

Mililani-raised Author Revisits 1980s' Hawaii In Debut Novel

By **NICOLE KATO**

Local author Monica Lee invites readers to take a journey through the “other side” of Hawaii during the 1980s in her first novel, *Fricken Kids*.

She details the lives of three sisters — Wendy (12), Amanda (9) and Stephanie (5) — as they learn the importance of family in times of struggle and neglect.

“*Fricken Kids* is more than a funny-kine book about three local sisters growing up in the mid-’80s,” explained Lee.

“It addresses deeper concerns — like education and what’s being taught in schools. It talks about racial prejudice, classism, mental illness and abuse of all kinds.”

The story unfolds from Amanda’s perspective and, as Lee explained, “everything is big in the eyes of a kid.

“I chose a 9-year-old girl to tell the story because a child’s mind is full of refreshing ideas. I think a lot of people confuse childhood innocence with ignorance, but kids are way smarter than we make

them out to be.

“They know what’s going on, and they are very honest with their feelings.

“They adapt to harsh situations easily, and they do it good-naturedly ... I think the fresh approach to life that comes naturally to all keiki is what made me write this novel, which deals with some really heavy issues at times, from a little girl’s perspective.”

The novel is set in Mililani, where Lee lived until she was 18. She recalled the days of watching houses and shopping centers emerge where pineapple bugs and sugarcane once grew.

And “playing at Red Ropes in the ‘black snow’ until the sun went down and the streetlights came on ... and playing dance battle with friends every weekend.”

And just like the characters in *Fricken Kids*, she grew up with her sisters and mother in a two-bedroom apartment.

Aside from her childhood experiences, Lee said she also drew her inspiration came from get-

ting her bachelor’s degree in English from Chamunade University. That achievement made her more comfortable with writing what she knew.

“Writing what I know was really helpful, because I didn’t need to do any research or detailed outlines; everything felt really

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natural.

“I didn’t need to force anything; it all came together, for the most part.”

Fricken Kids came to fruition during Lee’s time in school and started off as a handful of short stories for English classes.

“They were so well-received, I decided it was time to challenge myself with book writing,” Lee said. “When I get that burst of creativity, I sit down and just let the words flow.

“Sometimes I go at it and it’s like I’m on a

journey. I feel the emotions of the characters and see the scenery unfold around me.

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inventing that makes my soul happy.”

Lee also enjoys writing comedy and finding humor in even the serious aspects of life, as she did in *Fricken Kids*.

But even through the humor that Lee tried to intertwine in the book, she found it difficult at times because of the emotional connection.

“The hardest things to write were those scenes that involved abuse,” she recalled. “Even though this is a work of fiction, there are parts that hit

close to home — too close sometimes — and sitting down and writing them out felt almost impossible for me to do.

“I can honestly say that there are some things that are hard to find words to describe, and sometimes I found myself crying while I was writing because of what I was putting the kids in my story through.

“There were times I didn’t even want to finish *Fricken Kids* because some scenes were so intense. But I forced myself to sit down and plow through it and found that events I thought were too traumatic to do turned out better than I thought.”

All this solitary struggle was to get a positive message across to readers, she explained.

“People will take what they want from anything they read, but I’m hoping what they’ll take away the most is to always treat people good, no matter what they look like, because you never know what they are going through unless you know their story,” Lee said.

“Because it is told from

a Native Hawaiian perspective, it also brings to light the loss of culture, language and land — facts that are often swept under the rug in these islands.

“It’s a novel that I’m hoping will make people laugh and cry, and cause those who are old enough to reminisce again — to remember what life was like when things were simpler.”

Writing novels is something Lee has wanted to do since she was a child, and she already has another one in the works. *Megan’s Shadow* is the story of a 13-year-old boy who moves to Hawaii with his family after his sister’s death. He is faced with culture shock, tragedy and parental depression and he contemplates suicide just to get attention.

Megan’s Shadow will be completed this summer, and Lee also is working on the audio version of *Fricken Kids* (via iTunes), available for purchase online on Amazon, Kindle bookstore, and the Barnes and Noble’s Nook store.

For more information, email Lee at monicaaleewrites@gmail.com.

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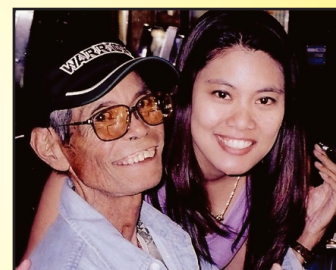
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