

KATE BRAVERMAN really gets into her writing. "I'm soaking wet when I get up, like I've been riding the stair-stepper for two hours," she says.

'Small' comforts

Braverman writes what — and where — she knows

By Mary Mazzocco
TIMES CORRESPONDENT

PROFILE

■ **WHO:** Kate Braverman
■ **WHAT:** Author of "Small Craft Warnings" (University of Nevada Press, \$16)

BEING IN BERKELEY is making Kate Braverman slightly euphoric. She left California four years ago, after Los Angeles had become "toxic on a cellular level." Now she lives inside a picture postcard, a 150-year-old farmhouse in the middle of an orchard, in the middle of a maple forest, in a tiny, isolated university town in southwestern New York state. But still.

"I miss the idea that you can walk out the door and see a foreign film," she says, sitting in Au Coquelet, a student hangout near the UC Theatre, wearing jeans with heavy ropes of Asian beads. "I miss being a freak among other freaks. I get to Berkeley and I just feel so free."

Braverman, who co-founded the Venice Poetry Workshop, has a reputation as a writer who really "gets" Los Angeles. "Palm Latitudes," perhaps her best-known novel, is about women living emotionally, socially and financially on the edge in the barrio.

But Berkeley is where she wound up in 1965 as a 15-year-old runaway, because people in the Haight told her that was where the book lovers were. Berkeley is where she put herself through high school and graduated from college, with an anthropology degree. Berkeley is where she wants to retire with her husband, a biologist and academic.

And Berkeley is a touchstone for many of her fictional characters, such as the mother in one of her newest stories who tries to reassure her daughter by leaving part of her spirit in a redwood tree on campus.

"Now if you ever want me, if you need me and can't find me, my spirit is here," says the mother in "The Woman After Rain," one of the stories in "Small Craft Warnings."

Her daughter replies, unim-



pressed, "You left your spirit in Malibu, too. ... Remember? The pine tree on the cliff where the deer family had been sleeping? And don't forget the blue spruce in the park in Aspen."

The exchange is based on one Braverman had with her daughter, Gaby. She raised Gaby, now 17, alone after falling in love with an artist and moving from Berkeley to Los Angeles, "like my first novel, 'Lithium for Medea.'"

"My stories are totally autobiographical," Braverman says. "If anything, my stories are more autobiographical as I get older because I'm less afraid. And because I understand that memory mutates everything over time, and there's no such thing as literary betrayal. Because just the act of making it literary takes it away from the idea of betrayal."

"Our lives are all forms of fiction anyway."

That fiction can be unsentimental to the point of terror in "Small Craft Warnings."

In "Pagan Night," a young mother reduced to living in a van with her boyfriend gradually realizes and even comes to accept, "They are involved in a new show with an agenda they don't mention. It's a rehearsal for

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sweet beauty of the murder mystery



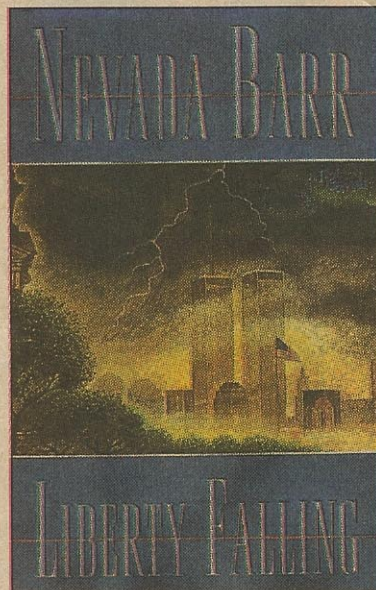
ROBERTA ALEXANDER
It's a Mystery

insatiable curiosity.

Tough and vulnerable, Anna is back in New York City, where her sister Molly, a psychiatrist, is critically ill. Terrified that Molly will die, lonesome for the arid West, uncomfortable back in the city where she lived when her husband was alive, Anna stays in park housing on Liberty Island.

When a Statue of Liberty guard dies in a fall, Anna thinks it's murder. But she doesn't know how, or if, it fits with a previous death at the statue, that of a young runaway. There are also reports of ghostly sightings at night in the ruins of Ellis Island.

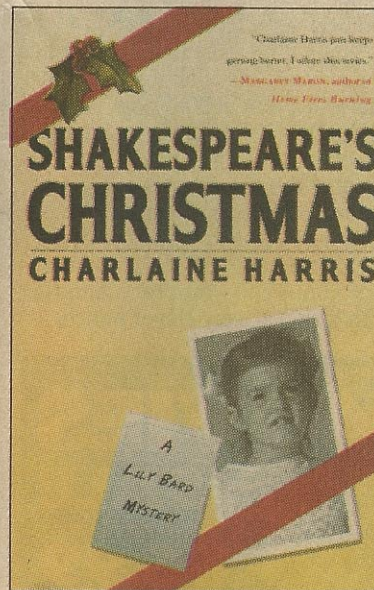
She keeps asking questions, but since she's not on duty, she's handicapped in her investigation. She's also struggling with her fears



the FBI agent, once Anna's lover, who is now devoted to Molly.

As in all of Barr's books, this one is filled with intense, amazing physical descriptions, in this case of the ruins. This is the most personal book in this series, and perhaps the most claustrophobic.

I'm with Anna here; I'm looking forward to her return to her per-



■ "Shakespeare's Christmas" by Charlaine Harris (St. Martin's, \$20.95, 214 pages).

This is the third book in a series about Arkansas cleaning woman (and karate practitioner) Lily Bard, and all I can say is that I'm sorry I missed the first two books.

Lily has gone home for her sister's wedding. But there's a sh-

Bartley was kidnapped as a baby, and Lily's future brother-in-law has a daughter the right age.

Lily's new lover, the sensitive private detective Jack Leeds, is looking for the child. Soon, people start dying. Lily and Jack, frightened for Lily's sister, struggle to find the answer before the wedding.

Lily is a terrific protagonist: smart, scarred, vulnerable and determined. Raped and mutilated years ago, she has coped by becoming physically strong and emotionally detached.

But her growing attachment to Jack may change that.

In the meantime, it's a pleasure to watch her survive.

■ "Going Local" by Jamie Harrison (St. Martin's, \$5.99, 323 pages).

Blue Deer, Mont., sounds like a charming backwater in the Big Sky Country.

But it isn't very quiet when two bodies are retrieved from a tent in the lake. An environmental lawyer and his young girlfriend are not only dead, but were run over by a truck.