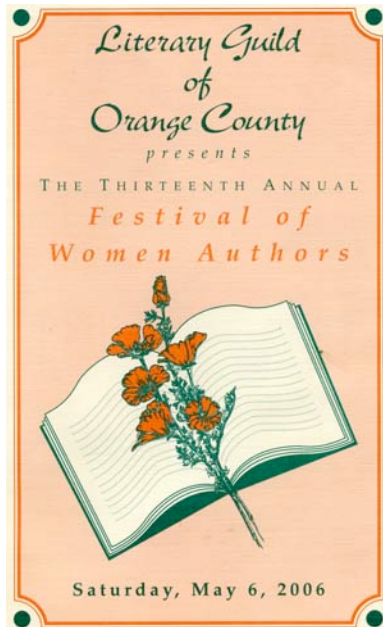




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**EVENT RECAP:  
THE FESTIVAL OF WOMEN AUTHORS  
“GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN”**

*By Angela Mackintosh*

THERE AREN'T MANY EVENTS THAT CAN BOAST AN A-LIST of best-selling women authors, which have included the likes of **Elizabeth George**, **Alice Sebold**, **Janet Fitch**, and **Lisa See**, to name a few. But the *Literary Guild of Orange County's* “Festival of Women Authors,” isn't like any other event. For one thing, I hadn't seen that many women all in one room, aside from an Sheryl Crow concert; and for another, the whole day event was well organized, came with a gourmet meal, and allowed guests to rub elbows with famous authors. We had no idea the event was going to be that big when we set out finagling our way into it, just two days before.

“My alarm didn't go off,” I said, before Beryl could even get a foot in the car door. She looked at me with that pleasant smile of hers and reassured me that it would be all right.

I glanced at the clock and saw it was 8:30 AM, the exact time we were supposed to be at the *Irvine Marriot* to secure our seats. Panic set in and my stomach danced to a sporadic samba as I thought of the gracious strangers from the Literary Guild who'd gone out of their way to reserve a space for us, last minute.

I lobbed a folder onto Beryl's lap and said, “I printed these last night. Could you separate them please?” They were makeshift business cards with perforated edges. As a graphic designer, I wasn't exactly proud of them, but my partner viewed them differently.

“These look great,” Beryl beamed.

I looked at her calm expression and thought that at least one of us is built of solid mortar—whereas mine had been replaced by an old dried-up glue stick.

With my foot cemented to the gas pedal, we arrived at the convention a little after nine. We pulled into the parking garage and the attendant said, “That’ll be ten dollars please.”

I glanced at Beryl who immediately starting digging into her purse, only to come up with nothing. “Do you take plastic?” I grimaced.

He bent down and stuck his tanned face through the crack in my window. “It’s okay,” he said with a wink. “Don’t worry about it.” And we didn’t have time to.

We rushed into the lobby and made our way down the empty hallway, much to our chagrin, and saw a woman standing there monitoring her watch, as though she were waiting for a date who she suspected wasn’t going to show. She looked up as we charged toward her. “You must be Linda, sorry we’re late,” I gasped and looked through the open double doors, to the speaker who was already in progress.

“Are you Angela from Wow?” she whispered.

I nodded and introduced Beryl.

“I have your badges right here,” she said. “We just need you to register.”

We were pleasantly surprised. On the phone she’d said that she wasn’t sure if she could get us in unless we showed up early.

**Linda Miller** escorted us into the enormous convention room and found us two empty seats at separate tables, draped with elegant tablecloths and decorated with an orchid centerpiece. We settled into our chairs as **Diana Abu-Jaber** approached the podium. I smiled at Beryl from across the room and exhaled for the first time all morning.

“Getting there is half the fun,” someone said to me once, although who said it escapes me now, but I suppose it could be true.

Two days before the event was to take place, Beryl and I had an impromptu meeting about where we wanted to take our new website, *Wow!*

We were tossing around ideas when she pulled out a folder filled to the brim with clippings, emails and paperwork. She handed me a newspaper article from the *Orange County Register*, dated a few months back.

My eyes rapidly perused the listings. “There’s some good book clubs in here.”

Beryl glanced over my shoulder and pointed. “Look at that one. It’s perfect!” It was a listing for the thirteenth annual Festival of Women Authors. I agreed it *would be* perfect, although the article stated, “Limited to 500 participants, the event always sells out. Announcements go out in early March.”

“Oh no. It’s only two days away!” I blurted.

Beryl immediately picked up the phone and dialed the number on the listing. She got a strange recording that she assumed wasn’t the guild’s number, but left a message anyway. Then she said, “Let’s call the hotel.”

When Beryl got the *Irvine Marriot* on the phone, they hadn’t heard of the event, but transferred her to the event’s coordinator—and unfortunately, he didn’t have a clue either.

“Are we in the twilight zone?” she said.

We both laughed about how odd the whole thing was, although now, more than ever, we were determined to get to the bottom of it. Then I noticed a phone number in small print at the bottom of the article. It read: Contact the Writer: 714-796-6087 or [vtakahama@ocregister.com](mailto:vtakahama@ocregister.com). That’s when I called *The Register* and left a message on **Valerie Takahama**’s voice mail.

When I got home she’d already left two messages. I called her back right away and explained our predicament. Her voice was friendly and I immediately felt comfortable. She graciously gave me the home number to the coordinator of the Literary Guild. I want to thank Valerie for being such a resource and a wonderful contact. Anyone would be proud to have an article written by her gifted pen.

At the same time I was talking to Valerie, Beryl was getting a return call from **Joan Hansen**, the founder of the guild, who said that although she wouldn’t be attending the conference due to a wedding, she would take our names down and see what she could do. Beryl called me immediately with the good news, and by the next morning, we were attending the event.

I sat next to **Hiro Kranz**, the treasurer of the guild, and when I told her how we'd gotten into the event on such short notice, she'd said, "Two days? Reservations are taken six months in advance."

I paused, then quickly diverted the conversation back to her, and found out that not only was she the treasurer, she had a story of her own. She showed me a book on the Japanese Internment Camp she'd lived in when she was a young child. Being half-Japanese, I was interested to hear about her taxing experiences, but unfortunately that would have to wait. She looked at my badge and saw that I had an orange dot. "You get to hear **Cynthia Kadohata** speak."

Looking down at my program and realizing what the color meant, I was thrilled! At 11:10 to 12:00 PM, there were "Breakout Sessions," which were speeches given by selected authors in designated meeting rooms. I couldn't have been happier with my selection.

I turned my attention to the podium as **Diana Abu-Jaber** began to speak. She was prettier in person and younger than I'd expected for such a wise and truly gifted writer. What ensued next was pure laughter. I'd never seen a better speaker in all my life. It seemed effortless, as she explained how she had an "abnormal" childhood, growing up in an Arab-American family. Then she read a chapter from her book *The Language of Baklava* that had the whole auditorium of women giggling, in between outbreaks of laughter, from her witty and honest prose. I'd never laughed that much in unison! There's something about a roomful of women that creates a contagious buzz.

The laughter continued when **Melissa Bank** took the podium on the opposite side of the room, and due to her height, had to stoop down in an awkward fashion and tilt the microphone up without much success. A Guild member immediately jumped up and assisted her with the microphone. Missy stepped back in her jeans and blazer and patiently waited, smiling. And at that moment I thought, wow, I'm going to be listening to the founder and goddess of "Chiclit" speak.

Bending down, she grabbed the microphone and said something to the effect of, "Well, that's a hard act to follow!" but follow it she did. And for me, it was apropos—

everything she said I related to, because she was not only speaking for the reader but for the writer.

Melissa talked about how difficult it was to come up with that second book, and the struggle of wanting to create something different from her past works. And how she said to herself, “This book is too much like *A Girl’s Guide to Hunting and Fishing*, and maybe I can write about something else...” and how exploring a new genre made her realize that she was trying to be something she was not... and to stick to what you know. Then she read a chapter from her new novel, *The Wonder Spot*, and I was thoroughly delighted. She not only captured my exact feelings, but also found a secret way into my personal life. She talked about how her boyfriend was hard of hearing in one ear and the funny miscommunications she’d had with him. This is the same with my husband.

After the speeches, we attended the “Breakout Sessions” where both Beryl and I were lucky enough to attend **Cynthia Kadohata’s** session. She gave an amazing speech and presentation of her personal slides, which encompassed her whole childhood, her family, her start in writing, and her adoption of her beautiful baby boy from Kazakhstan. Her life is pure story and an inspiration to us all. She said something that day that struck a cord within me. She said, “The more specific, the more universal.”

These words gave me the courage to say what I really needed to say without doubting myself.

During the autographing session, I noticed that the wine bars had opened up in the lobby, so while Beryl went to stand in line to get our books signed, I stood in line to get us drinks. That’s when Linda Miller grabbed me, as though I were somebody special, and introduced me to the author and chair of the literary guild, **Jonna Hoppes**. Jonna told me that she was working on a new book, due to be out soon, and I got to tell her about our website just before she was swarmed by an adoring crowd.

The event was spectacular. The rest of the day consisted of a gorgeous luncheon with a wonderful soup and salad, a plateful of sumptuous desserts, and marvelous speakers—to top it off, an autographing session where we had the opportunity to meet all the authors personally: **Diana Abu-Jaber, Melissa Bank, Rhoda Huffey, Cynthia Kadohata,**

**Mirta Ojito, Adrienne Sharp, Ayelet Waldman, and Mona Shafer Edwards**—all of them, class acts and wonderful women.

If you ever have a chance to attend one of the Literary Guild of Orange County's festivals, you won't be disappointed. We are looking forward to the next event and hope to see you there!

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