

The Miami Herald

Posted on Tue, Nov. 13, 2012

Author Sandra Cisneros pays tribute to mother with love, humor at Miami Book Fair

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PATRICK FARRELL / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Author Sandra Cisneros speaks to the crowd at The Miami Book Fair International on Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2012.

Sandra Cisneros' mother died five years ago, but Tuesday night at Miami Book Fair International, the author brought her to life in the best way that she could — through stories.

The author of the novels *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo* told the audience in the smaller, more intimate version of the Chapman Conference Center — a perfect fit with the deeply personal subject matter — that her difficult relationship with her mother is the reason she still has so much to say about her.

“Had she been in my generation, she could have been so much more,” Cisneros said Tuesday, after reading an essay in which she refers to a “prisoner of war mother” who “never dreamed of having seven kids.” Her mother also influenced her career path, introducing Cisneros to the library, “a house of ideas, a house of silence,” as she wrote in an essay.

Cisneros, warmly appreciative of her audience and the volunteers who make this fair happen each year, also read her latest book, the illustrated fable *Have You Seen Marie?*. In the book, she touches on loss and kindness in a tale about helping a distraught friend look for her missing cat while still aching from her own loss. (Spoiler alert: The ending is uplifting.)

The subject was bittersweet, but the evening was far from a downer, especially after Cisneros read an amusing poem lamenting the drabness of undergarments for women of a certain age. The chorus? “Rage, rage, do not go into that good night wearing sensible beige or white.”

And when some young students stood shyly before the microphone to ask her questions, she was kind and gracious. If you weren't a writer, one asked, what would you be doing now?

Cisneros confessed that her perfect job wouldn't pay very much: "I want to be a professional dreamer," she said. "And I wish I could've been a flamenco dancer."

Earlier in the evening, Dean Nicholas Lemann and Columbia journalism Professor Mirta Ojito spoke about Ojito's life from the time she left Cuba at age 16 in the Mariel boatlift to her years at The New York Times. Ojito is the author of *Finding Manana: A Memoir of a Cuban Exodus*.

Meanwhile, in honor of the fair, aspiring writers can help Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Díaz write a story on Twitter.

At 5 p.m. Thursday @WLRNHerald will tweet out Díaz's first line — "The dogs hadn't barked all week" — and you make up and Tweet out the next line using the hashtag #WLRNStory. The best lines will be retweeted until 6:30 p.m. and will form a final story that will be posted on WLRN.org.

The rules: Follow a logical path and use a South Florida setting.

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