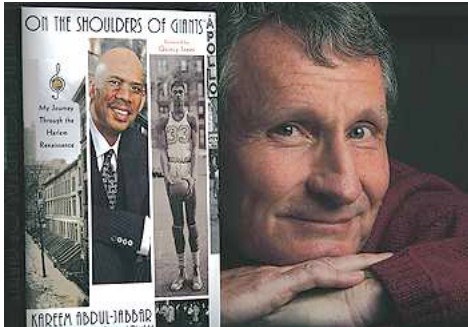


## Book unites professor, hoops legend

•OCC teacher, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar team up to research and recall the Harlem Renaissance.

By Michael Miller

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Raymond Obstfeld, a writing teacher at Orange Coast College, co-authored a book with basketball great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

TUSTIN — In the living room of Raymond Obstfeld's condominium is a picture of himself with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The two look decidedly different — Obstfeld thin and bespectacled, Abdul-Jabbar robust and athletic — and the 7-foot-2 basketball legend towers over the Orange Coast College professor.

They have quite a few things in common, though. Both trained in self-defense and grew up watching Western movies. Both encountered discrimination growing up — Obstfeld as a Jew in small-town Pennsylvania, Abdul-Jabbar as a black man in New York City. Moreover, both are prolific authors. A book bearing both of their names, "On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance," is scheduled for release on Friday.

"It came very naturally with Raymond," said Abdul-Jabbar's manager, Deborah Morales, who met Obstfeld when she took a scriptwriting class with one of his colleagues at OCC.

Morales, a 1984 OCC graduate, took the class because she wanted to pen a documentary about the Harlem Renaissance — the period from roughly 1920 to 1940 when Harlem became America's center of black art and politics. Obstfeld suggested that Morales turn the idea into a book, and an unlikely partnership was born.

The credit on the book's cover — "Kareem Abdul-Jabbar with Raymond Obstfeld" — might imply that Abdul-Jabbar provided most of the material while his partner worked it into readable prose. Actually, "On the Shoulders of Giants" was a collaboration in a truer sense. Obstfeld wrote historical chapters on Harlem while Abdul-Jabbar contributed separate ones about his personal memories — a format influenced by the call-and-response structure of gospel songs.

Often, Obstfeld said, Abdul-Jabbar gave him guidelines for what material he wanted covered.

"I was pretty much like a lawyer going into a courtroom," he said. "I was basically reshaping everything in a way to say what he wanted to say."

The two collaborated even within chapters, as Abdul-

Jabbar worked his own paragraphs into Obstfeld's history. Abdul-Jabbar, the author of a half a dozen books and an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Lakers, welcomed the give-and-take.

"Raymond's very tenacious, very easy to work with because he pays attention to details," Abdul-Jabbar said Monday by phone. "One of the things I learned when going to UCLA is that you have to be thorough in your research, and Raymond believes in that too."

Obstfeld — who teaches at OCC with his wife, Loretta, also an author — has written more than 30 books, including fiction, nonfiction and poetry. His mystery novel "Anatomy Lesson" is scheduled to be the first release this fall by Iota Publishing, an Irvine-based book press. At OCC on Feb. 28, he plans to join Abdul-Jabbar in a book signing.

The Lakers star has another appearance lined up next month as well: He's offered to speak at Obstfeld's son's elementary school in Tustin. Abdul-Jabbar said his talk won't just be about basketball.

"It's good to let them know there's more to life than just hoops," he said. "Sometimes they get that mind-set."