

Protecting the

Environment

One Story at a Time

Faculty member's books in a genre all their own

The shore gives birth to many things. Turtles emerge from the sand to dig nests in the sand, depositing eggs to spawn new generations. Tides rise, delivering nourishment to crabs, fish, and birds that depend on the bounty. Waves roll back into the sea, carrying seeds to distant shores adding to the bio-diversity of the planet's delicate balance. But ideas are also born as the inspiration of the water is absorbed into the minds of those who watch from the shore.

BY DAVID COSGROVE '88

based in reality, in truth... In another sense, I see journalism as empowerment, very often providing a voice for the voiceless. Well, the most voiceless group I can think of is the planet's non-human populations. I guess, I'm trying to give the fauna and flora a voice. That sounds journalistic to me."

Having been educated at Clark University, Penn State University, and Adelphi University, Morano worked professionally as managing editor for *Movie Screen Magazine*, editor-in-chief for *RockBEAT Magazine*, and senior editor for *Inside Hooker Magazine*. He still occasionally freelances, covering ethical issues for *Editor & Publisher Magazine* and crafting entertainment pieces when time permits.

Currently, Morano is working on a textbook for film critics, *Don't Tell Me the Ending!* He expects to be finished this summer. Then he'll begin his third novel, *Out There Somewhere*, the story of several animals who live in a Maraneland/Sas World setting. Then, and only then, the author plans to write the sequel to *Wing*. Morano believes "one story written is worth 15 half-written stories," so he always finishes a project before moving on to another.

Just as Morano found his way into the classroom, so has his writing. Charlie Aria a 7th grade English teacher at Ford's Middle School, has been using *Wing* as part of the curriculum ever since he first read the story. "I'm in love with it," he says. "It's enchanting, you fall in love with Lupe because you can identify with him, you're on his side. He holds onto his dream and my students get behind him. One of the biggest messages pertains to relationships and friends. In middle school, that's what you are living."

Upon completion of the book, Morano visits the classes, fielding questions and providing added information on how and why he chose his material.

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reading for all humans living on our fragile planet," Morano smiles and says, "That's a lot of copies sold. Look, I know I'm not Stephen King or John Grisham. I'm not Hemingway or Twain. I know that. My stories don't need to be best-sellers or major motion pictures for me to feel like a success. All those achievements are great, but I think my work stands on its own, and I'm proud of that. It's a success because I can read it to my kids and you can read it to yours, and because I believe it gives something back to the planet. And you know what really makes it a success in my mind? When I walk into a school to chat with a class about *Wing* and a teacher takes my arm, points to a kid sitting in the front row and says, 'That kid's name is Oscar. He hasn't read two paragraphs all year, but he read every

word of your story and he's prepared about 25 questions for you, the only thing he's written all year. He expects you to answer them all.' No problem, because for me, that young student is an Oscar really worth winning." **MU**

*Morano lives in the woods of western Jackson in a log home on 3.5 acres that abut a small Walden-esque lake. He met his wife Kris at Penn State, and *Wing* is dedicated to her. They have two sons, John, 5, and Vincent, 5. Malcoona is dedicated to the two boys. A *Wing* and a *Prayer* is available on Amazon.com, at www.Windstormcreative.com or by calling 360-169-7174. A limited number of first editions are still available at the Monmouth University Bookstore. Look for Malcoona next fall/winter from Windstorm.*

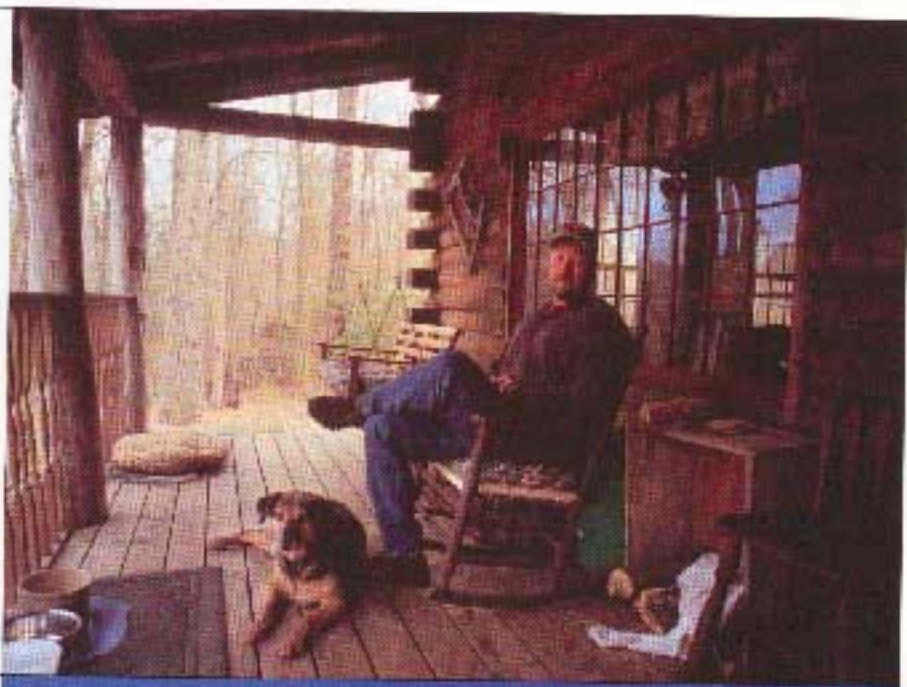
show you how much research he did and how much understanding he has for animals." On Binti the octopus, Lackland adds, "No one could have brought this majestic creature's behavior to life better than John."

Lackland points out, "As a working biologist, I have a close relationship with aquatic animals. It's my job. But the way John expressed his views and feelings toward not only endangered species, but also life in general, is precious. He created two universal books that are simply fantastic. I feel as though John has given me a gift."

Morano also gives to the students at the University. A member of the faculty since 1988, he served as advisor to the Student Government Association and the men's basketball team. Morano continues to advise the award-winning student newspaper and is active in the workings of the Communication Department, where he directs the journalism program. Over the past few years, Morano has won five Student Choice Awards as the outstanding faculty member in the School of Humanities. He's the first ever recipient of the School of Education's "Excellence in Teaching Award" and he's a perennial nominee for the "Distinguished Faculty Award." "I'm the Susan Lucci of that one," he jokes.

Dr. Don Swanson, chair of the Department of Communication, says, "John is a very popular, well-liked professor whom students highly respect." The chairman continues, "John's not just writing fiction for entertainment, he's educating people to be aware of ecological problems and issues. His link to the sea and all forms of nature show that everything is interconnected. If we destroy one aspect of the world, it can have grave ramifications for future generations."

A journalist by trade, Morano maintains that fiction rarely absolutely pertains to journalism. "These stories don't write themselves. I have to research animals, settings and environmental problems, all



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story is about Binri, an octopus who lives in a coral reef, and Kemar, a Cambodian boy who fishes the reef. The story features an introduction by Kathryn Fuller, president of the World Wildlife Fund, another of the world's largest environmental organizations. She wrote, "Sometimes it takes a book like John Morano's *Makoona* to remind us just what amazing sights are lurking beneath the surface. In the undersea world of *Makoona*, octopuses, dolphins, sharks, turtles, blowfish, gobies, stargazers, and moray eels all combine to create a teeming tableau of life."

Although Morano spends much of the time taking readers to visit creatures who live in the coral, he also writes about people in *Makoona*. "When I wrote *Wing*, I think I was afraid to put people directly into the story," the author explained. "I felt more comfortable writing about the animals. But when I started to think

about *Makoona*, I decided to use parallel plot construction to show how closely tied the human and animal stories really are."

One of his main human characters in the novel is Amelia Barback. Morano maintains that she survived her crash, decided not to return to her former life, and became the most skilled outboard motor mechanic on the island of *Makoona*.

An interesting animal character is Molo, a male octopus who has an eye for Binri. Molo speaks nothing but Grateful Dead lyrics. In fact, the band enjoyed the character and the book so much that they've granted Morano the right to use any of Robert Hunter's lyrics and a song by Bob Weir and John Barlow for free. "That was a big moment for me. After speaking with them for several weeks, having seen them *Makoona* and *Wing*, Alan Trust, the custodian of the band's lyrics and the president of Ice Nine

Publishing, called me. He began by telling me that the Dead has a long history of never supporting any cause or politician. I thought for sure that I'd have to re-write the entire character. And then he went on to say, 'But there is one cause we've always been interested in, and you've identified it, the environment.' Alan told me how he'd like to see the band credited, how much he and others enjoyed the story, Robert Hunter in particular, and then he gave me the band's blessing."

Right about now, you're probably wondering, "With an octopus who speaks Dead lyrics, how accurate can Morano's stories really be?" Good question. Dave Lackland, the head aquarist of Jenkinson's Aquarium, located on the boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach, says, "It's scary how exact he is in depicting the animals. They (*Wing* and *Makoona*)



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Wing is the story of Lupo, the last living Guadalupe Island Perrel. The bird starts out locked in a cage, planning his escape to search for Galapagos, otherwise known as the Islands of Life, where he hopes to find a female from his flock.

Last seen on the planet in 1911, Morano has resurrected a Perrel telling his story in a very Disneyesque style. Described as "a children's book for adults," *Wing* can entertain just about anyone. Critics have compared the book to other anthropomorphic literature such as *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *Watership Down*, and *Jungle Book*. Some are saying that Morano has taken things a step further, giving anthropomor-

phism a face for the year 2000 and helping pioneer a new genre of writing now being called Eco-literature.

Morano describes the genre as, "the literary equivalent of Eco-tourism. I try to take environmental problems that face the world today, identify creatures who are affected by them, sprinkle in a little adventure, humor and mysticism, and tell their story." He continues, "I really do believe that truth is stranger than fiction, that the natural world is more interesting than anything I could create. So I build my stories as close to nature as possible."

But *Wing* is not only about the environment. Similar to the way Orwell used his farm animals to comment on politics in *Animal Farm*, Morano takes on other issues, using his cast of animals to comment on education, race relations, religion, parenting, sexism, and other concerns. These comments are subtle, and part of the story.

Associate Professor of Psychology, David Payne, was one of the first faculty

members to read *Wing*. He points out, "John's love of nature, caring attitude, and keen insight into emotions and motivations that were portrayed through Lupo are really the endearing qualities of the story. It's not a documentary. It's a fantasy and is very successful at what it attempts."

After selling out its first print run, Morano began to shop the book a second time. Larger, more commercial publishers were not fully convinced that green-literature would generate green-profits. Pride, however, a solid independent publisher named, "the most ethical press in America today," by *Wachwood Magazine*, quickly made an offer to republish the story.

Jennifer DiMarco, who owns Pride (now Windstorm Creative due to a recent merger) and the Little Blue Works imprint that *Wing* is currently under, said that she was so inspired by the story she had to publish it. "The animals speak to readers through a basic moral concept that appeals to both younger and older readers," she explains. When asked what she thinks the chances are for *Wing* to ascend as high as the silver screen, DiMarco responded, "It's very possible. Actually, I think it is definitely going to happen. The story is so visual, it doesn't even need a screenplay." The publisher is currently speaking with Blue Design, an independent production group located in Los Angeles, who is interested in the story. But this is not the first time Lupo has ruffled the feathers of professional animators. Morano was approached twice over the past three years with contract offers from a company owned by Cass Warner, of the Warner Bros. family and Unbound Studios of Philadelphia. Morano turned both offers down, saying, "My agent at the time didn't think it was in my interest to sign. He said that I should keep writing more stories and better deals will come."

Morano took his agent's advice. This summer he completed his next novel, *Makawa*, another eco-novel expected to be available by Christmas. This time the

One such idea belongs to Associate Professor of Journalism, John Morano. To combine his love for the environment with his desire for writing, he created a genre of literature that has been termed Ecoliterature. Having completed graduate studies at Penn State University in early 1987, Morano was vacationing at his parents' home. He sat on their porch in New Smyrna Beach, FL, and gazed out the window. A rogue shark snapped up easy pickings in the shallows of the lagoon beyond the back yard. Morano had often seen dolphin, manatee, otter, and osprey work the water. The lagoon held his attention more completely than the 19-inch screen speaking to him from across the room. When he finally faced the dusty air, what he saw changed his life. A reporter stood in front of a small chrome cage telling viewers that the creature inside was an obscure hamster, so obscure, that it was the last of its kind. The small animal was a male, with no hope of prolonging the existence of his species. When he died, as he surely would, the planet would never see his kind again.

Morano remembers, "I was 27 at the time, and pretty frustrated that I hadn't yet written a book. I couldn't believe that life was going on all around me and I couldn't find a story to write. But when I saw that hamster, I knew I had my story. Imagine if you were the last one of your kind...and people had locked you in a cage."

Although Morano ultimately abandoned the hamster, he replaced it with the Gaudalope Island Petrel, a bird he found in the pages of a book about endangered and extinct species while sitting in a quiet corner of the Guggenheim Library. What resulted was his first novel, *A Wing and a Prayer*. The book has just been published in a second edition and features an introduction written by John Sawhill, president & CEO of The Nature Conservancy, one of the world's largest environmental groups.

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