

Summerville author releases book of poems

Ettinger's new collection, combining poetry and history, will be featured at April 21 reading

By Lisa Britton

Go! Magazine

Amelia Diaz Ettinger grew up in Puerto Rico, but she knew nothing about the bombings.

It took someone warning her to “check the flag” before she understood the situation. A red flag, she learned, was an alert for bombs.

The reality was this: Since 1941, the U.S. Navy had used the Puerto Rican island of Culebra for target practice.

Ettinger, who now lives in Summerville, recently published a chapbook — a small book of thematic poems — titled “Fossils on a Red Flag.”

The poems tell the story of Culebra during the three decades it served as a target.

“It’s based on firsthand experience, although I came in at the tail end,” she said.

Ettinger will be featured at the Art Center East Writing Project virtual gathering on Wednesday, April 21.

The free literary event is live via Zoom at 7 p.m. To register for access, go to artcentereast.org/calendar.

Copies of her book can be found at JaxDog Cafe and Books in La Grande, Art Center East, direct from the publisher at www.finishlinepress.com, and on Amazon.

Ettinger came into the situation on Culebra in 1970 as an undergraduate student when she took a job conducting a bird survey every weekend.

It was on her first excursion that she met the woman who warned her about the flag.

“She was a real activist, involved in the politics of the island,” she said.

Ettinger learned that the small island had been used as target



Art Center East/Contributed Photo

Amelia Diaz Ettinger

practice for decades, resulting in forced relocation of citizens and damage to the habitat and the coral reefs that support the fishing industry.

“They’d very frequently miss the target and were destroying the most amazing coral reefs in the world,” she said. “Without coral, you don’t have fish.”

The bombing ended in 1975, fueled in part by the Endangered Species Act of 1970.

“This female turtle made her nest right dead center on the target,” Ettinger said. “They couldn’t bomb. That turtle is the heroine — she stopped the bombing.”

According to the publisher, the poems in Ettinger’s chapbook “weave the thread of song through destruction and exploitation of the small island, as well as the triumph of the people of Culebra.”

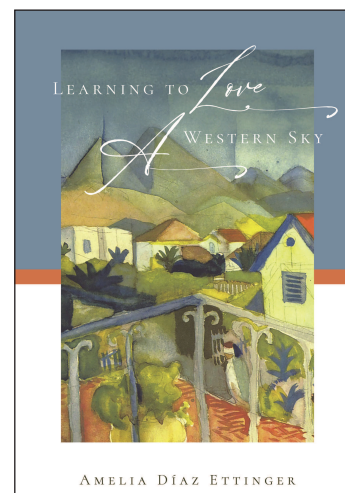
“Basically my book is an education,” Ettinger said. “It’s so important to have stories like this out there.”

Ettinger came to the United States in 1974 to earn a master’s degree in science from Washington State University.

She ended up in Eastern Oregon because her husband was a psychology professor at Eastern Oregon University.

She taught at La Grande High School — first Spanish, then science — until she retired in 2013.

Also by Amelia Diaz Ettinger



Since then she has been focusing on on her writing.

“I’ve written poetry all my life,” she said.

Previous to “Fossils on a Red Flag,” Ettinger published “Learn-

ing to Love a Western Sky” and a bilingual poetry book, “Speaking at a Time / Hablando a la Vez.”

She’s currently earning a master’s of fine arts at Eastern Oregon University.

Be safe, wear masks, stay distanced: we will get through this. Thank you. Mae



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GO
WEEKEND OUTLOOK



FRIDAY
High 64 Low 32
Sunshine; nice



SATURDAY
High 69 Low 36
Sunny and mild



SUNDAY
High 73 Low 38
Sunny and warm