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Local author publishes emotional memoir of life with celebrity parents

By Sora O'Doherty



Author Christine Scherick O'Brien Photo Sora O'Doherty

In "Crave: A Memoir of Food and Longing," author Christine Scherick O'Brien writes of her life growing up with her famous movie and television producer father, Edgar Scherick, and her mother, a former Miss Missouri and talented musician who was afflicted with health problems. Her mother's search for health through nutrition affected the lives of her four children, O'Brien and her three brothers, as they were growing up. O'Brien appeared at an Orinda Books luncheon Nov. 14 to speak about her life and her book. Her book was published on Nov. 13 by St. Martin's Press.

Born on the East Coast, O'Brien came to California as a teenager, moving with her father's career from New York City to Hollywood. Eventually she wound up in the Bay Area. Having lived for six years in Lafayette, O'Brien and her husband Tim now live in Walnut Creek. She teaches at Saint Mary's College in Moraga and he coaches rugby there. She met her husband when she was an undergraduate at UC Berkeley. Having grown up with three brothers, O'Brien was tough and physical, so when she was invited to start a women's rugby team at Cal, she accepted the challenge. Having completed her senior year at Beverly Hills High School, where O'Brien didn't feel that she fit in with the surfers and jocks, playing rugby at Berkeley made her feel "seen again."

When she graduated from Cal, she went on to earn a master's degree at Saint Mary's. She is proud of her

writing in "Crave." My language, she says, has been called "so evocative, so unusual." O'Brien believes that each writer's language is unique, "like your fingerprints."

In "Crave," O'Brien writes about how both of her parents affected her. Her father was, she says, "a rage-aholic: he was addicted to yelling." But he was also creative and powerful. When O'Brien was with her father on the sets of some of his productions, she was deep within the magical world of film-making, where the actors were treated like royalty, and she was too. This led her to feel that celebrity was very important, and for a time skewed her approach to relationships.

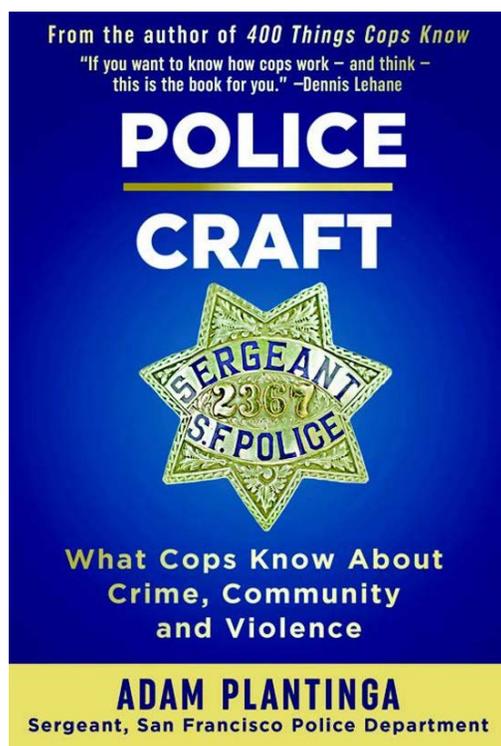
When O'Brien was 10 years old, her mother collapsed for the first time. They were living in New York City at that time, in the historic Dakota apartment building, where O'Brien once went trick-or-treating to the door of Lauren Bacall. O'Brien's mother tried various doctors, but they failed to make her feel better, so she took matters into her own hands, turning to practitioners of healing through diet. She followed several diets that seemed extremely radical at the time, although perhaps less so now. After starting on blended drinks containing fresh yeast and raw liver, she moved on to a regimen that focused on blended salads and vegetable juices, with small amounts of daily protein. O'Brien mentions in "Crave" that in the film, "Rosemary's Baby," which was filmed at the Dakota, Mia Farrow is "forced to ingest blended green drinks with strange ingredients to prepare her to spawn an unhuman child."

"I feel some relief," she noted, "that someone is recognizing the very thing I have myself felt, that this is a scary place to live."

O'Brien and her brothers followed the diet as their mother directed, because, O'Brien says, "we felt we were keeping her alive." But they were always hungry, if they were not in fact malnourished. O'Brien writes about how she was "deliriously eager" for smoked salmon, and savored the experience of eating lobsters. At summer camp she dreamed of steak and reviled the white diet of carbohydrates. "It doesn't matter how much I eat," she says, "I am never full."

O'Brien details how she admired both of her parents, but worried about her mother's health and her father's rage. She ricochets from the relative deprivation of her mother's strict diet to the luxurious trappings of stardom, as she gets to hang out on her father's movie sets or accompany him on the red carpet at the Golden Globes.

Always a writer, O'Brien kept diaries as a child, and her memoir stretches from those early days in Manhattan to her present live in the Bay Area. "Crave" is her first book.



Book Signing for another local author Dec. 1 Moraga resident, author and San Francisco Police Sgt. Adam Plantinga will be talking about and signing his second nonfiction book about law enforcement, "Police Craft," from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Dec. 1 at Orinda Books.

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