

Sally Field picks up pieces of her life and moves on to wrap Rancho Mirage Writers Festival

Bruce Fessier Palm Springs Desert Sun

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Sally Field wrapped the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival Friday like a boxer offering condolences to an opponent she had just pummeled.

"Thank you for letting me beat you up," the petite, two-time Oscar-winning actress told festival founder Jamie Kabler at the Rancho Mirage Public Library after doing a Q&A with Kabler, like Ginger Rogers trying to lead Fred Astaire.

Field said everything she needed to say in a 45-minute talk about her 2018 memoir, "In Pieces," but she probably could have accomplished it just as effectively dancing backwards in high heels with Kabler asking more leading questions.

Kabler began the last event of the three-day festival by asking Field about her performance as Mary Lincoln in the 2012 film, "Lincoln," for which she was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Oscar.

Field responded, "Wow. How do we even begin there? That's like the end."

Field had an orderly arrangement to her book.

She had re-discovered her passion for acting, she said, while making "Lincoln," as her mother was dying, and while Field was seeing a therapist who helped her identify the many uncomfortable, if not dysfunctional pieces of her life. That confluence was the climax of her book, and she was thrown starting the Q&A at that point.

So, she offered a few choice comments about Kabler's moderating skills.

"What an odd question," she remarked after Kabler asked her why she made "Smokey and the Bandit" with her then-boyfriend, Burt Reynolds.

"You could have said 'unique'," Kabler retorted, before adding, "I'm moving on to the next question."

Sally Berger, one of Kabler's many friends in the audience, whispered to another festival-goer, "Tough interview."

But Kabler did get in some questions that weren't about Field's book, and one resulted in one of the most interesting exchanges of the Q&A. Kabler asked Field about her TV show, "Brothers & Sisters," in which she starred from 2006 to 2011 as the mother of a gay son who appeared to be "an all-American kid."

In real life, Field said, her own son is a gay man who appeared to be "an all-American kid," and she struggled to let her son find his own path. She was able to help write some of the TV show from personal experience, Field said, "So, 'Brothers & Sisters' was really important for me for that."

The few jabs and stumbles during the Field Q&A were among the very few bumps and bruises Kabler and his crew, including festival executive director Debbie Green and Rancho Mirage Library Director Aaron Espinosa, experienced all week.

Tickets for the event sold out in three hours almost a year ago and, after five previous festivals, customer service went arguably smoother than ever. Fans and speakers alike raved about the lineup and the conversation that engaged rooms full of audiences in the library from 8:30 a.m. to mid-afternoon all three days.

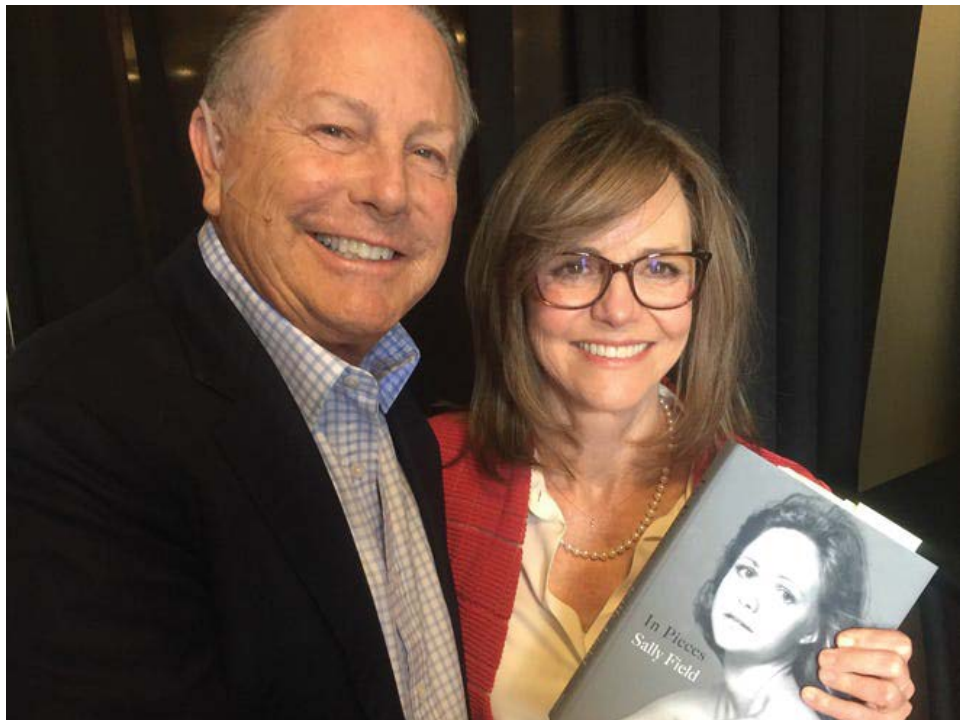
It's almost a bromide to say the latest event is better than the ones that came before, but even Kabler echoed that the fans said exactly that with conviction this week.

"We opened with Tom Hanks, we closed with Sally Field, we had (former California) Gov. Jerry Brown interviewed on Thursday by Maureen Dowd of the New York Times," Kabler said after the last Q&A. "Within two weeks after the last festival, I made several calls. I saw it line up. It just happened to come together in November with Tom, with Sally and then Gov. Brown."

Former Sen. Barbara Boxer, who regularly attends this festival, joined former California Gov. Gray Davis for a conversation on "The State of the State," moderated by Brown's brother-in-law, former CBS and Fox News president Van Gordon Sauter. They discussed the need to protect the middle class after housing prices have gone up by 100 percent, college tuition has increased by more than 100 percent, and health care costs have risen by at least 60 percent since the 1980s while wages have risen just 5 percent.

Boxer said these kind of substantive conversations are typical of the festival.

"What I love about the festival is that Jamie attracts really, truly the best and the brightest people out there, from historians to novelists to non-fiction writers and politicians," she said. "What's so important is, the country is so divided, it's great to hear these issues discussed in a calm way and have people in the audience who are Democrats, Republicans, in the middle – I like that. I think it has a very special touch, and I think it reflects Jamie's humanity because he likes to bring us all together."



Sally Field poses with Jamie Kabler after completing their Q&A Friday at the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival *Bruce Fessier/The Desert Sun*



Festival donor Harold Matzner brought a World War II tank from the Gen. George S. Patton Museum in Chiriaco Summit to display outside of the Rancho Mirage Public Library to represent the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival's theme of remembering World War II. *Bruce Fessier/The Desert Sun*

The festival only had one African-American speaker, but Boxer said she noticed more women speakers on the roster, and one festival-goer, Dee Ann Nichols, said what she liked most about all the conversations was the discussion on anti-Semitism.

Kabler said even before he could be asked about diversity that there will be more of it next year.

"I have a number of African-American writers and I'm very proud of that," he said. "I have Zadie Smith (a British novelist of Jamaican descent) coming. I have a Nigerian writer. I have a conservative young college student who fought for conservative speakers on college campuses, Zachary Wood."

This year's theme was a remembrance of World War II in celebration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day coming June 6. New York Times columnist Bret Stephens suggested a theme of great wars, Kabler said on the preview night with Stephens sitting in the front row, but author Susan Eisenhower said that was too broad a topic and he should just focus on World War II.

Next year's festival will again feature a substantive political dialogue.

"Next year, our theme is Americans and Presidential Elections because our festival is in January of a presidential election year," Kabler said. "It also (will be) the 100th anniversary of women's (voting) rights. So we're going to have a lot more women writers."

The author-speakers already announced include Doris Kearns Goodwin, Dennis Prager, James Carville, Anna Quindlen, Max Boot and best-selling novelist James Patterson.

"This year we were weak on fiction," said Kabler. "Next year, we're spending over \$200,000 on fiction writers and we're having the best fiction writers in the world coming to Rancho Mirage."

Tickets are scheduled to go on sale March 1 at rmwritersfest.org. Kabler said he hopes to add 150 to 200 general admission tickets for the library events supported by two \$50,000 donations from Helene Galen and Harold Matzner, five \$20,000 contributions, and more than 200 \$5,000 donations.