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Rizik Speaks 'Of Forgotten Times'

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Storyteller Marisela Rizik gave a book reading at the Puerto Rican and Latin American Cultural Center (PR/LACC) Monday. As she read excerpts from her book, students were drawn into her novel, "Of Forgotten Times." What the audience wasn't expecting and got was advice they can apply to their own lives.

"Books are your secret weapons. They can help you question who you are and what you're about," Rizik said.

Rizik said she tends to write about things close to her, including her experiences growing up in the Dominican Republic. She also likes to include universal themes in her work.

"Often we think a book is something outside ourselves, but a good book is an invitation to reflect on ourselves and the world around us," Rizik said.

Her book, "Of Forgotten Times," takes place on a fictitious Caribbean island, governed by a tyrannical dictator. The dictator's daughter returns from boarding school and feels like an outsider in her father's upper-class world. The novel is loosely modeled after life events from the Dominican Republic, which was under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo for years. He seized power in 1930 and ruled until his assassination in 1961.

Rizik said she had a talent for writing since she was little. Because she had a very conservative father, she had to make up stories when she wanted to go on dates.

"I found myself plotting all these stories, I was a good plotter," Rizik said. The Dominican Republic is still a very traditional Catholic and male-dominated society.

Rizik explained the "collected conscious" of Dominicans is against Haitians because Haiti invaded the Dominican Republic. She said this doesn't excuse the discrimination and hatred between the two sides.

Zulma Rios, a 7th-semester anthropology major, said it was good to hear an insider's view of the situation, especially since historical information tends to be written by outsiders.

Mayté Pérez-Franco, director of PR/LACC, applied the Dominican-Haitian conflict to the worldwide problem of discrimination. Pérez-Franco told students to watch the beliefs they perpetuate and question what they learn.

Rizik emphasized the importance of becoming a free thinker.

"It's good to expose yourself to different things, makes you think - otherwise we're just borrowing from people," Rizik said.

She encouraged students to find things they like to do and pursue them.

Johnathon Muniz, a 7th-semester business major, attended the event for his METAS (Mentoring, Educating and Training for Academic Success) course. He said he enjoyed the book reading because "it was something different." He enjoyed the fact Rizik read excerpts from her novel and then explained them.

Rizik dances and teaches tango while continuing to write. She finished her latest book five years ago, but has to get the courage to publish it, she said. "Of Forgotten Times" was published in 1994.

Isabel Z. Brown, associate professor of Spanish at the University of Alabama, translated the novel from Spanish to English. Rizik expressed gratitude, toward Brown, knowing the extensive time it takes to translate literature from her own experience. The English language book, published by Curbstone Press in 2004, was for sale after the event.

Rizik will be doing other readings in New England throughout the week.

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