

WRITER

Continued from Page 1

on making things short, tight and clean. They want to make sure you don't take any extra space."

Abu-Jaber said that one time she was so hesitant to make some changes that her editor bribed her with a care package of Arabian foods.

To those that know her, Abu-Jaber's good fortune at finding a publisher is not surprising. She has always been an overachiever.

After skipping a couple of grades, she entered State University of New York at Oswego at age 15. By age 26, she had completed a master's degree at the University of Windsor in Canada and a doctoral degree at State University of New York in Binghamton.

Since then, she has taught at a variety of colleges around the country, joining the University faculty in September 1990.

While *Arabian Jazz* will be Abu-Jaber's first published work, it is not her first novel. She attempted her first book as a seventh grader and has written "at least three or four" since then.

She got the idea for *Arabian Jazz*, which is based loosely on her own experiences growing up in an Arab-American family from a professor she knew as a doctoral student.

"It took me a long time to write about my experience," she said. "It never occurred to me that people would be interested in hearing about Arabs."

Although Abu-Jaber's blond hair and fair complexion suggests an ethnic heritage other than Arabic, she is a member of a prominent Jordanian family. Her uncle, Kamil Abu-Jaber is the Jordanian secretary of state and many of her other relatives are involved in Middle Eastern politics and business.

Abu-Jaber acknowledges that balancing her writing with teaching responsibilities was often difficult.

As a creative writing professor at the University, she reviews about 100 manuscripts a term from students applying to get into her writing workshops and screens applicants to her department's master's of fine arts program.

Fortunately, she was able to take month-long breaks from her teaching duties to work exclu-



Diana Abu-Jaber

sively on the novel.

Sometimes she got an "artist residency," a type of grant in which a literary organization paid her room, board and salary for her to write full time.

But although Abu-Jaber said she enjoys full-time writing, she said she has no plans to give up teaching.

"I think there's something very good about having contact with other writers," she said.

Abu-Jaber is also interested in developing more courses about Middle Eastern culture and literature at the University.

In the future, Abu-Jaber plans to continue writing novels and possibly screenplays. If things go well, she may even get a chance to write a screenplay for *Arabian Jazz* — her agent has talked to several Hollywood bigwigs that are "very excited" about turning the novel into a movie.

Abu-Jaber will have to wait until after the book is distributed for the final word on such a deal.

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