

ALUMNI PROFILE:

## Lauren Simon '74

### *Finding Her "Second Act" as a Playwright*

As a fifth-grader in Helene Layman's class at Langley in the early 1970s, Lauren Simon '74 made her stage debut in "The Pirates of Penzance" and "The Wizard of Oz," instilling in her a lifelong love of theater and the written word. Nearly 50 years later, she is proud to carry on Mrs. Layman's legacy as she brings the world of theater to a new generation through her own original plays.

Although she has always loved writing – and spent the first 25 years of her career as a journalist and editor – it wasn't until her daughter began participating in school drama productions that Lauren found her calling as a playwright. "I volunteered to paint sets and sew costumes for my daughter's plays, and remembered how much I enjoyed theater," she says. After attending a weekend workshop on writing a 10-minute play at a summer arts academy in the early 2000s, Lauren was hooked and soon enrolled at the University of Idaho where she earned a master's degree in playwriting.

messages of diversity, acceptance, and pride in one's heritage," she adds. "It's been exciting to use production techniques like presenting in the round to reinforce the notion of oneness."

A resident of Laguna Beach, CA, since 2012, Lauren is just finishing a two-year term as the city's literary laureate – a role that has her working to raise the profile of literary arts in the city through community workshops and events and through a new historical play she has written about the summer Tennessee Williams once spent in Laguna Beach. She also works to promote the arts locally through her Bare Bones Theatre which offers new play readings followed by audience conversations.

While it can be challenging to make a living as a playwright in a world that's filled with so many talented writers, Lauren loves the process of creating a play from start to finish. "I enjoy the solitary work of imagining and writing, but I also find it exhilarating to bring a script to directors, actors, and designers and collaborate with them to make my ideas a reality on stage," she says.

As she reflects on her first introduction to theater in fifth grade at Langley, Lauren credits Mrs. Layman as the most influential teacher of her career. "She believed in me and encouraged me as a writer and an artist," says Lauren, who attended Langley from fifth through eighth grade. "I don't know if I would be where I am today without her." She fondly recalls taking her first overnight trip away from home to Pennsylvania Dutch country, buying Mother's Day gifts at the Langley Fair which was held in the spring, spending time with her kindergarten buddy, and reading in the cozy school library.

With just 14 kids in her class, Lauren learned to build relationships and always felt her teachers gave her the attention she needed to develop a strong foundation at a critical age. "Those years at Langley grounded me as a student and gave me a skill set and an appreciation for learning that allowed me to be successful in high school and college," she adds. "I developed a level of confidence as a scholar that I might never have found at another school."



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To date, Lauren has written more than 30 plays, ranging from full-length dramas, comedies, and musicals to plays as short as one minute. Whether for adults or young audiences, her plays often deal with social justice issues and are inspired by her passion for history and art. Her work has been performed at festivals and theaters from coast to coast.

During the past few years, Lauren has partnered with Creede Repertory Theatre to write three musicals for a Young Audience Outreach Tour which brings theater into schools in underserved communities in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Utah. "Each musical has reached about 40,000 children with powerful

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To learn more about Lauren Simon's career as a playwright, visit [www.lojosimon.com](http://www.lojosimon.com).