinda literary program worth its salt must serve up substantial material from speakers whose authority comes from their work, not from sensationalism. Readers in the area are generally well-read, intellectual, and scrupulous about detecting shadow puppetry when it comes to literature - and lectures in general.

Maynard has authored 15 books, including "At

the library's programming and partnerships.

Maynard's and Loya's connections in literary circles are indeed vast and already attracting "authors-of-note." David Ewing Duncan (author of "When I'm 164" and "The Experimental Man," writer for The New York Times, Fortune, Wired, Atlantic Monthly, and other publications) will appear with the two hosts on March 27. Kevin Sessums, the former Vanity Fair contributing editor for 15 years recently named editor-in-chief of 429Magazine, an LGBT print publication in San Francisco, is tentatively scheduled for April.

But aside from best-selling authors with awesome biographies, the element that is sure to delight listeners-either in person, or online when the planned podcasts are up and running-is the boisterous energy and bold honesty of Maynard and Loya.

Unperturbed by each other's interruptions, they appeared to thrive on verbal competition: one-upping a partner's story with an equal, or even more outrageous tale, the atmosphere was good-natured and lively. Sometimes picking up their counterparts' trail and racing off in a seemingly opposite direction, it was like an auditory NASCAR on a shape-shifting track.

Thematically, there are overlaps more than separations between them. Unafraid to tell "naked" stories, stripping pretense and pride from their narratives, revealing their vulnerable, flawed, compassionate characters during an audience question period, "Joyce and Joe" might well be headed for syndication.

Upcoming 'Sweet Thursday' Lectures at LLLC

Novelist and poet Elizabeth Rosner will discuss her recently published works, "Electric City" and "Gravity" from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday, March 19 in the Community Hall. Lecture for adults, 18 and older. To register, visit Register at tinyurl.com/elizrosner.

Author Betsy Streeter will discuss her book "Silverwood" as well as provide insight into the writer's process for science and speculative fiction from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday, April 16 in the Community Hall. Register at tinyurl.com/betsystreeter.

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[back](#)

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