Local poet addresses Iraq war through different voices

Cabrillo instructor David Sullivan captures stories of war that went largely unreported

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APTS — By giving voice to Iraqi and U.S. citizens who were affected by the war, Cabrillo College instructor David Sullivan, with his new book of poetry, "Every Seed of the Pomegranate," hopes to capture a side of the war that remained hidden to the general public.

"Her father’s alive, she’s a torch of hope. She was burned, the fire is burning her mouth. When her mother sees / the churning apparition / walking towards her, she falls on her knees. Is it the end of the world?"

Poetic scenes, such as this one from "The Day the Beekeeper Died, Sadhu-Mishali," by Sullivan, inject just one of many related incidents of the war that readers become aware of through the book.

A collection of 63 poems divided into two halves, "Every Seed of the Pomegranate" focuses on pre- and post-invasion Iraq, and how civilians, along with the soldiers, dealt with the burdens of war.

Sullivan, who teaches English and film at Cabrillo, said the inspiration behind the poems came from some of his students who are war veterans.

"I see them struggling to readjust, and I realized how little I know about their experiences," he said.

After some preliminary research, which consisted of documentary films, books and other literature about Iraq, the project began to come together.

"It began as an attempt to understand, and it ended up about trying to give fresh voices to those understandings," Sullivan said.

Once he began to educate himself, the poems started to appear," he said.

Sullivan then began to assign the poems to the people who inspired them.

"Both U.S. soldiers and Iraqis have been enthusiastic about lending their names to the poems," he said. "I feel deeply honored by the response."

One poem, "Born on the 4th of July, in Honduras," is dedicated to Army Sgt. Guarnesia Mendez.

"He remembered that boy / he'd been, as he dove into the swimming pool where / Studd's portrait / graced the wall, / ripping, chipped mosaic. He was American," the poem reads.

In another poem, Sullivan takes on the voice of an Al Jazeera reporter, who describes a scene during a bomb-carrying helicopter campaign.

"I could just make out / Haiti's black nuclei crescents plucking / pomegranate seeds / and placing them onto..."

See SULLIVAN, page B3.