

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Saint Mary's Visiting Writers offer community lecture



Marie Mutsuki Mockett

Photo provided

By Sophie Braccini

Every year the Saint Mary's College Master of Fine Art in Creative Writing invites visiting writers to mentor master students and give lessons on campus. Some of these craft lectures and readings are open to the community, online, during the school year, such as author Marie Mutsuki Mockett, who will discuss a very timely topic on Zoom at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11: How to write about disaster.

The visiting professor is a local author born to an American father and a Japanese mother. Writing is her profession, whether through teaching or writing books. Mockett's first bestseller was the memoir "Where the Dead Pause, The Japanese Say Goodbye: A Journey" where she examines how the Japanese cope with grief and tragedy, and is set against the backdrop of the 2011 disastrous earthquake and the tsunami that ensued; Mockett's family temple is located 25

miles from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The memoir was a finalist for the 2016 PEN Open Book Award, Indies Choice Best Book for Nonfiction and the Northern California Book Award for Creative Nonfiction.

The topic of Mockett's lecture at Saint Mary's was proposed in 2019, before the time of COVID and devastating wildfires. She explains that writing fiction and non-fiction alike in times of disaster is a way to not only process the emotions that arise, but also to get a better grip on reality. For her when she was confronted with the Fukushima catastrophe and its impact on her family, telling her story was what allowed her to comprehend the new reality she was finding herself in, to heighten her awareness, and to move on to live life in a different way.

Her new book, "American Harvest," is set in seven agricultural and heartland states. It was a finalist for the Lukas Prize for Nonfiction.

Krista Varela Posell who works for and is a graduate of the MFA program adds that the lecture will also focus on examples of disaster writing, and what the writer's responsibility is in his or her work during times of disaster.

The lecture is part of the two-year MFA program that Saint Mary's has offered to budding authors for more than 15 years. The program continues this year, running at almost full capacity, a maximum of 48 students, in spite of the fact that all classes are online. Posell says that the program includes a wide variety of students aged 20 to 70 who form cohorts that become lifelong small communities of writers supporting each other. Some end up teaching, others writing full time, or, like herself, managing university programs.

The creative writing MFA will not admit new students until the fall of 2021. More information about the lecture can be found at www.stmarys-ca.edu/creative-writing-reading-series-with-marie-mockett

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