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LOVING LOOK AT THE LOST ART OF DIARIES

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Georgia Rowe

Get acquainted with new authors in November - this month brings debut books by several Bay Area writers.

"Beyond Words: 200 Years of Illustrated Diaries" by Susan Snyder (Heyday, copublished with the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, \$45, 152 pages). Remember diaries? Mark Twain, John Muir and Lawrence Ferlinghetti are among the authors who put pen to page in the entries that comprise this beautifully arranged book. Yet some of the most affecting writings are by writers you've never heard of - a 13-year-old girl mapping her neighborhood, an anonymous whaler on the San Francisco Bay. Warning: "Beyond Words" may induce intense longings for the pre-tweet era.

"Floating Worlds: The Letters of Edward Gorey and Peter F. Neumeyer" edited by Peter F. Neumeyer (Pomegranate, \$35, 256 pages). What a delight to discover the epistolary friendship between American artist Edward Gorey and Bay Area author Peter F. Neumeyer. Gorey, whose distinctive humor and detailed crosshatch ink drawings made him one of 20th century's best-known artists, collaborated with Neumeyer on several children's books; they became faithful correspondents, and the book includes 75 letters, 38 illustrated envelopes and more than 60 postcards and drawings that passed between them.

"The Swan" by Jim Cohee (Indiana University Press, \$14.95 softcover, 128 pages). Ten-year-old Aaron Cooper has stopped speaking since he witnessed the death of his sister, Pookie. But he proves an unforgettable narrator of this short but vibrant first novel by Bay Area author Cohee, set in Indianapolis in the 1950s. Aaron constructs a fantasy world drawn from literature, sci-fi films and his own fervent imagination to navigate the loss. Funny, poignant and as endearing as its central character, "The Swan" is a wholly original tribute to childhood resilience.

"Crown of Dust" by Mary Volmer (Soho Press, \$16, 288 pages). Here's another fine debut novel, set during the California Gold Rush. Volmer, a professor at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, sets her tale in the town of Motherlode, where Alex - a young girl disguised as a boy - arrives on the run from a violent past. Alex finds respite with Emaline, the owner of the town's inn, until she becomes the first prospector in

the owner of the town's mine - until she becomes the first prospector in town to strike gold. A gripping ride through the Wild West, with a nice feminist twist.

"A House With No Roof: After My Father's Assassination, a Memoir" by **Rebecca Wilson** (Counterpoint Press, \$16.95, 256 pages). In 1966, Dow Wilson - a respected union leader and outspoken civil rights activist - was murdered in San Francisco. His daughter Rebecca was 3. Her mother moved the rest of the family to Bolinas in Marin County, and in this thoughtful memoir, Wilson recounts the troubled childhood that followed: a brother who turned to drugs, a sister who left and, finally, her mother's death from cancer. Wilson, who lives in San Francisco, explores the ways tragedy can reverberate from one generation to the next.

"All Indians Do Not Live in Teepees (or Casinos)" by Catherine C. Robbins (Bison, \$26.95, 408 pages). Robbins, a Bay Area journalist and contributor to the New York Times, delves into the status of Native Americans in her first book. Based on dozens of interviews, "All Indians" explores issues of urbanization, health care and repatriation, which, under a federal law enacted in 1990, has allowed Native Americans to retrieve tribal artifacts from museums and reclaim "sovereignty over their stories and their lives." The picture that emerges is of a diverse American population striving to meet contemporary challenges. Robbins reads from the book Nov. 22 at Barnes & Noble, 3600 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose.

"Last Day on Earth: A Portrait of the NIU School Shooter" by David Vann (University of Georgia Press, \$24.95, 184 pages). In 2008, Steve Kazmierczak killed five and wounded 18 at Northern Illinois University before turning the gun on himself. Vann, investigating for Esquire, gained access to the 1,500-page police file and talked to friends and fellow students of the school shooter. In "Last Day on

Earth," he creates a compelling portrait of Kazmierczak - but also gives a frank account of his own history with guns, leading to a dark fantasy of a school shooting.

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