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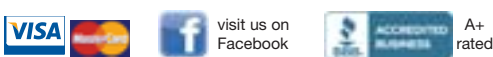
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Local Authors

Lafayette Author's Novel is Far from Science-Fiction

By Jennifer Wake



Lafayette author Jil Plummer
Photo provided

Set in the year 2030, photojournalist Kendra Savage is recovering from the loss of her husband and young son following a worldwide pandemic in the novel *Caravan to Armageddon* by Lafayette author Jil Plummer. The story begins with countries cut off from one another and fearful of another outbreak. The broken and defiant 28-year-old photographer is offered an assignment to document a secret cross-country journey of celebrities from 11 countries in 13 travel trailers intent on restoring a sense of peace and regaining mutual understanding in the world.

While Plummer sets the book in the future, *Caravan to Armageddon* is not a typical science-fiction thriller. The underlying plot is centered on the book's main characters – each with their own complexities – and the timeless aspects of what comprises friendship and family. Often told through the eyes of Savage behind her camera lens, Plummer introduces her characters visually at first, adding layers to each as the book progresses: a clown from Peru, an opera singer from Italy, a poet from Africa. The book builds in intensity when different group members are attacked along their journey, and Savage begins a quest to find the would-be assassin.

Plummer says she drew her inspiration for the book's variety of characters from her travels as well as from the many adult ESL (English as a Second Language) students who at-

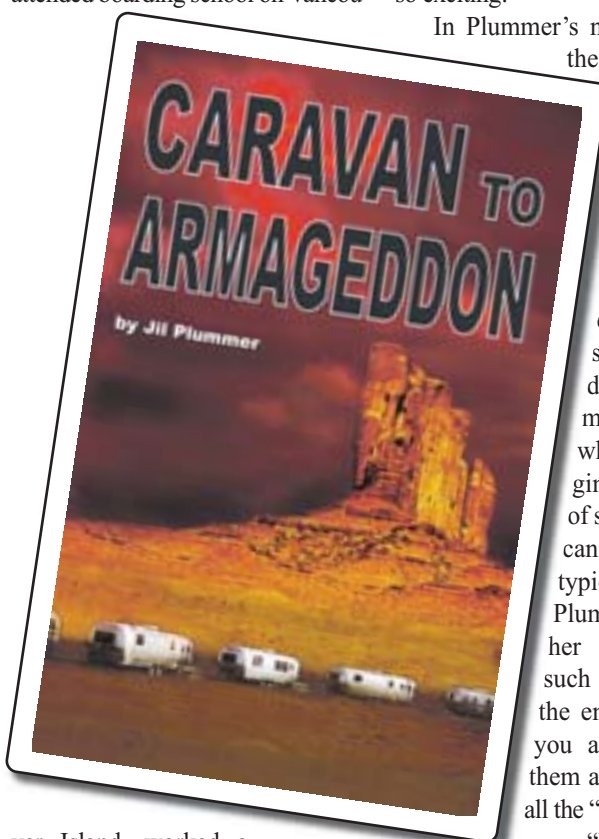
tended her creative writing classes at Acalanes High School over the past 20 years.

"I loved my students and from their writing and just being with them I learned so much about the human spirit. There were the Vietnamese boat people, the Iranian refugees, the Russians, the Africans, many of whom had suffered things we cannot imagine," says Plummer.

Living abroad also taught Plummer much about people, she says. She worked on a banana plantation in Jamaica, trained horses in England, and visited family in Spain. She also attended boarding school on Vancou-

Years ago, she joined her husband on his first assignment, traveling by Airstream trailer with a group of French nationals across the U.S., through the national parks, to Washington.

"There we met at the State Department reception the foreign diplomats we would travel back with over the same route," Plummer says. The author kept a diary of the journey, including descriptions of the countryside, and personalities along the way. "The characters in *Caravan* are all fictitious, the cameras made digital and, of course, no assassins made our trip so exciting!"



In Plummer's novel, many of the Americans who interact with the caravaning group have a backwoods drawl often heard in the far corners of sleepy towns dotting the upper mid-west. And while in the beginning the voice of some characters can seem stereotypical at times, Plummer develops her characters in such a way that by the end of the book you are rooting for them all – at least for all the "good guys."

ver Island, worked a couple of off-Broadway plays in New York, and worked for a Clown TV show in Hollywood where she befriended clowns, and all sorts of circus performers, including chimpanzees. Her husband was a photojournalist, and took her on assignments to Peru, Portugal and many countries around the South Pacific.

Plummer used her personal experience when writing about the American countryside unfolding in front of a long line of gleaming silver trailers.

"I find that the main theme of my novels is how different people often are [from] how we first perceive them and that we should never judge without walking in their shoes," says Plummer.

Caravan to Armageddon is an enjoyable read that gives us a glimpse of the human spirit under the most stressful of circumstances. The novel is available on Amazon as an e-book and will soon be available in paperback.

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SMC's Reading Series—30 Years and Going Strong

By Andrea A. Firth



Author Lysley Tenorio
Photo provided

"It's a really glamorous reading series," says Brenda Hillman, Director of the MFA Program at Saint Mary's College in Moraga. For the past 30 years, Saint Mary's has hosted a creative writing reading series that invites poets and authors to share their work with the students and public. "It's a great opportunity for the members of the community to hear some really well-known writers in an informal setting," says Hillman. "We always have writers from all the three genres—poetry, fiction and non-fiction—that represent a great artistic diversity."

The 2012 series kicks off on Wednesday, September 12 with readings by two distinguished and internationally known poets: Robert Haas and Tom Meschery. Both Haas and Meschery are SMC alumnae and the evening is billed as a sesquicentennial event, part of the college's celebration of its 150th anniversary.

In October, award-winning fiction writer Lysley Tenorio will be reading. Tenorio is an Associate Professor at SMC, and his debut collection of short stories, *Monstress*, was published last spring and has been described as "brilliantly quirky, often moving, [and] always gorgeously told." In *Monstress*,

Tenorio, a Filipino-American, explores the disparate cultures that comprise his background, but he says his stories are not biographical. "Like most writers, my work is emotionally autobiographical," says Tenorio. "In other words, the emotional and psychological concerns of my characters are concerns that I've had in my own life, though my personal circumstances aren't nearly as interesting as those of my characters."

Tenorio's story collection is required reading for all incoming freshmen at SMC and for readers looking for a new, refreshingly unique Bay Area author. *Monstress*, the title story in the collection, is based on a really cheesy American sci-fi flick and an awful Filipino caveman horror film that were spliced together to produce what one critic described as the worst movie of all-time says Tenorio. An admitted sci-fi/fantasy movie and television junkie (his favorite TV show of all time is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Tenorio says this disastrous movie meld seemed like great material to explore. Despite the strange and outlandish plots and situations in Tenorio's book, he has been told that, at its heart, *Monstress* is a collection of love stories.



Monstress is author Lysley Tenorio's collection of short stories. Image provided

The SMC Reading Series also includes several craft talks. Held on Wednesday afternoons, the craft talks have working writers explore topics related to the writing mind and the process of writing says Hillman. "I think the craft talks are interesting for people who like reading contemporary literature or who are interested in writing themselves," she adds.

In addition to all the great visiting writers, the public will also have the chance to hear from five of the SMC MFA faculty who will be participating in Litquake, San Francisco's annual literary festival. SMC faculty members will be reading on Saturday, October 13 in the city. Check the Litquake website for the specific location and time at <http://litquake.org>.

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