

Authors talk about their works on 'Authors' Night' at LA Festival of Books

by RENE VILLAROMAN
AJPress

LOS ANGELES—Five Filipino and American authors talked about their works during the Authors' Night event organized by Philippine Expressions Bookshop at the Philippine Consulate on Friday, April 24.

Authors' Night is traditionally held on the eve of the Los Angeles Festival of Books, says Linda Nietes, owner of Philippine Expressions, a mail order importer of books by Filipino Americans in search of their roots, and other foreign writers who write about their experiences in the Philippines and with Filipinos.

On Friday, April 26 the organizer and the Philippine Consul General, Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon, hosted Carina Monica Montoya (aka) Carina Forsyth, who is the author of *Filipinos in Hollywood*, which was released last year; Angus Lorenzen, who at age seven, fled Japanese-occupied North China with his sister and mother, days before the Pear Harbor attack, only to be captured in Manila and held in the Santo Tomas University Internment Camp for more than three years. His book is titled *A Lovely Little War: Life in a Japanese Prison Camp through the Eyes of a Child*.

Estrella Besinga Sybinsky is the author of *Portents and Promises: Echoes of Politics, People and Places*, a collection of free verse that encourages reflection and thought. Penelope V. Flores, co-author of the *Philippine Jeepney: A Metaphor for Understanding the Filipino American Family*, has a Ph.D. in Comparative and International Education from the University of Chicago.

Claude Tayag is a well-known painter, sculptor and furniture designer, as well as chef and author of *Food Tour* and one of the featured culinary writers in another book, *Kulinarya: A Guidebook to Philippine Cuisine*.

In her book, Montoya wrote about the influx of the earliest Filipino immigrants to Los Angeles in the 1920s, many of who suffered discrimination and were prevented from marrying outside of their race, until in the 1940s, when the United States gradually began opening its doors to families. "These early immigrants settled in enclaves in the Little Tokyo section of downtown Los Angeles and in Bakersfield, an agricultural town in the San Joaquin Valley. She also talked about the Filipino immigrants' eventual transfer to the Temple-Beverly corridor, in what is now known as Historic Filipinotown, driven out of their Little Tokyo enclave by commercial development. "You have to understand the history of Filipinotown," Montoya stressed. "There were a lot of hard work, tears; there were organizations and lots of big street parades," Montoya said, comparing the settlement to Plymouth Rock, the spot where the first immigrants from England landed in America.

Lorenzen talked about his experiences as a seven-year-old boy living in a Japanese interment camp at the University of Santo Tomas where he suffered a great deal. "There was a lot of hope in the early days of our interment; food clothing were passed on to us by some Filipinos," Lorenzen recalled. "Later on, they smuggled messages and medicines. But Japanese treatment was becoming harsher every year."



Claude Tayag (seated) signing books with (from left) Linda Nietes, Mary Anne Tayag, Chef Cece de Casto, and journalist Rene Villaroman. AJPress photo by Rene Villaroman

Sybinsky wrote about Portland, Maine, thus: "Thick, dark ocean waters; surely there must be spirits there. The vision is hauntingly towering, and so sadly beautiful."

Penelope V. Flores, who also wrote *Good-bye Vientiane*, provided the comic relief to generally serious event. She used a metaphor, the ubiquitous Manila jeepney, to explain the psyche of the Filipino family to her students at San Francisco State University. "The only way you can understand the Filipino family is when I use a metaphor," she had told her students. "The jeepney is an extension of a Filipino family's living room: there are curtains, a padded

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NYC celebrates Immigrant Heritage Week

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Office of Immigrant Affairs. This year, the weeklong celebration ran from April 17-23, and featured over 180 multi-cultural events hosted by museums, community organizations, public libraries and educational institutions throughout the five boroughs.

Immigrant contribution

To celebrate the immigrant community's contributions to New York's economy, Upwardly Global, a nonprofit organization that serves immigrant professionals, partnered with La Guardia Community College to come up with a panel discussion.

"More than 800,000 immigrants enter the United States annually and most of them are increasingly educated, ready and capable to work," Nikki Cicerani, managing director of Upwardly Global said. She added that in New York City alone, there was a 24 percent growth in immigrant arrivals between 2000 to 2006.

One of the panelists, Tara Colton, deputy director of the Center for an Urban Future, agreed.

"Philosophically, this country is a nation of immigrants," Colton said, "Unfortunately, brain under-utilization

is a reality because immigrants are often relegated to do menial jobs. A lot of immigrants are skilled and educated but are under-utilized."

This is where organizations such as Upwardly Global come in. They equip immigrant professionals with necessary skills and resources to rebuild their careers in the United States. By doing this, they are also helping US employers benefit from the hidden talent pool of immigrant professionals.

"We call it "economic downgrading," remarked Cicerani, "because talented immigrant job seekers face obstacles such as a lack of networking resources and they end up getting jobs as nannies, security guards or cab drivers just to get by, even if back in their home countries, they were professionals like engineers, teachers or accountants."

According to Upwardly Global, there are over one million skilled immigrant workers in the US today who have earned a Bachelor's or even Masters degree in their home country, possess an average of seven years of work experience and have the legal right to work and live permanently in the US

There is an estimated 36 million immigrants all over the United States,

representing 12.4% of the population. In New York State, there are four million immigrants, or 21.6% of the entire state's population. In New York City, 37% of the population is composed of immigrants.

"Immigrants fit right into the racial and ethnic mix of New York City, and they represent a significant portion of workers in virtually every occupation in the city, up and down the spectrum," David Kallick, senior fellow at the Fiscal Policy Institute said.

New York City is third among cities with the highest concentration of immigrants, after Los Angeles (40%) and San Jose (38%) and ahead of San Francisco (36%) and Houston (29%).

"Despite, or maybe because of these numbers, the country in general has not been good in integrating immigrants completely to the society," lamented Dr. Suma Kurien, director of LaGuardia Community College's Immigrant Education and Training.

"There is a need for a clearly articulated pathway for the immigrants either through re-training or re-credentialing. They should be given the opportunity to transition to a comparable career," Dr. Kurien said.

Celebrating diversity

"Immigrant Heritage Week started with a handful of community events and now with 180 events citywide, its success is a testament to the incredible strength of our diverse immigrant population," said Mayor Bloomberg in a statement. "We are going to make sure that we continue to serve all immigrant communities in our city. Our Language Access Executive Order is just one more way to make New York even more accessible to the communities that contribute to our wonderful diversity."

"Immigrant Heritage Week celebrates our shared immigrant histories, diverse cultures and religions, and the role these play in enriching our City," said Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs Robles-Román.

"It is my great honor to be a part of the 6th Annual Immigrant Heritage Week celebration," said Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Linares. "I am grateful for the numerous event partners from across New York City whose contributions make this community-building celebration possible. Working with our numerous City agencies on Executive Order 120, we are making it easier for all immigrant communities to receive City services."

In July 2008, Mayor Bloomberg signed Executive Order 120 creating a centralized language access policy for New York City. Executive Order 120 mandates that all City agencies that provide direct public services create a language access implementation plan to provide language assistance to limited-English proficient New Yorkers.

Each agency has now designated a Language Access Coordinator who has developed a Language Access policy and implementation plan, which are now posted on www.nyc.gov. Plans include strategies and implementation timelines for interpretation, translation and multi-lingual signage, as well as training of front-line staff and quality assurance measurements.

Immigrant Heritage Week explores that diversity through a rich collection of community events and cultural activities created to highlight the immigrant experience in New York.

Established by Mayor Bloomberg in 2004 as a citywide celebration, Immigrant Heritage Week is celebrated around April 17th, the day in 1907 when more immigrants entered through Ellis Island than any other date in the City's history. (Momar G. Visaya)



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