

Scarsdale Salon: Book lovers commune at writers' chat

By DANIELLE RIVERA

Nineteenth-century Charleston and 1970s New Jersey were but two literary stops at the ninth Scarsdale Salon, held Nov. 29 at Bronx River Books on Spencer Place.

Four authors shared readings from their works, riffing on the theme "Distant Voices." Light hors d'oeuvres were served, with several rows of chairs set up near the far alcove. The bookstore filled up quickly, leaving standing room only.

"Distant voice can be from anywhere," said Scarsdale author Ines Rodrigues, who organizes the series with fellow Scarsdalian Preeti Singh. "From a long forgotten memory, from a place we visited a long time ago or from a corner of a writer's imagination."

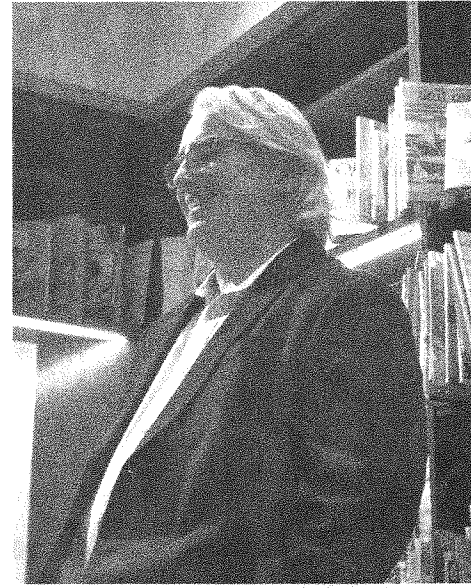
Three of the four readings pulled from personal experience, with Scarsdale resident Jacqueline Friedland, a former attorney, as the exception. Friedland read from her historical novel "Trouble the Water," which is set in 1840s Charleston, South Carolina, roughly 20 years before the Civil War. The chapter, which focused on 17-year-old protagonist Abby as she arrives in the States from England, was rich with similes and vivid description.

"She was anxious to remove her stockings," Friedland read, "so she could feel her toes sink into the thick carpet, its pink and gold fibers bursting forth from the floor like fairies."

Each reading was followed by a Q&A period. Friedland fielded questions about her research and character development.

"The worst with the research is you get really into it and you discover things that have nothing to do with what you need to write," she said. "You start reading about, 'Oh, they made perfume back then,' and next thing you know you've lost three hours. You've learned something interesting but your book is no further along."

New York City-based writer Thaddeus



DANIELLE RIVERA PHOTOS

The ninth Scarsdale Salon was held Nov. 29 at Bronx River Books on Spencer Place. From left, featured authors Jacqueline Friedland and John Gredler, and series co-organizer Ines Rodrigues.

Rutkowski read a selection from his novel "Haywire," which won the Asian American Writers' Workshop Members' Choice Award. Rutkowski has written six books spanning poetry, novel and short stories, but said even his fiction is inspired by his own life.

His chapter "Brotherhood" explored themes of belonging and identity, with particular emphasis on Rutkowski's Polish and Chinese ethnic background. The story picked up with Rutkowski in college, mentioning mangled frying pans, a poor term grade and a karate class.

"I heard your name and thought you'd look like a football player," Rutkowski read, quoting his college roommate, "but you look more like the cook on 'Bonanza,' that guy named Hop Sing."

Garth Road resident Ellen Shapiro heard about the Salon through Rodrigues, who teaches at The Writing Institute of Sarah Lawrence College, where Shapiro is involved in an intermediate novel workshop.

While she didn't learn any tidbits for her own writing, Shapiro said she "enjoyed listening to ... the people read their work and how different it was. Their voices are so different [from] my voice; it was interesting."

John Gredler of Tuckahoe read a portion of his working memoir, a riveting piece about his parents' contentious relationship. The story takes place when Gredler is about 8, and highlights an instance in which his parents are arguing downstairs, throwing a glass ashtray between them.

"Every time he reads a different story, I'm like, amazed," Rodrigues said, looking to

Gredler. "I've always wanted to have him here, so I'm glad you came."

Kathy Curto closed the evening with the lightest fodder of the evening, reading a chapter from her memoir "Not for Nothing: Glimpses into a Jersey Girlhood," which publishes Dec. 11. Curto's piece, riddled with names like Joey Rodolfo, Pop and Tony Boy, struck the right chord of funny and familiar on living in an Italian-American family, drawing chuckles from many attendees.

Curto talked about journaling as a kid and addressed the challenge of writing from a child's perspective. "It's a huge risk, and I know it's a huge risk," she said, "and we'll see what happens."

Curto was one of several attendees to praise the Bronx River Books venue. "This is amazing," she said. "It's got that new book smell."