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PLNU's annual Writer's Symposium spotlights restorative narratives

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Every spring for the last 24 years, Point Loma Nazarene University has hosted reporters like George Plimpton, authors like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, poets like Nikki Giovanni and screenwriters such as Destin Daniel Cretton for their annual Writer's Symposium by the Sea Monday, Feb. 18 to Thursday, Feb. 21. Moderated by journalism professor and symposium founder Dr. Dean Nelson, discussions of the intimate inspiration behind the writer's renowned stories has always been a part of past panels.

But this year, the idea of "Restorative Narrative" seems to be a common driving force for the speakers set to attend this year's symposium, not just in their work but in their career choices as well. That was the case for former ABC "World News" and CNN reporter Jody Hassett Sanchez, who spent 17 years in network television, until she decided to "jump off the cliff" and try her hand at documentary filmmaking.

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The audience reacts during last year's Writer's Symposium Point at Loma Nazarene University.

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“After years in the trenches of the news business, I was no longer interested in contributing to what I think of as, ‘Our collective compassion fatigue,’” said Sanchez, who will be speaking at Crill Performance Hall Monday, Feb. 18. “Stories about conflict, horror, human rights abuses – I still want to shed light on those stories but now I want to be able to find that thread of hope, or something small that points to the possibility for change.”

Sanchez’s 2010 film, “SOLD: Fighting the New Global Slave Trade,” focuses on how three abolitionists in different countries are fighting against a business flourishing under globalization. The filmmaker’s latest project, “More Art Upstairs,” explores what happens when artistic snobbery is stripped away, and everyday Midwest folks get a chance to engage with contemporary art.

“It all requires a level of real trust and I think the real line between what I did in broadcast and what I do now is I’m so aware of the sense of accountability I have to the people who allow me and my crew to tell their stories,” said Sanchez, “I always want to go back and look them in the eye after I’ve done that piece or film for them.”



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And while it may go against a journalist's innate nature, political reporter, Georgetown University professor and Catholic E.J. Dionne found that publicizing his opinions also proved to be restorative to anyone willing to "challenge their own beliefs."

"It's often said the subjects you shouldn't discuss at dinner are religion and politics, but in my household, we talked about both of them all the time," said Dionne, who spent 14 years working as a reporter for the New York Times before joining the Washington Post in the '90s as an opinion columnist. "I'm a liberal who likes to write about religion. That certainly creates interesting conversations with people."

Dionne is the author of seven books, including "One Nation After Trump: A Guide for the Perplexed, the Disillusioned, the Desperate, and the Not-Yet Deported." He also wrote "Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith & Politics After the Religious Right" and "Why Americans Hate Politics." Dionne has been a columnist since 1993 and his articles are as unapologetic as his book titles.

"If you want to do opinion writing well, you have to take into account the best versions of the articles you disagree with and not just a parody of a differing view," said Dionne, who will also be speaking at Crill on Wednesday, Feb. 20. "You have to have a basic confidence that a significant part of the citizenry wants to think through what they believe and think through their views."

The Symposium will also feature international award-winning novelist Nnedi Okorafor, who is known for her "Black Panther" and "Wakanda Forever Marvel Comics," as well as poet, essayist and Yale professor Christian Wiman, who uses poetry as a channel for spiritual awakening for "unbelieving believers." Whether by faith or futuristic comics, these writers have also dedicated their talents to inspire

rather than just inform.

PLNU's 2019 Writer's Symposium will take place Monday, Feb. 18 to Thursday, Feb. 21. Tickets start at \$15 for the general public. For more information, visit pointloma.edu.

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