

About Mark Sanford Gross

"1/3 NY, 1/3 Washington, DC and 1/3 San Francisco." For the past 8 years Mark has called the Mendonoma Coast home where he lives with his husband Billy, their two Hungarian shepherds, Woof! and Ruf? in Anchor Bay. "I didn't realize the hidden metaphor of Anchor Bay until I was here for a few years. Our home now is truly my anchor."

Growing up in new York, Mark always says that New York is a great place to be from. "You learn a street sense and a way of living in diverse crowds that is not taught but lived." He moved to Washington DC to work in radio where he sold advertising for ABC radio's first FM Rock station, WRQX. During that time he earned his MBA in Management from Marymount University. He moved on to two other radio stations learning radio formats and audience behavior. The Washington Post took Mark out of radio and into the world of newspaper in the nation's capitol. It was during that time mark was accepted into part-time creative writing at John Hopkins University where he earned his MA over three years of full time work and full time writing fit into part time structure.

After 12 years at the Post's "DC mothership" he was asked to start an experimental remote home office in San Francisco to be the brand ambassador representing The Washington Post and Washington DC. "It was the first time of blending opposite ways of thinking. Silicon Valley was becoming the center of innovation and Washington, DC was the center of policy and regulation. Often one didn't understand the language of the other". Over the next fifteen years Mark developed his relationship skills learning how to bring together groups and teams of individuals with all their differences. In 2013, Mark was awarded the Washington Post prestigious Eugene Meyer Award named after Katharine Grahams father for his career contributions and principles.

He retired in 2015 when they moved to Anchor Bay. On his first day living in Gualala, he stopped at The Sea Trader. The woman welcomed him and could tell he was new. She offered the best advice, "You need to give it at least two years. It will take that time for you to realize who you are and how to fit in here and how all our surroundings work. Too many people give up. Don't. I promise you magic."

Mark seized what he could to understand living here. He was a reporter for the ICO. Volunteer for KGUA. A board member of Gualala Arts Center and the Point Arena Lighthouse. He contributed to the Lighthouse Peddler and volunteered for programs at Action Network. He started a running club. In 2022, he hosted discussion groups on James Joyce, Ulysses. Everything he did was part of learning how to build community across differences. "When I left the Post I returned my lap

top and computer. Soon after, I realized my skillset and all I learned about people was mine to own.”

He continued his writing development attending significant writing workshops including Cheryl Strayed’s Writers Camp at Esolen, Dorothy Allison’s workshop at Writing x Writers, Alexander Chee at Corporal Writing. Paul Lisciky at Provincetown Writers Offerings, Napa Valley Writers Conference, Summer workshop in Chamonix, France with Pam Houston and Cheryl Strayed. In 2015 he met best-selling author Lydia Yuknavitch. It was a turning point for his writing as he became a regular in her workshops followed by one year exclusive mentorship with her. In 2015, Mark was accepted to Skidmore’s New York Summer’s Writing Institute working under Garth Greenwell and a list of incredible writers.

A little bit from him. A little bit from her. A little bit from them. A little bit from everyone including his fellow writers helped Mark put together his own format and program to help writers on every level to get the stories out of them, heard by others.

When he partnered with Peggy Berryhill his role in the community grew. Peggy was unconditional in teaching and trusting Mark to help him grow into an integral part of KGUA while strengthening his own skills.

During his three cross-country drives in the past two years Mark decided to start “Let’s Go Bookstoring.” A series of interviews with independent local bookstores he discovered while driving. “It gave me a chance to talk with unsung heroes passionate about reading and books who struggled through the pandemic to keep reading alive with people locked-down. It was a fascinating learning experience about the power giving of small used bookstores. Southland Books in Maryville, Tennessee, The Source in Davenport, Iowa, Hooray for Books in Alexandria, Virginia. Just a few. He turned these interviews into KGUA special segments.

A discussion with Kristina Jetter, Executive Director of the Sea Ranch Lodge led to an on-going monthly Storytelling Writing workshop. It was this when he branded his workshops as Write-Up-The-Coast.

Mark leads with passion, energy and enthusiasm. All of which he gets by watching others grow and take chances. He started running in 2018 and since then has done half marathons in NY, SF, Humboldt and Washington DC. He took up Canicross (running with dogs) and together he and his dogs have done countless 10Ks.

“I just want everyone to write. Share their voices. Become not just the town that started writing but the coast that started writing and continue as far as we can.”