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Local Authors Highlighted at Lafayette Library's Sweet Thursday

By Moya Stone

Local Lafayette residents Linda Peterson and Maria Hjelm have been two of the hard working ladies behind the Lafayette Library's popular author reading series Sweet Thursday since its inception six years ago. But the upcoming Sweet Thursday event scheduled for November 13, at 7:30 will honor Linda and Maria as authors. Both women have contributed their literary talents to recently published anthologies.

Many readers will know Linda from her mystery book, *Edited to Death*, featuring magazine writer Maggie Fiori - the "arrogant but likable" amateur detective. Linda is just finishing up the second in that series while helping to promote "Writin' on Empty: Parents Reveal the Upside, Downside, and Everything In Between when Children Leave the Nest" for which she wrote the opening essay, *Naked Parents in the Pool*.

The book is a collection of essays about the universal experience of children leaving home and includes authors such as the San Francisco Chronicle's C.W. Nevius, the New York Times John Leland, and Linda Weltner from the Boston Globe. Edited by empty nesters Joan Cehn, Risa Nye, and Julie Renalds, *Writin' on Empty* started as a conversation among women sharing feelings about sending their children out into the world. Soon the three women decided there was an obvious niche to fill. Linda, who also works full time as a marketing executive, met Risa in a writers group and became involved in the project.

Linda's only son is 30 now and has a baby of his own, but Linda says the day he left home for good is as fresh for her as if it happened yesterday, "I missed the noise, excitement, and chaos of having a teenager around," says Linda. But she also concedes that there are a few upsides as well. "Fridge freedom," she says. "We no longer have to worry about what's in the fridge." In her essay, Linda approaches the topic with humor sharing stories of her meltdowns and tirades the first few weeks after her son, Ben, left for college, and then the surprising upside, like late night skinny-dips in the family swimming pool.

Maria, who has a background in book publishing and now works in fundraising at UC Berkeley, became involved with the book, *Knowing Pains: Women on Love, Sex and Work in Our 40s* through a friend. This collection of essays addresses another niche - the shift women make into their 40s, having achieved a certain level of success and confidence, and how they deal with issues such as aging parents, death, divorce, motherhood, sex, and more. Edited by local businesswoman Molly Tracy Rosen, *Knowing Pains* came from Molly's desire, on her 40th birthday, to read about other women in their 40s. She went to the bookstore and found nothing on the subject, thus she decided to fill the gap herself.

In her essay, *Just a Blip*, Maria shares her story of losing her mother, who was diagnosed with cancer on Maria's 39th birthday and died two months short of her 40th birthday. She says in her essay: "So, here's my quarrel, my bone to pick, my beef with being 40 - it's all too adult, and I prefer to pretend that I'm still 28. You'd think that having three kids, a mortgage, and a marriage that needs constant tending would have turned me into an adult, but it's the learning to live without the protection of my mother that has finally done it."

Maria says she is struck by this shared experience of turning 40. "There are so many different ways to experience 40," says Maria, "I marvel at the strength of

women and how different we all are and the many different ways to experience the same thing."

Joining Maria and Linda on the November 13 Sweet Thursday event will be Knowing Pains editor Molly Rosen and contributor Nancy Davis Kho, and Writin' on Empty editor Risa Nye and contributor Laura Shumaker. Copies of both books will be available for purchase, with proceeds going to breast cancer education. For more information contact the Lafayette Library at 283-3872.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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