GREG SARRIS

the forgetters

A tender, astonishing, and richly beautiful story cycle about remembering our shared histories and repairing the world.

Perched atop Gravity Hill, two crow sisters—Question Woman and Answer Woman—recall stories from dawn to dusk. Question Woman cannot remember a single story except by asking to hear it again, and Answer Woman can tell all the stories but cannot think of them unless she is asked. Together they recount the journeys of the Forgetters, so that we may all remember. Unforgettable characters pass through these pages: a boy who opens the clouds in the sky, a young woman who befriends three enigmatic people who might also be animals, two village leaders who hold a storytelling contest. All are in search of a crucial lesson from the past, one that will help them repair the rifts in their own lives.

Told in the classic style of Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok creation stories, this book vaults from the sacred time before this time to the recent present and even the near future. Heralded as a "a fine storyteller" by Joy Harjo, Greg Sarris offers us these tales in a new genre of his own making. The Forgetters is an astonishment—comforting and startling, inspiring reveries and deepening our love of the world we share.

"I ADMIRE GREG SARRIS'S SENSE OF THE GRITTY PASSION OF LIFE."
—JOY HARJO

"SARRIS HAS BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THESE ANCIENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TALES AND LEGENDS, LENDING THEM A SUBTLE, LIGHT-HEARTED VOICE AND VISION."
—LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF BOOKS

"A WONDERFUL READ THAT TRANSPORTS US TO A REALM OF BEAUTY, KINDNESS, AND LOVE OF LIFE."
—ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ

THE FORGETTERS

By Greg Sarris

ISBN: 9781597146302
eISBN: 9781597146319
Paperback • pp 248 • $20.00
On Sale 4/16/2024

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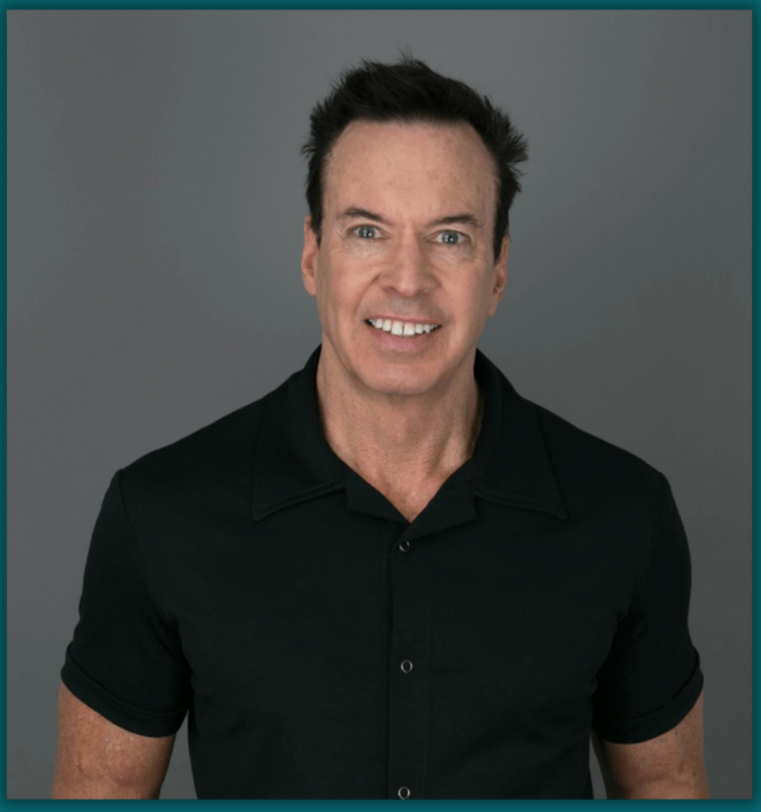
GREG SARRIS

Greg Sarris is an accomplished author, university professor, and tribal leader serving his sixteenth term as Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. He is the current board chair of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. In 1992, he co-authored the Graton Rancheria Restoration Act which restored federal recognition and associated rights to the Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo Native Americans of California, including the right to reestablish tribal lands.

Sarris graduated summa cum laude with a degree in English from the University of California, Los Angeles and received his Ph.D. in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford. He has taught American and American Indian Literature, and Creative Writing at UCLA, Stanford, Loyola Marymount University, and Sonoma State University. Currently, he serves as a member of the Board of Regents for the University of California and is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Sarris is also a producer, playwright, and the author of several books, including the award-winning *How a Mountain Was Made* (2017), *Becoming Story* (2022), which earned a starred *Kirkus* review, and *Grand Avenue* (1995), which he adapted for an HBO film and co-produced with Robert Redford. He is co-executive producer of *Joan Baez: I Am A Noise* (2023) and a short story, *Citizen*, was adapted by San Francisco's Word for Word theater in 2023 and was lauded as a "lush [...] linguistic feast" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



Q&A WITH GREG

Tell us about your choice to have this story cycle narrated by two crows. What excited you most about writing them and their unique dynamic?

Often in the indigenous world, you will have animals to tell stories. On the mountain where I live, there are indeed two crows that sit in a branch yakking back and forth. I looked at them and thought, they are arguing with one another, why not let them be the storytellers? And away they went. They just began chattering amongst themselves and telling stories. I was very excited because I think dialogue and questions are so important in the world at large. They help us find ways to understand one another in a deeper and more sustainable way. Dialogue and questions instead of debate, endless arguments, and war.

Speak about the importance of storytelling in your own life. How does telling stories help you to make sense of your experiences?

Storytelling was special to me as a child who was curious about the world around me. I would always ask my Indian elders for stories, or I would do things, often misbehaving, that would cause them to tell stories. Stories were the way I began to know who I was in place and time. I didn't read a book until the eleventh grade, and then as I fell in love with literature, I understood where my love came from – it's all stories. Stories are the only things we have as human beings to know who we are and to reflect on who we are. We don't have immense wings to fly or huge strong legs to run, but we have stories.

Question Woman and Answer Woman act as a bridge between stories that take place across multiple timelines. Aside from these interlocutors, what, if anything, links these stories together?

What links the stories is the timelessness of the human condition. The ways in which we have to learn and then relearn those important lessons in life that will keep us alive and healthy as a species. Again, it is stories that will allow us to reflect on ourselves and our behavior. Each of the stories that the crow sisters tell as a result of their back-and-forth questions and answers is in a sense a parable about someone who has forgotten something about themselves and/or the world around them that is important and essential to remember for the well-being of themselves and indeed the world around them.

Who are some of your greatest influences as a storyteller? If you're comfortable sharing, what was the first story you remember really resonating with?

The first book I ever read was Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and I remember feeling sorry for the fish, which of course was a very auspicious beginning for someone who would become a writer and a professor of literature. However, one of the first stories I remember was a lie that my adopted mother told me about my biological parents – that both my mother and father died in a car accident. Somehow, even at the age of three or four, when I asked what adopted meant, I knew that was a story that was not true. Perhaps that is what set me off on a lifelong journey to explore the truth.

The natural world is of great importance in The Forgetters. Speak about your connection to the world around us, where did you find the most inspiration for this book?

Of course, I am old enough to have grown up around a community before it became overrun with homes, freeways, and shopping centers. I spent so much of my time alone on dairy farms with animals, and of course time with all of the birds and the natural world around me. But then of course it was the Indian elders, Mabel McKay, the renowned basket weaver and medicine woman in particular, who told me so many stories not just about the animals and the natural world around me but the ways in which the natural world and humans were related and in fact, the ways a lot of the elders could turn into animals and use a lot of the songs and powers for animals to heal and doctor. That was amazing to me. I can't forget.

THE FORGETTERS By Greg Sarris
will be published as a paperback,
by Heyday Books on April 16, 2024.
(ISBN: 9781597146302) • pp 248 • $20.00