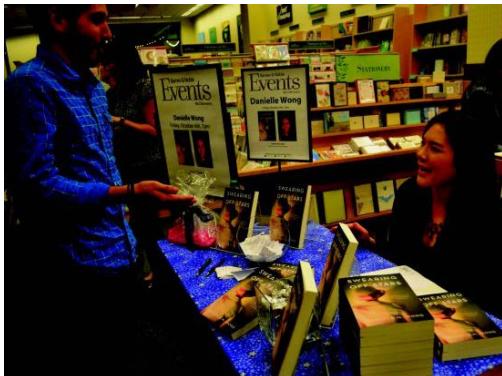


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Campo grad Danielle Wong makes her literary debut with 'Swearing Off Stars'

By Sophie Braccini



Danielle Wong at her book signing in Emeryville.
Photo Sophie Braccini

Danielle Wong graciously presented her first book, "Swearing Off Stars," at the Emeryville Barnes and Noble bookstore Oct. 3 in front of an audience of about 50 people. It was the young woman's first time doing such a thing, she was not put off by the various questions and was pleased to see that her first readers had understood what she wanted to do: defend her values and affect change through her writing.

A young open-minded Californian, Wong wrote a passionate love story where the heroines have to fight against prejudices. Drawing on the young author's passions and knowledge, the multitude of topics addressed in the book is a testimony to Wong's large array of interests, her desire to defend good causes, and her already varied and sometimes painful life experiences. As she begins writing her second book, Wong has also learned to navigate another aspect of an author's life: promoting her work.

In post World War I England, young American girl Amelia (Lia), has come to Oxford to study. It is the early 1920s and women are authorized to listen to lectures, but not to matriculate or actively participate in class. Soon, enthralled by beautiful and smart Scarlett, Lia will participate in the early English feminist movement and realize that her attraction to Scarlett is more than just as a friend. Their story is far from simple and spans several decades and continents, ending tragically but beautifully on an island in the Bahamas in the 1950s.

Wong's 30-year saga is tightly penned in just 250 pages. The book is well crafted in a vivid style. Although Wong is heterosexual, she was always interested in oppressed minority groups and their fight for equal rights. The heroines of "Swearing Off Stars" have to fight to exist as women and as lesbians, in the context of both the society and their own families.

It took Wong a year and a half to draft the book, and then another two years of research to complete it. The fiction is infused with the knowledge she gained in college, taking classes about the LGBTQ movement, and during long hours in the library in Washington, D.C., where she lived a few years ago before coming back to Moraga with her husband.

Wong defines herself as a feminist, meaning that for her, men and women have equal rights and should be treated the same. She does not shy away from the term feminist; some of the young women in her age group do not like to use the term because they see it as aggressive toward men. It is not this young woman's view. Her feminism is based in a quiet recognition of women's courage, first among them her mother, who was the pillar of their family after her father suffered a massive stroke when Wong was a freshman at Campolindo and died of immune diseases after several years of rehabilitation.

This tragic family drama nourishes Wong's prose, in a romanticized way of course, but when she writes about anger and grief, the young author's words ring true. The family tragedy also taught her that life is short, that everything can change from one day to the next, and that it is urgent to live to the fullest and get things done.

Her brief time as a flight attendant and her travels all over the world also inform the story.

After finishing the novel, Wong contacted small editors that accept unsolicited books and decided to work with She Writes Press, a hybrid publisher, meaning that the author has to cover some of the marketing costs, but controls the production aspects and retains the rights to the manuscript. Ingram Publisher Services has started distributing the book, including on the Barnes and Noble network and Amazon.

Wong wants to be a full-time writer. The next book she is writing is part romance, part thriller for young adults. She plans to do more presentations of "Swearing Off Stars" in local bookstores.

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