

'Truman' examines death with delicateness and elegance

By Sophie Braccini



Yes, "Truman" talks about death in the western world in the 21st century, and about emotional responses when confronted with the end of life. The topic is heavy, but director Cesc Gay has created a human and uplifting story out of tragedy, bittersweet, tender and touching. The film talks about our relationship to death, how it strips us of all pretenses, but not of our humanity and of what lies at its core: love.

Tomás is Argentinian and lives in Canada. One early morning we see him kiss his family goodbye and fly to Spain where he pays an unexpected visit to his friend Julián. Both men are middle aged, they have a deep bond from their early years in Buenos Aires, and it is clear that they have not seen each other for a long time. Little by little the spectator understands that Julián is very sick and that Tomás has come for a last visit.

The movie follows the two friends during the few days they are spending together in Madrid where

Julián now lives and works as an actor.

Julián also has a big good old dog, Truman. What will become of him? The two men meet different people whose reactions to Julián spell a whole gamut of behaviors. There are those, like his cousin, who refuse to see him abandon the fight and would want him to give one more chance to an ultimate round of chemo. The young woman is all anger and denial, she does not want to accept what is going on, she feels betrayed and can't deal with the loss.

There are the friends who avoid Julián, those who pretend to care and cast him away without a second thought, and the unexpected former foe who offers compassion with grace.

The movie says a lot about how males deal with such overwhelming emotions. Julián's son for example is surprisingly touching and restrained.

The movie first and foremost

contrasts the two men. Tomás, who cannot and does not want to cry and let his emotions out, and Julián who has already been through the different phases of denial and anger and is now accepting, if not anticipating, the inevitable. He is naked and pure in front of his demise, like Vivian Bearing is at the end of the play "WIT" by Margaret Edson. All has been taken away from him, his health, his job, his future, he is even giving away Truman, and all is left is an acceptance, a love, a pure flame. That flame burns those who are afraid of it, it ingratiates those who can face it and simply recognize the dying man for who he is.

The movie features two remarkable actors Ricardo Darin (Julián) and Javier Cámara (Tomás). "Truman" won five Goyas (Spanish Oscars) when it came out.

"Truman" is part of the international film showcase and will play for a week at the Orinda theater starting on May 19. More information at lamorindatheatres.com.

Our First 100 Days: Lessons from the Lamorinda Community Conversations

Submitted by Maura Wolf



Photo provided

While the rest of the country and world might be looking at Trump's First 100 days, a local group of Lamorinda residents has been looking back on our own First 100 days of the new administration.

Since the campaign season and election that illuminated the divisive nature of politics in our country, a small group of local citizens has been organizing and hosting Community Conversations, in conjunction with Saint Mary's College.

The effort was started when Maura Wolf and Edy Schwartz, both Moraga residents, decided that there was a need for an open-to-all, face-to-face convening.

They structured the Community Conversations so that people could be listened to – not debated. Attendees were invited to share what they were thinking and feeling, and eventually discuss with other people who had similar concerns. It wasn't a place for action and mobilization, but it was a place in which people were encouraged to gain clarity about how they might take action with other local or national groups. Saint Mary's College agreed to host the series.

Since the first convening in December, five Community Conversations have been hosted each month, with the last one of the academic year being hosted at the

Soda Center at Saint Mary's College in late April. Topics at these gatherings ranged from discussions about crossing divides, to health care, the environment, bias and privilege in the schools, cultivating women's power, sanctuary cities, finding well-being in a turbulent time and many others.

At each one, deep listening and creating thinking were emphasized as critical skills for our current community and political environment. And an intergenerational group was encouraged to attend. This aspect offered new bridges for connection and new energy to the civic conversations. Over the six months the meetings involved over 160 Lamorinda residents. On any given Saturday the group included some mix of middle school, high school and college students, young parents, older residents and seniors.

Teresa Onoda, mayor of Moraga, noted, "Who does not benefit from learning how to be an active listener especially when you make decisions that affect peoples lives? Jeanette Fritzy (Moraga Town Council), Bob Priebe (Moraga Town Manager) and I have attended most if not all of the Community Conversations at SMC and appreciate that we have a local institution that is helping make Moraga lead-

ers more effective. This is part of how Saint Mary's College and the town are becoming comfortable dance partners."

While the series has concluded for now, the Leadership Center at Saint Mary's College is open to community groups that want to talk

about conversations for the future. You can learn more about the effort or contact the Leadership Center here: <http://smcleadershipblog.org/2017/04/towards-new-way-civic-engagement-small-town-america/>.

Wagner Ranch Elementary Presents 'Alice in Wonderland JR'

Submitted by Laurie Schmitt



Cast photos provided

Travel down the rabbit hole and join Alice, one of literature's most beloved heroines, in her madcap adventures as Wagner Ranch Elementary presents "Alice in Wonderland JR" the first week in June.

The ever-curious Alice begins her journey innocently enough as she chases the White Rabbit and meets, not one but, three Cheshire Cats. Her adventures become increasingly stranger as she races the Dodo Bird, gets tied up with Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, meets sassy Flowers, celebrates an Unbirthday Party with the Mad Hatter, raps with a bubble-blowing Caterpillar and beats the Queen of Hearts at her own game!

"Alice in Wonderland JR.," based on the classic Disney story, is sure to be fun for the whole family. Wagner Ranch's fourth- and fifth-grade actors have been rehearsing for months to bring you this wonderfully wacky musical. It is directed by Ron Pickett, with help from Music Director Derrick Silva, Executive Producer Mara Plankers, and Assistant Producers Sonya Grover, Sally Hua, Loryn Nieto and Candace Poon.

Showtimes are 4 and 7 p.m. Friday, June 2, and 3 and 7 p.m. Saturday, June 3. Tickets may be purchased at the door or online at www.showtix4u.com. Price is \$10-\$12.



Writing college essays is a complicated task

By Elizabeth LaScala

It is important to understand some fundamental truths about college essays. First, many parents ask me if I can help their student with "The College Essay." These three words suggest a singular piece of writing. The average college applicant will tackle far more than one essay before the application process is complete.

Last cycle students I worked with wrote an average of six essays and the range was between zero and 16. On the lower end of this range are students who wrote four essays as responses to the University of California's four Insight Questions. Students who applied only to the California State Universities did not need to write any essays, since none are required. On the higher end of the range were applicants who developed responses to the UC application's four Insight Questions, the central essay for the Common Application as well as a wide variety of supplemental essays required by selective colleges nationwide.

With careful revisions and editing, the central essay on the Common Application can often be used for one of the four Insight Questions on the UC application — but just one.

Supplemental essays are essay questions that are unique to each school and are a way for colleges to know more about what they are looking for in an applicant — colleges are searching for good match-

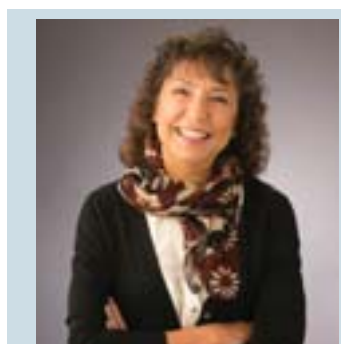
es too! For example, supplemental essays help a college to assess the writing ability of students, freshness of their minds, the uniqueness of their experiences as well as how well the student has researched their school. Having a number of writing requirements also enables colleges to assess if the students are writing their own essays — they look for consistency across essays (of voice, writing quality, knowledge of conventions, overall presentation, and so on).

Then there is the matter of timing. If you know that the UC is keeping its Insight Questions the same as the prior year's prompts, and the same is true for the Common Application prompts, a student can write essays for these applications as early as the summer following junior year. But a student can't begin to develop their supplemental essays until she or he has a college list, and even then, only after the college has released all of its essay requirements for the current application cycle. Often this does not happen until September of the student's senior year.

For many seniors, the list of colleges and essays to write continue to grow well into fall application cycle. After the student has done a substantial amount of writing, many essays can be recycled with smart editing and minor revisions, often including expansion or reduction in word count. I do try to help the student reuse essays, whenever

this is possible, but not when reworking an essay will damage the student's chances of admission.

I take the time to describe and explain this essay writing process, so you are not misled by advertising that promotes getting "The College Essay" written for a small price tag over the summer months. In my view, these essay workshops are unethical, unless they clearly explain that writing one essay may only get a small part of the job done. It's tough enough to write good college essays. Uncovering them late in the process makes a tough job even harder.



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. Reach her at (925) 385-0562 (office) or (925) 330-8801 (mobile), or online at www.doingcollege.com or Elizabeth@doingcollege.com.