

STYLE

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PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

Saratoga poet Mary Lou Taylor recently completed a 10-day artist residency program at Montalvo Arts Center. 'It's a great environment to be creative in,' said Taylor, who is finishing two projects she started there.

Saratoga poet returns to her Montalvo roots

Taylor completes artist residency

By SHANNON BURKEY

It's been more than 30 years since Mary Lou Taylor took her first poetry class at Montalvo Arts Center. Since then, her love of words has taken her far, but it has also brought her back to her roots.

The Saratoga poet, who first heard of the class at Montalvo when she saw an ad in the Saratoga News in the late 1970s, recently finished a 10-day artist residency at the center. "Montalvo has been very good to me, and it's a great environment to be creative in," she said. "It's like coming full circle. My career in poetry started there."

Taylor, who also served on Montalvo's board of trustees for several years and has had many readings

there over the years, says she was honored to be asked to participate in the artist residency program.

"It was beautiful up there, and I got a whole lot out of it," she said. "Now ideas are coming to me all the time, and I think a lot of it was having that opportunity to go to Montalvo."

Though her residency ended in January, Taylor is busy finishing two projects—one that she started working on while at Montalvo and

another that she conceived of and began while there.

The first project, a 75-page manuscript, is a book of original poems called *Finite Infinity*. It will be her second book of original poems published. The other project is a 28-page chapbook—a pocket-sized booklet—with original poems based on her travels through Asia.

"I just love writing. I write sev-

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eral poems a week," she said.

Taylor has always had a love of writing and a love of poetry. In fact, the first book she bought with her very first paycheck was a book of poetry, *A Treasury of Great Poems, English and American* by Louis Untermeyer, which she still has to this day.

The written word has always played a big part in Taylor's life. Even when not writing herself, she taught others how important it was. After getting her degree in English in 1971 from San Jose State University, she ended up at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, where she taught American literature, humanities, short story, speech and debate and basic oral communications until 1980.

She then took a five-year hiatus to work for two San Francisco artists, archiving their works. But

in 1985 she returned to the profession, teaching writing at Fremont High School.

Throughout the years, poetry was always a big love. She became a board member of Poetry Center San Jose, serving two terms as its president, and is currently on the program committee at Montalvo and is a trustee for the Center for Literary Arts at SJSU.

"I was running all kinds of competitions and doing all kinds of stuff with poetry, but not really writing," she said.

Then in 2002, she decided it was time to really delve into writing. Her first book, *The Fringes of Hollywood*, chronicled her life growing up in Los Angeles.

"It was all about Hollywood and the celebrities I encountered growing up," she said. "There is a poem about the time I was at a UCLA junior prom and Elizabeth Taylor danced right next to me. Ava Gardner showed up at another dance when I was in high school, and Judy Garland

bought a Christmas tree stand from me. The first book is about all those experiences."

After the first book was published, other works appeared in the anthologies *Cotton and Spirit* in 2006 and *The Call* in 2009. Along with the two books she is currently working on, Taylor is also putting together an anthology of poems about Hollywood figures.

With several projects in the works, Taylor says she is excited to get her poetry out there for the public to read.

"I hope they come with their own interpretation, and I hope they enjoy it because that's what poetry is for—enjoyment and bringing out your emotions," she said. "You can read detective novels and they are fun and full of mystery, but there is always mystery in poetry, too. People just have to not worry about somebody else's interpretation and just find their own."