UC SANTA BARBARA

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Author in the House

On the face of it, the task of writing a memoir would seem simple: write about one's life. To do so with skill, however, is an enormous challenge. Mary Karr, one of the most celebrated memoirists, poets and essayists of her generation, will talk about the craft when she visits UC Santa Barbara later this month.

The 2016 Diana and Simon Raab Writer-in-Residence, Karr will speak Wednesday, Feb. 10 at 7 p.m. at UCSB's Corwin Pavilion. The event, which is free and open to the public, is co-sponsored by UCSB's Interdisciplinary Humanities Center (IHC) and the campus's Writing Program.

Susan Derwin, director of the IHC, said Karr's work across genres makes the author of "The Art of Memoir" the ideal person to discuss what it takes to write a memoir that is honest, probing and accessible.

"The advisory committee thought Mary Karr would be very appealing to the campus," Derwin explained. "She works in multiple genres, and she will be able to speak to a broad audience about her work as both a poet and a nonfiction writer. 'The Art of Memoir' is inspiring general readers to think about writing and memory. Karr makes a great case for memoir writing as a process of self-discovery. Engaging with their past through writing helps people discover and develop their voice."

Diana Raab, herself a memoirist and poet, said Karr's works have influenced her and a whole generation of writers. "Mary Karr's work has been a huge inspiration for me," Raab noted. "She's the one all writers turn to when referring to memoirs, as

she is a pioneer of this difficult and rewarding form.

“There are certain characteristics which make a memoir poignant and memorable,” Raab added. “As Karr says in ‘The Art of Memoir,’ ‘Each great memoir lives or dies based 100 percent on voice … for the reader, the voice has to exist from the first sentence.’ Karr’s three memoirs certainly exemplify this tenet.”

In addition to “The Art of Memoir,” Karr is the author of the memoirs “The Liars’ Club,” “Cherry” and “Lit.” Her poetry collections include “Sinners Welcome,” “Viper Rum,” “The Devil’s Tour” and “Abacus.” Her work has appeared in The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Poetry, and Parnassus. She is the recipient of prizes from PEN and Best American Poetry, and she has won Pushcart Prizes both for poetry and for essays. Her grants and fellowships include the Whiting Writer’s Award and a Radcliffe Bunting Fellowship, as well as grants from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation. She is the Jesse Truesdell Peck Professor of English Literature at Syracuse University.

As the writer in residence, Karr will also meet with students at the IHC. The informal meeting will give students the chance to learn directly from Karr, who is known as a champion of clarity and honesty in writing. Her residency, Derwin said, offers students the opportunity to engage her directly.

“Often universities bring celebrated writers to campus and keep them behind the podium, at a distance,” Derwin observed. “The Diana and Simon Raab Writer-in-Residence Program doesn’t offer just limited contact between the writer and UCSB students. Diana Raab is committed to making writers available and accessible to young people. She was inspired by her mentors, and she wants UCSB students to have that same experience. That’s why, in addition to the public event, UCSB students will have a separate opportunity to meet Mary Karr. At its heart, the program has a teaching mission.”

Copies of Karr’s books, courtesy of Chaucer’s Books, will be available for purchase and signing at the Corwin Pavilion event.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary

collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.