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Novelist Offers Cal Poly Students, Faculty, Staff Praise, Encouragement

Catherine Ryan Hyde

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Nationally known author Catherine Ryan Hyde gave keynote remarks at the President's Community-Based Learning and Service Awards.

Hyde, who lives in Cambria, is best known for her novel, "Pay It Forward," which was made into a hit movie. In light of the success of the movie and novel - which center around doing good deeds for strangers with no expectation of rewards - Hyde has also set up a non-profit [Pay It Forward Foundation](#).

The author was applauded by the crowd of 120 students, faculty and staff gathered in Chumash Auditorium May 29 as she told of how help from strangers changed her life.

"I was driving a car late at night 25 years ago, and my car died," she explained. She was alone in a dangerous part of Los Angeles, where she lived at the time, and had just gotten off the freeway in her old, dilapidated car. It stalled - which wasn't unusual - but then lost all electricity. And then smoke started seeping into the passenger compartment from the engine.

She got out, "And one of the first things I saw was two men running toward me: one of them with a blanket. Many thoughts went through my head, and not one of them sounded like, 'Gee! This is a good thing!' Not one of them involved me being rescued," she said.

But that's just what the duo did. Both brushed past her, popped open her engine hood, and began to douse the flames. "The one with the blanket leaned in, and he put out the fire by hand with the blanket."

A few minutes later the fire department showed up, and firemen pointed out that the blaze was serious and could have been fatal for all three had it reached the fuel tank. She figured "That was pretty much the biggest favor anyone had ever done for me.that was my fire, and my car, and that was his body."

When she turned to thank the men, they were already gone, she said. "But when somebody does something like that for you, it changes you."

Over the next few weeks, once again auto-abled, Hyde said she noticed, "Here I am, all of a sudden, pulling over to help people stuck on the side of the road. It's something I wouldn't have done before.

"That's when I started to think that maybe this thing could be contagious," she said.

That was the inspiration for her novel, "Pay It Forward."

The book, she said, is her exploration of the question, "What would happen if we all did a little bit more for each other?"

"That's what a novel is for me: working out a question on a very deep level. It's usually a question that doesn't have a clear answer, or else why would you write a novel about it?"

But she says she's concluded, "It's not really hard to do a little more for each other. This is what we all want, really: to make things a little better."

The "kindness movement," she stressed, "is something I see growing like a wildfire."

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