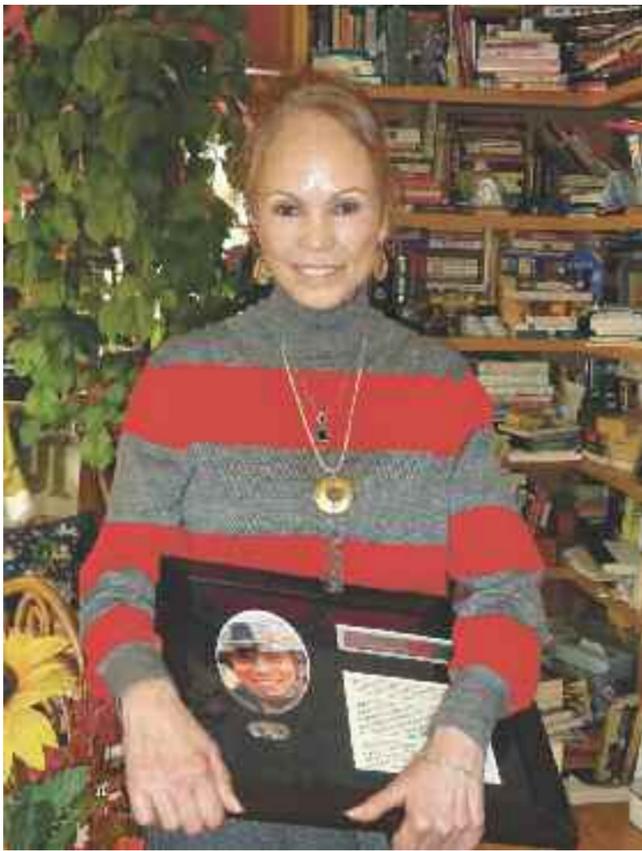


Remembering the Fallen on Memorial Day

By Cathy Tyson



Yolanda Vega with a picture of her son Jonathan Antonio Vega Yelner. Photo Cathy Tyson

How can a family deal with the loss of a child to war? It's every parent's worst nightmare. Lafayette mother Yolanda "Jolie" Vega knows that pain and trauma; her son, Jonathan "Antonio" Vega Yelner, was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2008. He was 24 years old, grew up in Burton Valley, attended St. Perpetua School and graduated from De La Salle High School. "Not a day goes by that I don't miss him," said Vega.

"The local Blue Star Moms, a non-partisan, non-profit organization of parents who have children actively serving in the military, appeared out of nowhere after everyone left," said Vega. Following the initial shock, they offered strength and support. Vega was so moved by their generosity and helpfulness that she went on to found the Golden Gate chapter of Gold Star Moms.

"The point is to keep the memories of our children alive and offer solace to families with the long struggle of losing a child," said Vega, who is a proponent of dealing with "the ele-

phant in the room."

Vega explained how family and friends can be at a loss for words following a death; that uncomfortable silence "hurts us to the bottom of our hearts." She and other parents of deceased soldiers would prefer just a hug or some kind of acknowledgment.

While Walnut Creek has a lovely Veteran's Memorial Plaza and Danville has remembrances throughout the town, Vega noted there's nothing like that in Lafayette. She would like to see some kind of permanent memorial at the new library, and said that while the hillside full of crosses is a great visual reminder, someday those will probably come down.

The Gold Star Moms participate in a number of events throughout the year to support each other and honor the supreme sacrifice their children made. There's a three day retreat at the Marines Memorial Club in San Francisco that offers counseling, fellowship and togetherness. "There's an unspoken familiarity with folks who have been through the same

Local Mom Chronicles the Struggles of Raising a Child with Autism

By Lou Fancher



Laura Shumaker Photo provided

Just like the autism embedded in the mind and life of her 27-year-old son, Matthew, Laura Shumaker carries with her the permanent sting of others' judgment.

Despite a lauded book, "A Regular Guy: Growing Up with Autism," a popular San Francisco Chronicle blog and therapy (for herself, not just her family), the wounds of public opinion cause her to say, "It still hurts."

Meeting to discuss her contribution to a new Chicken Soup for the Soul release, "Raising Kids on the Spectrum," the Lafayette resident is in constant advance/retreat mode.

"I say something, then I take it away, don't I?" she asks, laughing at herself.

And perhaps this is key to sur-

living the constant thrust and parry of raising a child – and maintaining one's own sanity – when that child falls within autism's spectrum. Humor, especially the ability to laugh at oneself, is a saving grace.

"People say, 'It must be so hard.' It's emotionally hard because you're trying to relate to your child in a way that is productive," Shumaker says.

Before her first son was born, Shumaker worked in various sales jobs, but never considered herself a career woman. A deep craving for motherhood had been her great ambition; partly because of her close family history, partly just an innate desire.

"It was just in me," she says. "Maybe it was because as a 9-year-old, when my sister was born, my intense grieving over my brother (who had died four years prior) ended. Or changed."

Regardless, when Shumaker and her husband, Peter, welcomed Matthew into their lives, she says the years were filled with chaos.

"Nobody I knew had children with autism. I was constantly managing a person without a lot of self-control. I felt I was in damage control mode. At the same time, I had two other little boys."

... continued on page B3

painful experiences," said Vega. "I look forward to it, but it's bitter-sweet."

During the holidays she and other Gold Star Moms participate in the Wreaths Across America project, where volunteers lay wreaths at cemeteries throughout the East Bay and across the country.

Their chapter of Gold Star Moms has sponsored "Every Mile a Memory" – a run for the fallen – and has helped out at the bi-annual East Bay Stand Down event that provides health care and services for needy and homeless veterans.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 16,000 service members have died during active duty. A National Military Family Bereavement Study is underway to examine the impact of these deaths on surviving family members. The study is conducted by the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress in Bethesda, Md. For more information about the study, visit www.militarysurvivorstudy.org.

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Saint Mary's College Museum of Art Points of View: Mary Lou Correia and Paul Kratter



Saturday, June 1 – Sunday, Sept. 22



Mary Lou Correia



Paul Kratter

Two of the East Bay's most vibrant and spontaneous *en plein air* painters, Mary Lou Correia and Paul Kratter, began their careers in the field of commercial art, but left the controlled indoor environment behind mid-career, to work at the whims of nature. They now haul painting equipment on foot and occasionally on horseback, searching for a dramatic vista, or racing against fading light.

Before embracing *en plein air* painting, Correia designed book covers for UC Press then became Director of Publications and chief designer for Saint Mary's College. In her latest paintings, Correia's brush strokes are exuberant and emotional, with vibrant colors designed to depict the landscape's changing moods. Correia skillfully paints small human figures in her favorite locations, as if to remind us to be careful stewards, treading lightly in our environment.

Sports and wildlife were Kratter's early passions, so it was appropriate that he began a career in advertising design for the National Football League and several major league baseball clubs. He moved on to children's book and wildlife illustration, but his love of the outdoors eventually attracted Kratter to *en plein air* painting and a dramatic shift in style. His new works are confidently loose and contemporary, yet their subtlety bespeaks his knowledge of, and admiration for, early 20th century Tonalist painters.

Reception for the Artists, Sunday, June 2, 2 – 4 pm

Phone: 925-631-4379
stmarys-ca.edu/museum
Hours: Wed-Sun, 11 am-4:30 pm
Museum Admission: \$5 Adults, K-12 Grades Free
(Museum Closed July 4)