

WORDS OF WISDOM

Suzanne Redfearn and Lauren “Lojo” Simon, the city’s first literary laureates, reveal why writing is an important skill and what they hope to accomplish with their role.

By Catherine Norby



Pictured at Laguna Beach Books, Suzanne Redfearn (front) and Lauren “Lojo” Simon, the city’s first literary laureates, will organize events focused on the written word.

WRITTEN LANGUAGE HOLDS GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR Suzanne Redfearn and Lauren “Lojo” Simon and, as the first literary laureates of Laguna Beach, the pair hope to bring local residents closer together, simply with the power of words.

Redfearn had an unexpected start to her career as an author, though she has since gone on to produce two acclaimed novels. She started out as an architect, but after an idea for a story struck her, she began writing and—seven months later—she had finished her first novel. However, it would not be until her fifth novel, “Hush Little Baby,” when she would find success as a published author. Her next novel is expected to be out sometime next year, as she recently signed a two-book deal with Lake Union Publishing.

Simon, on the other hand, offers a different perspective on writing: She constructs her words into poetry and prose while additionally acting as a playwright and dramaturg. Typically, her plays are expressionistic in nature, used to explore concepts like identity, conflict and purpose. Six years ago, Simon earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in theater and dramatic writing from the University of Idaho, a drastic change from the bachelor’s degree in politics she received from Brandeis University back in the 1980s.

Read on to find out how these two literary ladies feel about their new position and what they hope to accomplish along the way. Their term, which lasts through May 2020, began in late spring and replaces the city’s position of poet laureate, which was introduced last year. For the latest posts by the new duo, visit lagunabeachcity.net/cityhall/art/literary_laureate.

Laguna Beach Magazine: What compelled you to choose writing as your profession?

Suzanne Redfearn: I didn’t. I’m an architect by trade. My degree is in architecture. ... I sat down literally just to write down this very compelling idea that I had. ... I did not admit that I was writing a novel until I was three months into it. ... It [seemed] too audacious and too embarrassing to say, “I’m writing a novel,” because everyone says they’re writing a novel. ... My grandfather was a storyteller, so I believe it was handed down from him. Even now, when people ask me, I’m not sure

what to say. Mostly, I consider myself an architect, but the author thing has kind of taken off, so I guess I'm an architect and an author.

LBM: What do you hope to accomplish during your time as a literary laureate?

SR: What I decided was, if I was going to do this, it wasn't going to be me as a literary laureate—it was gonna be me as an ambassador to pull together all the literary scholars and ... community we already have here. We have an incredible number of groups that are already doing amazing things. ... I want to facilitate whatever these people who are already doing this want to do, and ... tie them all together ... to create more of a community and support each other in all the different things that they're doing.

LBM: What literary contests or events are you planning during your term?

Lauren "Lojo" Simon: I'll be teaching short-form playwriting at the [Laguna Beach

Community &] Susi Q [Center] and creative storytelling at the Boys & Girls Club [of Laguna Beach]. ... [The playwriting course] ... will start in October. I'm working with Laguna Art Museum to engage the community in writing creatively about art and creating art inspired by literature. This project, called Word & Image in Dialogue, will include lectures, workshops and a communitywide event in which writers and artists will share their work. I'm also excited to share my theatrical work with Laguna this year. Thanks to a generous donation, Creede Repertory Theatre [from Colorado] will bring its production of my new family-friendly musical "Seeds of Change" to the Boys & Girls Club in November.

LBM: How does it feel to know you are one of the first writers to take on this position?

SR: Honestly, humbling and honored [are] probably the first two words that come to mind. ... I feel a huge responsibility also, because I want it to go well. I like what the city's doing

and I want it to be successful enough that they keep going with it.

LBM: What is your main inspiration when it comes to writing?

LS: I'm inspired by the universal human struggle to connect and understand one another. That's why we make art—because we want other people to know and recognize our internal desires, thoughts and feelings. Art helps us feel less alone.

LBM: Why is writing a skill that should be passed on to future generations?

LS: Writing is essential to communication, to recognizing our shared humanity, and to feeling connections across time and place. It creates a record of who we are that informs the future. ... It's essential to understanding and compassion. Writing is one of the core elements of civilization, and the world needs more civility right now—more humanity, more heart, more understanding, more compassion. **LBM**



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