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Coming Events

JOIN US FOR A

BOOK SIGNING EVENT

with local author
Megan Portorreal

for her debut poetry & prose book

"YOU AGAIN"

When: Saturday, November 8
Time: 10:00am - 2:00pm

WHERE:
Soldato Books & Records
15 Sylvan St, Rutherford, NJ 07070
(Inside the Williams Center, 2nd Floor)

RSVP for the You Again event. <https://partiful.com/e/oXruypNFopvPVgqmzvfs>

With the upcoming book signing for her debut poetry collection, *You Again*, on November 8th at Soldato Books & Records, Megan Portorreal shares the emotional and artistic process of creating her dreamy collection, the inspirations behind it, and the power of vulnerability.

Mia Guzzo: Could you please introduce yourself?



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Megan Portorreal: I'm Megan Portorreal. I'm a 34 year old writer, creative, and avid journaler currently living in East Rutherford. My debut poetry and prose collection, *You Again*, comes out this month, on October 28. I'm a writer by trade. I studied creative writing at William Patterson University and I started out in journalism, but then I switched to copywriting in my late 20s. Currently, I'm the copy manager for three apparel brands in New York City and I write poetry and prose in my spare time. [I've] dabbled in a lot of writing, like all of the writing, all forms of it.

MG: This is a shorter question, but I'm sure it is very complex for you. How would you describe this collection of poems in your own words?

MP: Oh, boy. I think it's a moody, intimate collection about love, loss, friendship, and, honestly, everything in between, right? So in it, I try my best to capture the ache of holding on to memories and to people, the quiet triumph of eventually letting those people and memories go, and the familiar comfort of going in circles. This is also where the title comes from, the comfort of going in circles until one day, without realizing it, you come back to yourself.

MG: You mention in the introduction how all the poems in this collection came from your old journals. What was the process of taking all of your journal entries across multiple journals and making them into one collection?

MP: It was a very hefty process. I have, at this time of recording, 35 journals-- when I started the collection, I think I had closer to 30-- so, it was a lot of going through each journal way back from the beginning. I went back and reread all of them from my teen years, my first journal that I revisited was one when I was 14 years old, all the way up until my 30s. It was a very emotional process, but I did notice that I was writing about the same people and the same struggles. Even from teenage years to my adult life, there were these same recurring struggles of love and friendships that just kept kind of coming back to haunt me almost.

MG: The themes of grief and love are very interwoven throughout your narrative, and you say [in the summary how] *You Again*, blurs the lines between memoir and poem as well as memory and dream. Could you talk a bit more about the ways that these themes coexist within your work?

MP: As far as grief and love go, I feel that you can't have love without grief, or love without pain. In fact, I think the more you do love and the stronger your feelings are for whoever-- your friends, your family, your romantic interests-- the deeper that pain and that grief will be if and when it were to end, right? So you can't have one without the other. They are complimentary and, I think, that's what makes love very beautiful and worthwhile. As far as blurring the lines between memoir and poem, memory and



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dreams, I think it all comes back to what your individual truth is. I can have a dream that feels real to me and will affect my decisions in real life, and that will become my reality. I play around a lot with dreams and memories in this collection, and in a way, it almost doesn't matter if something is a dream or not. It's all sort of a truth, you know, and it's your personal truth.

MG: This is going off of what you're saying about with the title *You Again*, and going back in like this cyclical pattern. "I Think We're Alone Now," which is the first poem, ends with, to me, a clear proclamation that we're beginning. "He said, 'At the beginning,'" where "Heart Museum" ends a bit more open ended. So what was it like creating the narrative flow of this connection?

MP: So I think after I revisited all of my journals, grabbed all of these pieces, spread them out, and was looking for commonalities and themes, I did see there was sort of like phases and stages that I was going through in chronological order, from my earliest journals onward, and whenever I met a new person, the same pattern would kind of repeat itself. I split [*You Again*] into three sections.

"From Strangers to Me" is part one and I think that one's pretty self explanatory. We all start out as strangers, and then we meet these people-- even family, everyone's new to us at some point. And when you're learning about them, your feelings start to grow. That section is kind of romantic and hopeful. Then in part two, ["Love & Pain"] I put poems that were about love and pain, and all of those themes, whether [that love is] romantic or familial or platonic, and the kind of pain that accompanies them-- even some about my dog. You know, there's all different kinds of love in that section, and I try to show the phases that you go through them and the heartbreak that usually stems from deep love and the haunting that you feel after you have had great loss and heartbreak and you feel absences.

And then part three is "You Again," which comes back to how after all of that heartbreak and discovery and self reflection, you find yourself again. You come back to yourself. You have self trust. And I tried to end it on a very hopeful note, or an open ended note, because, honestly, the cycle will repeat itself. I do think you'll end up back at the beginning from strangers to more. And I wanted the book to kind of feel that way, that it could start over from the beginning once it's done. I try to capture the phases and the cycle of going in circles again and starting over and how that can be a painful process, but a beautiful [one].

MG: You're having a reading at Soldato, I'll mention that more later, but we're a book and record store, so what poets or musicians inspired you [in writing this collection?]



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MP: So as far as poets go, I'm a big fan of Lang Leav and Rupi Kaur. They are huge inspirations. It's inspiring to see women of color start off as self publishing, and, you know, have such a successful, beautiful career from that, and I'm self publishing, so I hope I can follow in those footsteps. I have so much respect for them both.

I mentioned Chris Martin in a lot of my pieces-- I love Chris Martin from Coldplay. I'm really into pop right now, so I have to name drop Taylor Swift. Ariana Grande is another one. Her album, *Eternal Sunshine* is so lovely and cathartic-- it must have been so cathartic for her if it was for me. I always admire singer-songwriters who really are not afraid to wear their heart on their sleeve and write confessional songs about things they're going through, especially heartbreak and love and all of those things. It's so important to hear other people's experiences, you know, and it's very inspiring whenever they come out with any music, because I'm like, "Yes, they're so brave. I want to be brave too. Let's do it."

MG: I definitely relate because sometimes I hear songs and it feels like, "Wow, I feel this exact way, but nobody's voiced it before." You said, "I want to be brave like that," and you are being brave like that.

MP: It is a little scary, but it's just something I feel so inclined to do, and I've always done it. I'm not afraid of being vulnerable. I think, like most people, the scary part comes with fear of judgment and scrutiny, but it's part of the process. And I really admire writers and singer-songwriters who can do that and continue to do that despite critique and the state of the world. It's so inspiring.

MG: You will be having a signing of you again in the Williams Center on November 8th from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM after your release date on October 28th. Why is it important for you to connect with local venues and be a part of this artistic community?

MP: As an independent writer, I think it's so important to establish relationships with other independent artists and bookstores, including Soldato, to help support each other in an otherwise very competitive industry. It's so important to build relationships with people in your neighborhood close by and establish this kind of circle where your roots are. I've lived in New Jersey my whole life and it's very important for me to establish that community. I've also been going to Soldato for a few years now. I mostly go for CDs because I collect them, but I also go for the books there-- they have a nice little manga section.

It means a lot to me that Soldato, other indie artists, and stores are willing to support me, give me a platform, and introduce me to their customers. It's important for me, too, to introduce my friends and followers to an independent bookstore that I really



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like to help bring them business. It's just so important to keep that local business alive and thriving, especially one as charming as Soldato. I think it's such a charming store, so it means a lot to me to partner with them.

MG: Why should people read *You Again*?

MP: Not just because I worked really hard on it, but I think of *You Again* as a mirror for the sentimental person, the kind hearted soul. It's not just a book about love and heartbreak, but it's also about the journey back to yourself. It's a comforting, hopeful read. Yes, there is lots of heartbreak and sadness and haunting in it, but it's the perfect companion for anyone who has gone through a breakup, has experienced loss, [or the] death of a loved one. It is a comforting piece that people can carry with them and lean on when they need it.

It's a reminder that, yes, these things can be so painful, haunting, and you might need to revisit them again and again. It's a healing process, but it's so beautiful and it's beautiful because of that love and that feeling you have-- and that's so important to remember when you're going through heartbreak, pain, and sadness. It's so important to remember that you feel that depth of it because of your capacity to love and it shouldn't deter you from loving again.

MG: Thank you so much. I mean, I'm sold from that [answer]. Is there anything I didn't ask that you'd like to share?

MP: In general when I was querying for this poetry book and eventually decided to self-publish, I learned a lot about the publishing industry and how it is really hard to debut poetry because it's not something you can easily turn into like a Netflix show. I think it deters people from pursuing poetry, studying poetry, or trying to break into the industry. It's just so important that we still hold onto poetry as something beautiful and worth studying. There are so many fiction authors who are wildly successful and, you know, I hope one day we could see more of a resurgence in poetry again. Poetry can be a very healing medium and if you love songs and music, that's poetry, you know, that's all poetry.

I'm really excited to debut with a poetry collection. I have dabbled in all writing, all kinds of writing, but it means a lot to me to debut as a poet for its brevity, for its connections with musical lyricism, all of that. I hope that people will find this collection inspiring and I hope it resonates with them and maybe inspires them to try and romanticize their diary entries or everyday life. I hope [*You Again*] is an inspiring collection for people to romanticize their sentimentality and not be afraid to be vulnerable.