

THEY LIVE AMONG US

Karla and Josh Self partner to create audiobook

BY DIANA COOGLE

With this interview with Karla Self, author of *The Spaces That Hold You*, the *Applegater* returns to a column we have run in the past, “They Live Among Us.” Here, Diana Coogle interviews Karla and, in a sidebar, her son, Josh Self, who produced the audio version of the novel.

I understand you were 65 when the novel came out. What made you decide to write a novel at this time in your life?

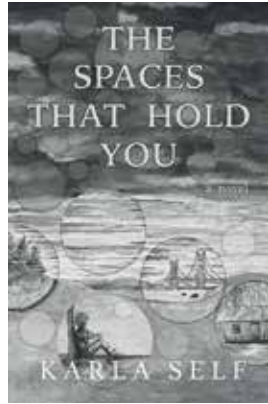
Karla: I have always jotted down thoughts and ideas to clarify my understanding of deep subjects. While I was taking an online fiction writing course at UCLA, my instructor encouraged me, describing my writing style as having a Southern influence, with winding sentences. One textbook suggested to simply sit down and write—so I did—and that the story would unveil itself—and it did. Those words became *The Spaces That Hold You*.

Can you describe your experience writing the book?

Karla: Incredibly, I started putting words to the page 20 years ago. I had no schedule, just wrote whenever I had time, with my family and career keeping most of my attention. I got serious about writing once I retired. When the pandemic hit, I worked each weekday, six to eight hours per day, for about a year, then took another year to rewrite and edit the manuscript. I enjoyed the intensity of thoughts and ideas flowing to the page once I dedicated myself to it. My husband and family were my informal writing group, reading my drafts and giving me feedback and encouragement.

Tell me about the central character, the boy, Levi.

Karla: The inspiration for Levi came from a boy I knew in my childhood. Because of him I understood even then that some children didn’t have enough food, consistent shelter, or parents to provide for them. My mother, who owned



a beauty shop and who was kind to this boy, inspired the character of Sydney. The kindness of others to Levi is a central theme.

How did your career in social services influence this book?

Karla: Through my work, I saw the pervasiveness of mental health issues and drug addiction; the novel is the story of a boy living

in poverty with his mentally ill mother. In my work, I noticed the blank in the “Father’s Name” space on many children’s birth certificates; in my book Levi longs for his unknown father. Through my work I saw the devastation young people face when things go wrong in their lives and the hope they can find in spite of it; my work helped define this theme for the novel. As a society, we have learned that untreated mental illness can lead to self-medication with drugs and alcohol and that those in poverty are less likely to receive treatment—thus, more drug use, addiction, overdoses, and homelessness, all of which affect the quality of life of children and families in our communities. I felt it was compelling to tell the story from the first-person view of the child. I thought of *Forrest Gump*, telling his beautiful story in his own words. I love that it is Levi, the young protagonist, sharing his own story.

Why did you place the novel in the Central Valley of California in the 1960s?

Karla: Having grown up in the Central Valley in the ’60s, I knew the culture of that time and place. And I think it is important for us to remember a time when we didn’t have information at our fingertips. I loved thinking through the manual process of things—how the characters pick up a telephone attached to a wall and dial a number or ask the operator to connect a call. I remember it well.

Can you elaborate on Amazon.com’s comment about the “underpinnings

of racism” in the town where the story is set?

Karla: Kelsey is a fictional town that was built by Dust Bowl migrants from the Southern states seeking work in the fields of California. The remnants of Jim Crow still held tight in some families, showing up in words and fists used against black and brown people. Young Levi witnesses this racism in the attitudes of a crowd, from indifference to enthusiasm, as they watch a black man being beaten simply because he moved too close to town, and again when some of Levi’s buddies make his best friend, Chance, a Native American, the butt of their jokes.

Do you have other books you would like to write?

Karla: Yes, absolutely. I have several themes floating around. My grandfather was a great storyteller and an inspiration. We wonder how much he embellished his stories. That is the joy of writing fiction: it can turn a weed into a flower in a flash. Historical fiction is of great interest to me, as well as books for young readers. As a writer, I want to make a positive difference in the world and plan on doing so for the rest of my life.

The Audiobook Process

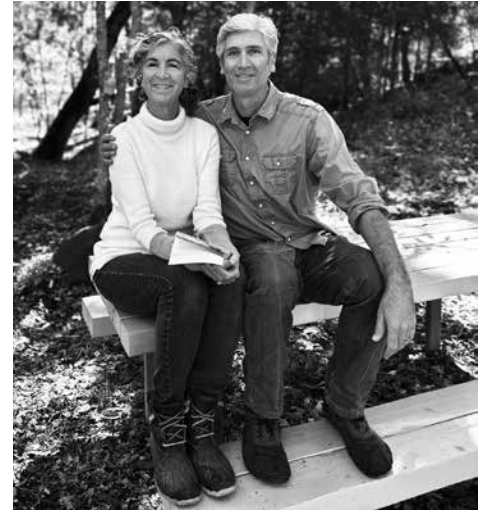
Karla’s son, Josh Self, narrated and produced the audio version of The Spaces That Hold You. Here he discusses the process.

Though I have had experience in front of a microphone and am an avid audiobook listener, I hadn’t had any experience with audiobook narration, so I wasn’t sure it was the best idea for me to narrate my mom’s wonderful book. But she asked me to audition as narrator, so I recorded a section of the book for her. She thought my voice perfectly represented the voice of Levi, and I agreed to do it.

There was a learning curve about the technical aspects. Online information was helpful. It is less about technical expertise and more about challenging the status quo and taking ownership of how the story should be told, which is with the utmost, heartfelt authenticity.

I listened to my mom read the prologue. That gave me an idea of how the story flowed in her mind. Then I did a few short test runs, then recorded the book, then worked closely with my mom to ensure clarity and accuracy both to the book and to her intent.

The Southern accent I use for Levi came from my childhood, when I listened



Karla Self and her son, Josh, collaborated on Karla’s audiobook.

Your bio says you live in the “Pacific Northwest,” but *Applegater* readers would like to know if you live in the Applegate.

Karla: I live in the mountains above the Rogue Valley and am in the beautiful Applegate Valley often, as I have family there. I always pick up an *Applegater* and peruse it from cover to cover.

Diana Coogle
diana@applegater.org

to and mimicked the accents of my grandparents, who were Dust Bowl migrants to California.

To make an audial recording of a book, you need a computer with recording software, a good microphone, and a quiet space without background noise. I turned a closet into a makeshift studio. My kids gave me quiet time when I was “in session.” I learned to edit and then digitally master the final recording to industry specifications. It was a solid two-month project: six weeks for recording, two more going back and forth with my mom, working through edits.

Professionally, it has been my mission to make a living out of living. I have had a fulfilling career thus far, from plant manager to strategic executive-level management. My expertise is in leadership, with a passion for people and the planet. I enjoy helping people find the best versions of themselves. This approach tends to build strong teams with the competence and confidence to step into the unknown.

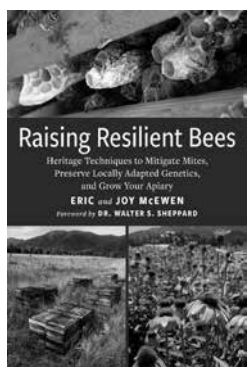
My wife and I live in Ruch with our two children. We’ve been living here, in paradise, eight years now.

Edited by Diana Coogle
diana@applegater.org

Raising Resilient Bees

By Eric and Joy McEwen

BY JEANETTE LETOURNEUX



The spirit of agrarianism that creates a passion for harmony—on a piece of land and in the wider ecosystems—is at the heart of the book, *Raising Resilient Bees*.

A quote about agrarianism, from essayist and poet Wendell Berry, graced the wall of the store that authors Eric and Joy McEwen used to own: “It’s not so much a philosophy as a practice, an attitude, a loyalty, and a passion all based in a close connection with the land. It results in a sound local economy in which producers and consumers are neighbors and in which nature herself becomes the standard for work and production.” The authors believe that this is the culture of beekeeping.

The McEwens espouse two concepts. “First, to contribute to the long-term

viability of the honeybee as a member of nature and a deliverer of great environmental benefits to the ecosystem at large, and second, to contribute to the stability of beekeeping as a craft, a livelihood, and a key component of the larger agrarian landscape and economy we seek to foster.”

The McEwens define resilience as exhibiting perseverance, effort, courage, and adaptability, and then being supported by the actions of other members of the ecosystem in finding effective solutions.

Another favorite saying, “A smooth sea never made a strong sailor,” is evident as the authors share their hard-earned and, at times, heartbreaking lessons of beekeeping.

The book covers technical details about organic and respectful bee-centric care, hive and apiary design, the natural rearing of queens, genetic selection for resiliency and mite resistance, ethically making a living from their farm products, and much more. Including over 100 color photographs and diagrams, a glossary, and references, this book will certainly add practical usefulness to lifelong learning for both new and experienced beekeepers. The authors’ stated goal is to raise resilient bees and resilient communities.

Over the past 20 years, the McEwens experimented with organic management practices while tending approximately 700 honeybee colonies. Their pollination and other services have supported many farms and businesses, including Applegate Valley’s Oshala Farm, Red Buttes Farms, Plaisance Ranch, Pacific Botanicals, Herb Pharm, and Whistling Duck.

Eric, who has a bachelor of science degree in botany and plant pathology from Oregon State University (OSU), heads the beekeeping operation on their organic Diggin’ Livin’ Farm & Apiaries in Takilma. He has been a mentor for the OSU Master Beekeeper Program and is a member of the Adaptive Bee Breeders Alliance. Eric is the originator and manufacturer of Natural Nest beehives, which the McEwens build in their sustainable woodshop on the farm.

Joy manages the farm and apiaries. She holds two bachelor of science degrees and a master’s degree in environmental science from OSU. She works as an apitherapist in Ashland and is the resident beekeeper for Southern Oregon University. Joy is a committee member on the US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency board for Josephine and Jackson counties and serves as a board member on

the Illinois Valley Watershed Council and the American Apitherapy Society.

The McEwens teach beekeeping and apitherapy on the farm, where they live with their three daughters—each actively involved in all aspects of the farm and the products generated. Honey—handled to retain maximum enzyme and nutrient content—is, of course, the primary product and the book explores its history and benefits. Other products are beeswax for sealants and candles, fermented beverages called Honey Bee Brews, honey-based herbal preparations, and medicinal tinctures from propolis, a resinous substance collected from tree buds by honeybees. The “bee glue” tincture is a customer favorite for infections. The McEwens do not sell bee pollen or royal jelly, as they feel these harvests come at too great a cost to the bees.

Through their efforts of producing local foods, pollination services, and medicinal products, the McEwens feel the joy and rewards of living a life in tune with the cycles of nature. Their hope is that the development of other farm and bee-based businesses will add abundance and sustainability to rural communities. Jeanette LeTourneux • jetlet10@gmail.com