

Night and Day

Local Author Profile

A Wing and a Prayer: eco-literature takes flight

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Readers and moviegoers alike recognize the value of an original story idea. Countless hours at Barnes & Nobel and local theater's can make even the most novice story-searcher believe that the plots of 2000 are recycled like yesterday's newspapers.

One professor's story, told first person through the perspective of...animals, is earning the critic's acclaim as a unique piece of literature, universally appreciated by both children and adults.

John Morano, associate professor of journalism at Monmouth University, his own niche storytelling, coined Eco-literature. The term has taken flight in unison with the success of the second printing of his first book, *A Wing and a Prayer*.

*Wing* is the story of Lupe, the last living Guadalupe Island Petrel. The bird starts out locked in a cage, planning his escape to search for Galahope, otherwise known as the Islands of Life, where he hopes to find a female from his flock. The afternoon's read will have you laughing aloud and holding your breath, all the while feeling an attachment to Lupe and his concerns for his future and the environment.

Morano said he found the inspiration for the book from an evening news segment while vacationing at his parents' home in Florida in 1987. He said, "I was 27 at the time, and pretty frustrated that I hadn't written a book yet. I couldn't believe that life was going on all around me and I couldn't find a story to write."

The reporter hovered over the cage of an endangered hamster and said, "When he dies, so too will his species."

"When I saw that clip, I thought—Bang! There's my story," said Morano. "Imagine you were the last one of your kind...and people had you locked in a cage."

Professor Morano replaced the hamster with the Guadalupe Island Petrel (extinct since 1911), a bird he found in the pages of a book about endangered and extinct species. *Wing* has just been published in a second edition by Pride & Imprints, now called Windstorm Creative after a recent merger, Port Orchard (WA) and features an introduction written by John Sawhill, President & CEO of The Nature Conservancy, one of the world's largest environmental groups.

“*Wing* is simply wonderful,” wrote Sawhill. “The cast of characters come alive from page one. It is a work that promotes a true conservation ethic, revolving around the mutually dependant relationship between people and nature.”

Critics have compared the book to other anthropomorphic literature such as; *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and the *Jungle Books*. Some are saying that Morano has taken things a step further; giving anthropomorphism a face for the year 2000 and helping pioneer a new genre of writing, eco-literature.

Prof. Morano describes it as, “...the literary equivalent of eco-tourism. I try to take environmental problems that face the world today, identify creatures who are effected by them, sprinkle in a little adventure, humor and mysticism and then tell their story.”

After selling out his first print run (10,000 copies published by Northwest Pub., Salt Lake City, UT), Pride quickly made an offer to republish the story. Jennifer DiMarco, who owns Pride, said that she was so inspired by the story, she had to publish it. “The animals speak to the 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 (Los Angeles), an independent production group interested in the story.

Last summer he completed his next novel, *Makoona*, another eco-novel. It should be available by next Christmas. The story is about Binti, an octopus who lives in a coral reef and Kemar, a Cambodian boy who fishes the reef. And don’t forget Molo, an octopus that speaks only Grateful Dead lyrics. That’s right. Morano got the approval of The Dead, a band noted for turning down endorsements of causes of every kind—except the environment, to use their lyrics for his psychedelic swimmer.

The story already features an introduction by Kathryn Fuller, President of the World Wildlife Fund. The environmentalist 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.”

Dave Lackland, the Head Aquarist of Jenkinson’s Aquarium in Point Pleasant Beach, says, “It’s scary how exact he is in depicting the animals. They (*Wing* and *Makoona*) show you how much research he did and how much understanding he has for animals.” Lackland, an experienced biologist, points out, “The way John expressed his views and feelings towards 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 is a journalist by trade. Having been educated at Clark University, Penn State U. and Adelphi U., Morano worked professionally as Managing Editor for Modern Screen Magazine (New York), Editor-in-Chief for RockBEAT Magazine (Los Angeles) and Senior Editor for Inside Books Magazine (NY/Miami). He still freelances occasionally, covering ethical issues for Editor & Publisher Magazine and crafting entertainment pieces when time allows.

Currently, Morano is working on a textbook for film critics, *Don't Tell Me the Ending!* He expects to be done this summer. Then he'll begin his third novel, *Out There Somewhere*, the story of several animals who live in a Marineland/Sea World setting. Next, the author plans to write a sequel to *Wing*.

The professor lives in the woods of western Jackson in a long home on 3.5 acres near a small Waldenesque lake. He met his wife Kris at Penn State, and *Wing* is dedicated to her. They have two sons; John (5) and Vincent (3). *Makoona* is dedicated to the two boys.

Just as Professor Morano found his way into the classroom, so has his writing. Charlie Aria, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher at Fords Middle School, has been using *Wing* as a part of his curriculum ever since he first read the story. “It’s enchanting,” says Aria. “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.”

When reminded what Richard Wainwright, a popular children’s author said about *Wing*, “...simply wonderful... A beautiful story that should be required reading for all humans living on our fragile planet,” Morano smiles and says, “That’s a lot of copies sold.”

He continues, “Look, I know I’m no Stephen King or John Grisham. I’m no Hemingway or Twain. I know that. I don’t need to be them. My stories don’t need to be bestsellers 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.”

And by charting the escalating success of *Wing*, Hollywood animators may give Morano’s Lupe, the last of the Guadalupe Petrels, ninety minutes to show his feathers to a worldwide audience.