

Leisure

Journey To Bridge A Generation Gap

By JOSEPH OROVIC

Literary history is rife with stories of journeys to self-discovery. Enter Celine Keating's "Layla," a take on the proud literary tradition - with a twist.

The novel follows Layla James, a modern teenage protagonist with an artistic bent, but conservative sensibilities.

Saddled with the death of her former-hippie mother and the ghost of a father who only left her with a name (you can guess its origins on your own), the aspiring photographer undertakes a journey across the country. Spurred by a mysterious letter left by her mother, Layla encounters the sometimes dormant activists of the flower-power generation on her road to a surprising twist ending.

On her road from New York to a commune in California, Layla discovers lessons about love, forgiveness and friendship we can relearn ourselves. Mushy parts aside, Keating hopes the book will reignite activist streaks that have gone silent.

"I guess in some strange way, I was almost hoping, 'C'mon this is possible,'" Keating said. "It would be lovely to see people take a more activist role."

Layla's story does not deviate wildly from Keating's own, who is also the product of two working-class parents from Queens. She also lost her father at an early age.

"I'm not the age of the protagonist, but I always wondered what would it be like to have a daughter," she said. "One with very different values."

The characters Layla meets are familiar to the author, herself a product of the 1960s.

After graduating Queens College in the early 1970s, Keating took a cross-country trip to California, volunteering for Cesar Chavez's farm workers' union. She also participated in the anti-war movement. To say her personal experience has geared her towards activism is an understatement. She looks back upon the era longingly.

"It's always hard to argue that your period was more important," Keating said. "I definitely think it was a seismic period of change. The whole 1960s era still had such an effect on the regular daily lives of people. Nothing felt like it saturated every corner of the country like that period did."

Those same peers that color her memories were very much on her mind when writ-

ing, as was her native borough.

"It leaks through certainly in some of the scenes, and [Layla's] family is still in Queens," she said. "Queens was definitely off the beaten track for the centers of power."

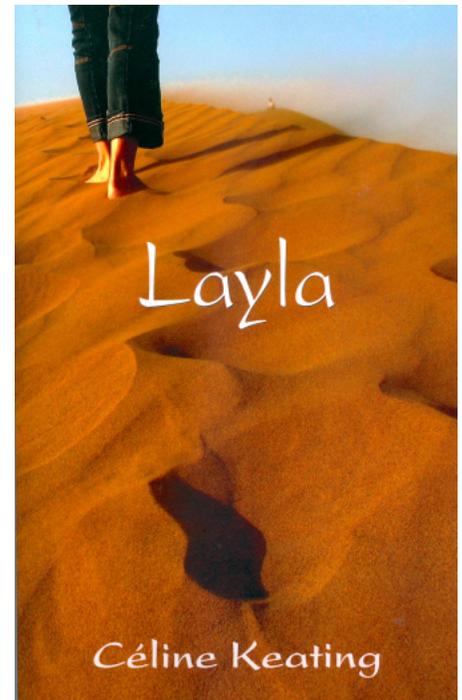
Still, when writing a nostalgic journey and homage to her generation, Keating admitted there is a gap between the novel she envisioned and the finished product - which is not necessarily a bad conclusion.

"It never meshes. At some point you say, 'This is what it is,'" she said. "It's always such a peculiar experience because how you feel the vision and what happens on the page, it's just two separate things. It wasn't too far off, at least, close enough to let go of it."

Keating hopes the novel will bridge a gap between the children of flower children and their parents.

"It would be great if parents and young adults would read the books and discuss it," she said. "You'd love to think that something you write would have meaning for someone."

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Celine Keating's novel of a journey and discovery.