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# Hokubei Mainichi News

# 北米毎日新聞

Friday, June 12, 2009

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# 'Intimate Conversation With Asian American Authors' Sells Out

SAN JOSE — "Talking Story: An Intimate Conversation with Asian American Authors" was a rare afternoon of extraordinary writers in an informal atmosphere.

Held on May 16 at the Northside Community Center in San Jose Japantown, the event was co-hosted by Midori Kai, a professional women's organization and the Japanese American Museum San Jose (JAMS) with a sell-out attendance. The event was held to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

The featured authors were Delphine Hirasuna, Janice Mirikitani, Marlene Shigekawa and Gail Tsukiyama. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston ("Farewell to Manzanar"), who was scheduled to appear, was not able to participate due to personal circumstances.

Participants gained insights of what inspires and motivates the authors and their experiences with the writing process. Each author took the stage to respond to an informal chat with moderators Shigekawa and Aggie Idemoto, followed by a lively audience question-and-answer session. A variety of genres were represented — fiction, non-fiction, poetry



From left: Phyllis Osaki, event co-chairperson; authors Gail Tsukiyama, Delphine Hirasuna, Marlene Shigekawa and Janice Mirikitani; Aggie Idemoto, event co-chairperson.

Photo by Kellie Galleguillos

and children's non-fiction.

Shigekawa was inspired by her own children and other members of her family. Two of her books, "Blue Jay in the Desert" and "Welcome Home Swallows," are multicultural children's picture books based on her family's internment experiences.

Shigekawa was born in Poston and serves on the Poston Restoration Project, working with the Tribal Council of the Colorado

River Indian Tribes Reservation to preserve the Arizona internment camp as a national historic site. She is expanding her skills to the writing of screenplays and has also written on career development.

Mirikitani is recognized as a poet, editor, community activist, and leader. Her passion is to create programs for women and families as they struggle with issues of substance abuse, rape,

domestic violence, AIDS, child care, health, education and workforce development.

Mirikitani's writings are not about victimization as much as they are about survival, rebirth and affirmation of self. While most remain silent about violent pasts, Mirikitani refuses to bow to a history of violation and voices her anger and acts for change.

Mirikitani is the second poet laureate for San Francisco and

the author of four poetry books: "Awake in the River," "Shedding Silence," "We the Dangerous," and "Love Works."

Born in San Francisco, Tsukiyama is the daughter of a Chinese immigrant mother from Hong Kong and a Japanese American father from Hawaii. Her multicultural upbringing is reflected in some of her novels in which her characters tackle the differences between the Chinese and Japanese cultures.

In her earlier novels, Tsukiyama writes of Chinese women feminists — the silk workers. A thorough researcher, she "learned what it was like to be Japanese and learned to appreciate Japanese art — the whole idea of Zen."

Tsukiyama has authored of six novels: "Women of the Silk," "The Samurai's Garden," "Night of Many Dreams," "The Language of Threads," and "Dreaming Water." Her newest book, which is set in Japan, is "The Street of a Thousand Blossoms."

Known in the Japanese American community for her book "The Art of Gaman," Hirasuna talked of how collections of the art and crafts made by Japanese

American internees during World War II gave her an understanding of the experiences and struggles of the Issei, beyond what she imagined.

Hirasuna announced an exhibit entitled "The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts From Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1946" will be on display at the Smithsonian American Museum in Washington, D.C. from March 5, 2010.

Hirasuna also discussed other projects, including "American Flags: A Unique Collection of Old Glory Memorabilia" and "100 Baseball Icons: A Century of Historical Baseball Memorabilia."

When asked what advice she could give to aspiring writers, Hirasuna was quick to respond: "Be yourself — speak from your heart."

The event concluded with door prizes, refreshments, book sales and signings by the authors.

The event was sponsored by the law firm of Berliner-Corcoran, Kazoo Restaurant, and GS Management. Co-chairpersons of the event were Phyllis Osaki and Aggie Idemoto.