



NEWS

Norwalk author's book honors female humorists

Page A3

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'LAUGH OUT LOUD'

Author highlights female humorists

By R.A. Schuetz

NORWALK — Type #motherhood into Instagram, and you'll come back with 10 million posts, a good portion of them memes about the unglamorous nature of child rearing.

"How it feels after hosting a kid's birthday party at your house," reads the caption of one, paired with a photograph of a marathon runner lying prone on the ground barely past the finish line. "When you hear your kid come into the bedroom and you wait to see if they'll lose interest and wander off," writes another with a picture of Squidward from the cartoon "SpongeBob" feigning sleep.

Now, such humor pervades conversation about suburban home life. But that was not always the case.

"Erma Bombeck was one of the first women to write about what it's like to be a housewife ... and that if you didn't feel euphoric changing a diaper, you were not odd," said Norwalk author Allia Zobel-Nolan. "She told it like it is. And she just made things funny."

According to Zobel-Nolan, seated in her home's "cat room" wearing turquoise eyeliner and feline-patterned socks, Bombeck opened the door for the



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Norwalk author Allia Zobel-Nolan, who has published a new book, "Laugh Out Loud," which reflects on the process of aging, at her home Thursday. She will be featured during an author lunch at the Norwalk Library.

host of funny women who followed, including herself. Once a stringer for the Hartford Courant and Stamford Advocate, Zobel-Nolan now has more than 170 books to her name. Her most recent is a tribute to the original housewife humorist.

The book is titled "Laugh Out Loud: 40 Women Hu-

morists Celebrate Then and Now... Before We Forget," and it consists of a series of essays written in the spirit of Bombeck. Zobel-Nolan had no trouble finding Bombeck enthusiasts — she had attended the ninth Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, a waitlisted affair hosted every two years in Dayton, Ohio.

Humorists, stand-up comics, cartoonists and "maybe four brave men" descend on the University of Dayton every other year to workshop comedy and speed date with literary professionals. To get tickets, people sit at their computers, refreshing their screens, the minute they go on sale.

"When I heard there was

an Erma Bombeck workshop, I said, 'Let me investigate,'" said Zobel-Nolan. "It was hysterical."

So in the fall before the 10th workshop, she proposed compiling a book of writing by the people who attend. She quickly got the green light from the convention and sorted through over 100 submissions to

choose the ones that were published.

The book not only showcases female humorists, but memorializes the generation who came of age while Bombeck's column was active. Zobel-Nolan, who lived on West 4th Street in the '80s, remembered the white lipstick, shoulder pads, disco and permed hair sported by Madonna wannabes of the era, and wondered how her generation had gone "from hot pants to hormones, from mood rings to menopause."

To that purpose, the book is divided into two sections, "Then" and "Now," the first recounting adventures from single life and the second explaining how those women found themselves wearing bright red cowboy boots at an ex-husband's cremation or locked in a heated room full of moaning yogis.

"It's a joyous book," Zobel-Nolan said. "It brings you back, and it brings you forward."

After all, in the words of Bombeck, "If you can't make it better, you can laugh at it."

Zobel-Nolan will be speaking on her book at noon on May 21, at the Norwalk Public Library, where she will give a reading and discuss the benefits of laughter.

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