



**KELLY
YOUNGER**

THE STORYTELLER

When Kelly Younger was growing up in the San Gabriel Valley, his heroes were the Goonies and Indiana Jones, and he dreamed of being an adventurer. As a Loyola Marymount University undergrad studying to become a classicist and archeologist, Younger traveled to Greece in the hope of discovering legendary treasures like his on-screen idols did. Due to his Irish blood, the only thing he found was sunstroke. After reassessing his life, he realized that what really enthralled him were the stories.

“Stories can either hold up a window or a mirror to the world,” says Younger, now a tenured professor of English and LMU’s resident playwright. “I know I’ve succeeded when a person says ‘Oh my God, that’s me,’ ‘I know someone like that,’ or

‘I didn’t know a person like that existed.’”

Over the past 15 years Younger has written more than 20 plays that have been produced everywhere from New York to Dubai, many of them acclaimed and award-winning. His comedy “Mandate,” about two men whose wives order them to take a guys’ night out together, won the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival in 2015.

Younger’s career changed dramatically three years ago when Disney Animation reached out for him to write and develop an animated Disney film and to become a member of the Disney Animation Story Trust, which allowed him to work on “Moana,” “Frozen 2,” “Ralph Breaks the Internet” and the forthcoming live-action “Aladdin.” He was also a Pixar Animation Brain Trust participant, assisting in the

development of “Cars 3,” “Incredibles 2,” “Toy Story 4” and other films.

These days, Younger is story-consulting on three feature projects for Illumination / DreamWorks Animation and developing new content for The Muppets. He’s co-developed a book on drama to be published next year and is at work on a forthcoming children’s book with illustrator A.J. Knox.

At home he stays busy raising his 10-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son with wife Stephanie Younger, the prominent Westside real estate agent. They started dating while at LMU, and she was with him on that fateful trip to Greece.

It’s also at LMU that Younger maintains the love of his craft. An avid learner, he believes he learns the most through teaching.

“Every semester brings a new group of students, all with different backgrounds and life experiences,” says Younger, who credits those fresh perspectives with bringing new meaning and complexity to the stories he teaches.

In addition to workshops on playwriting, Younger teaches courses in dramatic literature, classical literature, and mythology, as well as a popular seminar on fairy tales. He believes the power of fairy tales rests in that classic opening phrase, “once upon a time.”

“A fairy tale is a promise,” he says, and “once upon a time guarantees that no matter what happens — no matter the adversity, no matter the difficulties and the heartbreaks — everything will turn out all right.” ■

— Nathan Faust