

# 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

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 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 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](http://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](http://tinyurl.com/betsystreeter).

## Several Lamorinda Teams Head to Odyssey of the Mind State Tournament

Rookie team from Del Rey surprises everyone, even the coach

Submitted by Nicole Reader



From left: Diego Aguilar, Cameron Berg, Sam Laudy, Isaac Reader-Taatzes and Paul Stephan Photo provided

A team of third-graders from Del Rey Elementary School in Orinda took first place at the San Francisco Bay Region Odyssey of the Mind tournament on Feb. 28. They will advance to compete in the California State Tournament on March 28. Team members are Diego Aguilar, Cameron Berg, Sam Laudy, Isaac Reader-Taatzes, and Paul Stephan. Their coaches are parent Nicole Reader and teacher Marta Wallace.

Three other teams from Orinda will advance to the state tournament: two from Orinda Intermediate School, and one from Glorietta Elementary School, as well as four teams sponsored by Moraga Rotary, and two teams by Lafayette Rotary.

The team of five boys from Del Rey was at a double disadvantage: It was their first year participating in Odyssey of the Mind, and they were at the bottom of their age group, as they competed in Division I, the category for third through fifth graders. Despite this, they outstripped their closest competitor by nearly 30 points.

According to Lynn Larsen, state director of California Odyssey of the

Mind, the program is "a combination of theater and problem solving with a creative twist." Teams of students choose one of five possible problems assigned each year by Odyssey of the Mind, then work together for four months to create a "solution" comprised of a story, costumes, props, scenery, and technical elements. Although the team is guided by an adult coach, everything must be entirely devised and created by the students. At the tournament, the team presents the solution to this "long-term" problem in the form of an eight-minute skit. Another aspect of Odyssey of the Mind is a "spontaneous" problem, solved at the tournament with no prior preparation.

The Del Rey team tackled a long-term problem entitled "Experiencing Technical Difficulties," which required practical engineering skills in addition to creative thinking. According to the Odyssey of the Mind, "the problem is to design, build, and demonstrate various devices that complete specific tasks. The team will create a theme where technical failures must be resolved through com-

pleting the tasks. There will be a list of tasks to choose from including ring a bell, change the wording on something, sound an alarm, move an object, etc. There will also be a mysterious engineer character. Of course, there's a twist - all of the devices must be powered by rubber bands!"

As Larsen points out, in Odyssey of the Mind "students with talents in many areas find a unique opportunity to showcase their gifts in script writing, costume creation, music, dance, visual arts, props and scenery construction, engineering, problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, and more."

Whenever the Del Rey team asked coach Nicole Reader if she thought they would win the tournament, she told them two things: First, working hard was more important than winning, and second, it would be highly unusual for a team of third-grade rookies to make it to the state finals. At the award ceremony, blue ribbons around their necks, the team turned to Reader and gleefully reminded her of these words.

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