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## Insights into the Making of a Joyce Maynard Mystery Best-selling author to speak at LLLC Oct. 22

By Lou Fancher



Author Joyce Maynard Photo provided

The mystery of human connections as seen through the eyes of a 13-year-old child - or, honestly, anyone other than herself - has held author Joyce Maynard spellbound for decades. About to celebrate 60 years of life, the Oakland Hills transplant-from-Marin explodes myths about mothering, meandering fathers and even murder in her new novel, "After Her" (William Morrow, 2013).

Billed as a murder mystery and loosely based on the real life story of Marin County's 1970s Trilside Killer, Maynard's initial motivation for writing the harrowing story remains undimmed.

"It's a book about the themes and obsessions of my writing life that have never changed," she says, in an interview. "It's about human relationships. The crimes are the things that happen in families."

During Maynard's childhood, the "crimes" were committed primarily with two misplaced weapons: parental over-ambition and alcohol. Her mother was brilliant, overwhelmingly so, but unfulfilled. Maynard says she felt pushed out of her own skin by her mother's efforts to have a career through her daughter.

Living as the child of an alcoholic father was a curse she transformed into a blessing. In order to survive, she put aside her needs to become a caretaker-type. To exist in alcohol's fragile ether, she learned to distance herself; imagining every interaction from an outside perspective. As a professional writer since the age of 19, relinquishing herself to her characters or subjects became an advantage, but as a human being, it led to painful dependencies and relationships. The most notorious was with J.D. Salinger.

"For 41 years, yes, I've been criticized for bringing up Salinger," she says, in a voice tinged by hurt and resentment in equal measure. "But there's hardly been a day that it's not been brought up to me. I spent 25 years never bringing it up, until I wrote 'At Home in the World.'"

The best-selling memoir, describing the 11-month period during which she subsumed her every need and notion to the famous, much-older-than-she author, plastered her name on the front page of newspapers and magazines. It also nearly ruined her career and today, with a recently released Salinger documentary stirring up old wounds, fringes of bitter surprise linger.

"There's attention paid to Salinger's trauma, but none to the trauma experienced by the more than a dozen women, girls, like me, who suffered because of him. Reaction (to me) shows how far we have not come."

If media perception has not progressed, Maynard has. She's been a syndicated columnist, the author of seven (now eight) novels and four works of non-fiction. In December, the film adaptation of her bestselling "Labor Day," directed by Jason Reitman and starring Kate Winslet and Josh Brolin, will open in theaters. The mother of three adult children, she recently married attorney Jim Barringer, who she met on Match.com.

"I can let him take care of me: this is all new territory for me," she admits.

When she's not exploring the terrain of a new home and marriage, Maynard is writing. Daily. With the vigorous discipline of an athlete and the devotion of a nun, she spent two years crafting her most recent novel.

"After Her" is fundamentally about a family: 13-year-old, wildly imaginative Rachel; her 11-year-old basketball-playing sister, Patty; their depressed, disconnected mother and charismatic, homicide detective father. When a rapist/murderer known as the "Sunset Strangler" terrorizes the community by littering Mount Tamalpais with the bodies of young women he has killed, their world is turned upside down. Suddenly, their backyard "exploratorium" becomes a minefield; their too-busy father, consumed with catching the criminal, nearly disappears; and Rachel's friendships, budding sexuality and her ability to trust others wobble uncontrollably.

In a desperate attempt to snare the killer - and her father's favor - Rachel lays a fool's trap. Her escape is improbable and Maynard's single misstep in an otherwise finely wrought tale braced with haunting presence and shadowy fixations.

Maynard is an instinctive writer and often, whole chapters seem to have been written in a single breath. Laughing, she receives the comment, but says this book required two years of middle-of-the-night questions, multiple re-writes, and tortured weeks "waiting for the characters to figure out what they were going to do."

Maynard herself has no confusion. She's training her body to its peak potential and writing about it for More Magazine; conducting intimate, popular writing workshops in her home, and baking pies. "They flew me to the set to teach Brolin how to make a pie for the film. It's the sexiest cooking scene ever and it's absolutely my pie," she says,

her face curled into a smile not unlike the sly grin of a happy, mouse-consuming cat.

Maynard will read and discuss "After Her" at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 22 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. One-day memoir workshops are available Oct. 20 and Nov. 3 in her home. For information, visit [www.joycemaynard.com](http://www.joycemaynard.com).

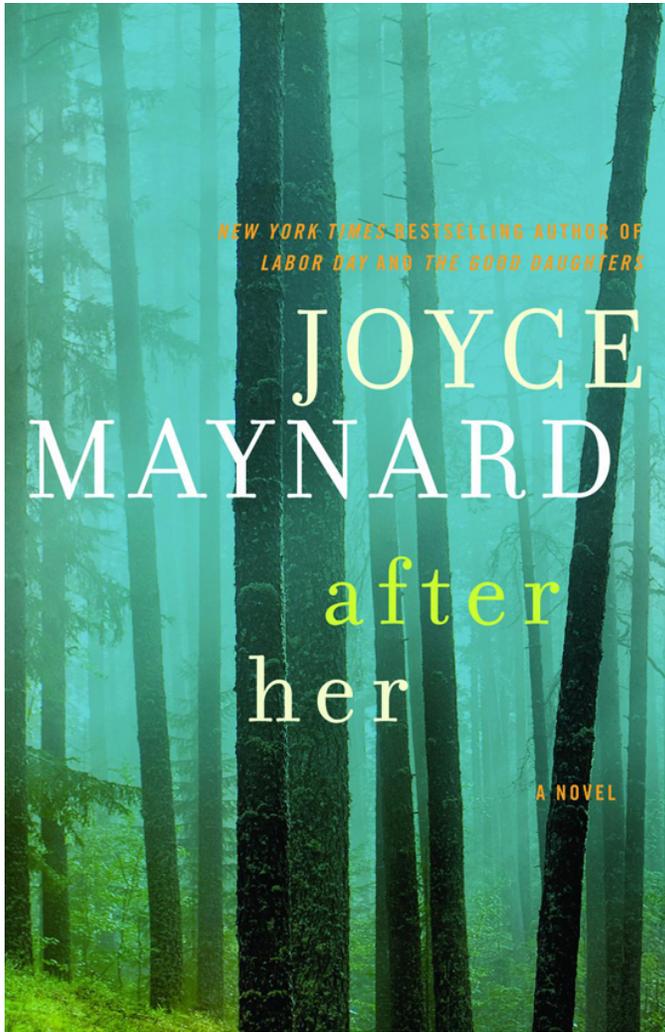


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Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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