

Local actress Clifford Henderson takes a literary turn

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WRITTEN BY CHRISTA MARTIN

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Her book explores what she calls "The Middle of Somewhere"

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She's known for laughter, not literature. But that's all about to change this month as local actress, improviser and co-owner of [The Fun Institute](#), Clifford Henderson, releases her first published novel. The book, "The Middle of Somewhere," by the small publishing company, Bold Strokes Books, is a story of a lesbian woman finding her way in life. Henderson will speak about her book at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 29 at [Bookshop Santa Cruz](#); her novel sells in local bookstores.

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For Henderson, this is a new venture. She's long been known in our community for her work with The Fun Institute, an improvisation school she and partner Dixie Cox founded in 2001. The school might be reminiscent of something like The Groundling's, the Los Angeles-based improv school and acting troupe where some of today's greatest comedic stars have received training. Right here in Santa Cruz, Henderson and Cox give aspiring actors, established comedians and regular ol' people a chance to indulge in their inner comedian by way of letting loose on stage and performing improv.

And while Henderson has been working in this field for quite some time, at one point along her road, she decided to write a two-woman show called "Detour Ahead." "People totally responded to that piece and said they loved the writing," Henderson says, looking back at the moment that marked her as a writer.

From there she thought "what the hell" and spent a year-and-a-half working on her novel, "The Middle of Somewhere." The story follows Eadie T. Pratt, a young urban lesbian who lives in San Francisco. Her life is falling apart and she runs from it, hops in her car and pulls a trailer straight out of San Francisco. Her car breaks down in the panhandle of Texas, in front of a Baptist church, the last place on Earth she wants to be stuck. Two rotund women come out to greet and befriend her, and from there a mystery unfolds. Pratt discovers that a financial scandal is underway at the church. Amidst this criminal situation, she meets a woman who is passing through town.

While the story may have a gay protagonist, Henderson doesn't call it "gay fiction,"—just regular fiction with a gay character. Of course, that niche, she admits, can still be hard to sell. However, she came across a publishing house, Bold Strokes Books, who steadfastly believe in the book and are doing a first run on it.

"In theater you don't have a product and nothing lasts," Henderson says. "[But with writing a book] this can be sitting on a bookshelf and I don't have to be there anymore." But for her event at Bookshop Santa Cruz, that book will be sitting there, and so will Henderson.



Clifford Henderson will be speaking about and reading from her book, "The Middle of Somewhere" at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 29 at [Bookshop Santa Cruz](#), 1520 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz.

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