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Centering herself through spiritual writings

By IMANI TATE

STAFF WRITER

Thursday, April 28, 2005 - Mabel Katz of Woodland Hills claims she's not a writer, but there are a few things she feels passionate about and which prompt her to put words on a page.

The author of "The Easiest Way," a book detailing techniques to help people find their spiritual centers, will be among the Chicano writers participating in an ethnic literacy series at the Diamond Bar library.

Katz, Rene Colato Lainez and Jane Medina will talk and sign their books at 6:30 p.m. Thursday for the library's celebration of Cinco de Mayo. It is the second installment of

the ethnic authors series. The first program involved African-American writers and commemorated Black History Month.

The final program will observe Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month with Asian-American writers Naomi Hara, Tanya Ko, Sonia Singh and Debbie Yamada at 6:30 p.m. May 26. All programs are free and open to the public. Additional information: (909) 861-4978.

The Friends of Diamond Bar Library and Mystic Sisters Bookstore in Monrovia co-sponsor the literacy and cultural appreciation series.

Katz's eldest son, Jonathan, was usually a quiet, soft-spoken child. But he used an one-time, angry outburst to get his mother to view the reflection of her own anger and unhappiness.

"I actually had everything anyone could want and thought happiness was in material things and people outside of myself," Katz said about a period in her life where her internal unhappiness stirred an anger she seemed unaware of and was unwilling to address.

"Jonathan talked to me, but I don't remember what he said. I only remember the tone, the anger in his voice," she painfully recalled. "He was probably 12-years-old. It was the only time I saw him angry in his life. He's a very laid-back young man, but his anger woke me up. I thought I should do something, figure out a way to find myself.

"My son put me on the road to self-discovery," said Katz, 49, smiling about the wisdom of a child. "He got tired of me being so angry. Maybe he didn't do it consciously, but unconsciously he became the mirror that made me look at myself. I'll be grateful to him for the rest of my life."

It was a bit difficult to get to the easiest way, she confessed. It involved a process - one in which she took classes in anger management, moved past the melodrama of people in workshops crying and engaging in stories, and sifted through contemporary techniques and ancient arts to find solace and peace.

Her search began in a seminar conducted by Dr. William Butler, a psychologist, at the Learning Tree University in Chatsworth.

"The seminar wasn't about anger management," said the woman born, raised and educated in Buenos Aires, Argentina and the youngest of dentist Mauricio Schwartzman and homemaker Sara Schwartzman's three children. "It was about what anger is, where it comes from and its nature. It made me become more aware of the origins and manifestations of anger."

Katz came to a simple and amazing conclusion as she searched for answers and sought to calm her inner core.

"I think we are angry when we are separated from God," she said. "We look for peace in the wrong places. It is the separation from God that makes us angry and unhappy, so we ask the wrong questions and look in the wrong places."

She took yoga classes. Besides becoming adept at the exercises, she followed her teacher's advice to imagine something positive so that her thoughts would be manifested in a positive reality. She immediately experienced results, transformed her sense of impotency into potent possibilities and learned "we are 100 percent responsible for the good and the bad in our lives."

Katz began to work on herself, rather than trying to force everything and everyone around her to change. She discovered when she changed, so did people and things around her.

"If there's anything in my life that I want to change, first I have to take 100 percent responsibility for changing myself," she asserted.

She used computer technology to illustrate her point.

"If the program is not downloaded, the computer won't play no matter what you do," she said. "If you make a mistake and it shows up on the monitor, the mistake stays until you delete or correct it. We spend our lives talking to the monitor and expecting the monitor to do something or change things.

"If we want it to change, we need to go to the delete key, not just talk to the monitor. It takes doing it yourself, not just talking."

Katz is admittedly analytical by nature.

It prompted her to earn a degree in business administration at the Universidad del Museo Social Argentino in Buenos Aires and become a certified public accountant in her homeland. It also imbued her with courage to come to America in 1983, traveling with 2-month-old Jonathan to join her physician husband, Dr. Alejandro Katz.

Later, it strengthened her resolve to balance mothering sons Jonathan and Lyonel with operating the tax and financial consulting firm she founded. When she divorced, she analyzed and altered her life to maintain stability for herself and her children.

However, to find genuine peace, she had to relinquish her addiction to analysis and too much thinking.

"After trying a lot of things, I came to this ancient Hawaiian art of problem solving. It's called ho'oponopono," she said. "Ho'oponopono means how to correct an error. It is the delete key on the keyboard of our minds. It's about 100 percent responsibility; involves a process of forgiveness, starting with yourself, and allows us to work directly with the divine.

"There's no middle man because you don't have to go outside of yourself to solve the problem," Katz claimed. "You don't need anybody outside of yourself to change your life, resolve problems or be happy. Everything begins from within and in consort with the divine.

"It doesn't matter what you call God," she reasoned. "It is whatever you think God is. It can be Jesus or Buddha. It is something inside of you, that created you and knows you better than anybody else. It has all the answers and knows what is perfect and right for you. You have to ask, not tell, the divine what is perfect and right for you."

Chuckling and shaking her head, she reflected on human beings' tendency to make God subservient to their will and desires.

"We cannot treat God as a servant," Katz advised, lamenting about humans constantly "telling him where to go and what to do, rather than asking and being open and flexible to the answers supplied through divine will and sometimes through the least expected places."

Katz has always been concerned about the struggles of Latino women to achieve genuine freedom and their own place in a community dominated by masculine desires. Her own journey of self-discovery also led her to become more vocal and active about helping Latino women stand on their own and achieve equity in their personal and professional lives.

"My mission is to wake up women, especially Latino women. It's imperative," she adamantly asserted, "because we are raising the future. We cannot continue to stay in abusive marriages, not making money and working, not being responsible for ourselves. We cannot stay in unhappy relationships thinking if the other person changes, we will be happy."

Changing women's perceptions is a monumental task, she admitted.

Nonetheless, she speaks at schools, community groups, conferences and seminars to convince people there is an easy way.

"Sometimes people don't believe you because it is so easy," she said, smiling. "We need to know the door will open. Ho'oponopono is about knocking at the door. These tools work whether you're poor, rich, have an university degree or not. It is indiscriminate and works for all."

Katz hosted "Despertar," meaning "Awakening" in English, on KTNQ, a Spanish radio station at 1020 AM, for two and a half years. She also hosted a weekly show with positive messages on Channel 54/Azteca television for 13 weeks from December 2004 to early March 2005.

"And I have another book in my head, but I haven't written it yet," she concluded.

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