

Clayton author overcomes life obstacles to write children's books

ANDRÉ GENSBURGER
Clayton Pioneer

Former Clayton resident Dante Salvatierra has had an interesting life so far.

As a "latchkey kid" coming home to an empty house, Salvatierra, now 35, has always channeled his energies toward creative purposes, living up to the Spanish translation of his last name, "Save the Earth" or "Save the Land."

His family originated in the Philippines. Salvatierra was born in Oakland but spent most of his school years in Clayton, attending Mt. Diablo Elementary, Pine Hollow and Clayton Valley High School.

"I still remember when Center Street was a gravel road," Salvatierra said during a recent telephone interview.

Graduating from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash., in 2000, he relocated to Nebraska, following his future wife, Sara, who had convinced him that "they were hiring teachers in Omaha." Salvatierra got hired to teach third- and fourth-graders.

It was there that he started writing children's books. "I didn't write them for publication," he said, "just for my class. But then people kept asking where they could get copies."

Rather than incurring the

cost of copying a 200-page book, Salvatierra turned to Lulu.com where Print-On-Demand functionality made publishing his Latchkey Kids book series much easier.



Former Clayton resident, teacher, politician, and author, Dante Salvatierra.

"The books are a lot of fun to read," said fifth-grader Brian Coleman of Sacramento. "I like that the new one's about fifth grade."

Salvatierra has even inserted Clayton descriptions in his fictional towns of Somersville and Nortonville.

Salvatierra's commitment to children and education led him from book publishing to an aspiring political career. Unhappy with the No Child Left Behind legislation and finding that the district con-

gressional seats were unfilled for the upcoming elections, Salvatierra made the decision to run for Congress during the 2004 elections.

"Politics is a necessary evil," he said of the experience, which he said made him aware how difficult political roles are to fulfill without temptation. "I don't want to say that I felt a bit dirtied by the experience, but one does not see politics from a politician's point of view where you have to try to please everyone, often by playing both sides."

As a member of the Green Party, he received 2,208 votes; however, he did not win the election, much to his relief. "I don't really want to do that again," he said.

In 2006, Salvatierra's life took another major change when he underwent surgery to remove a plum sized, astrocytoma-type tumor from his brain. Some 15 percent of the tumor remains, as it is too close to vital nerves to remove safely.

Salvatierra says the experience shaped his perspective on life.

"You think differently about having children," he said. "You don't want them to have no father."

While the tumor remains static, he undergoes yearly MRIs to ensure that it has not

changed. "The problem with this type of tumor is that if it returns, it is usually more aggressive."

The primary symptom he had prior to the surgery was dizziness. "The surgery was done while I was awake," he said. He decided to give the tumor a name to help him fight against it mentally, to channel the anger he was feeling and to bring some levity to the situation. He named the tumor Dubya, after President Bush.

"At first I felt like a walking dead man, and naming it helped me to deal with thinking about it in a different way," he said. "Now I think about living with it rather than dying from it."

Salvatierra is now releasing his fourth book in the Latchkey series. "The Fight for a Free Fifth Grade" tackles issues such as standardized testing in public schools, where the Latchkey Kids uncover a sinister plot to raise test scores at their school.

"Marketing my books is my weak point," he said of his decision to continue selling through Lulu.com. The online site offers a built-in promotion system designed to help authors.

"I still have the greatest job on earth," he said. "I teach children every day, and I write stories for them."

Grant, from page A1

museums, nursing facilities and land protection grants. To date, in excess of \$90 million in land protection grants have been awarded, representing more than 250,000 acres of land - the size of the city and county of San Francisco.

Located on the grounds of the former Presidio, the foundation was established by Gordon Moore, co-founder of the Intel Corporation.

(Moore is also known for his bold prediction that the

number of transistors on a computer chip would double every 12 months. This prediction became known as "Moore's Law" and, while the number of transistors has been revised to 18 months since first created, it remains an established rule.)

The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation employs more than 70 people and manages approximately \$6 billion in assets. Running an annual operations budget of \$20 mil-

lion, it assigns 5 percent in annual endowments, such as the one received by Save Mount Diablo.

The Irish Canyon purchase includes the historic Mount Diablo Coal Field and a public trail that now occupies a former stage coach road, allowing access to beautiful property views of Suisun Bay, Mount Diablo and the San Francisco peninsula.

The property had been threatened by ranchette development before Save Mount Diablo, a non-profit conservation organization, secured an

option to buy it more than a year ago. The parcel is also close to Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, City of Clayton Open Space, Save Mount Diablo's Chaparral Spring property, East Bay Regional Park District's Clayton Ranch landmark and Mount Diablo State Park.

Restoration efforts will begin in the spring.

For further information, contact Save Mount Diablo, 1901 Olympic Blvd., #220, Walnut Creek, CA. 94596. or call (925) 947-3535. [Http://www.savemountdiablo.org](http://www.savemountdiablo.org).



RESTORATION EFFORTS on Irish Canyon will begin in the spring. Photo courtesy of Save Mount Diablo



RECENT SAVE MT. DIABLO purchase preserves Irish Canyon. Photo courtesy of Save Mount Diablo

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