

Wednesday, November 19, 2008 meeting
Guest Speaker: Playwright and novelist Victoria Kneubuhl

Victoria Kneubuhl holds a B. A. in Hawaiian Cultural Studies, Art and Psychology from Antioch University, and received a Masters degree in Drama and Theatre from the University of Hawaii. She captured our attention by telling us, “Having a play performed is like people taking parts of your dream and performing it. It is both a rush and frightening.”

Victoria started writing for children, who taught her a lot because kids have no mercy. (How true!) She has had twelve plays produced, several of which have toured the Pacific, North America, Asia and the United Kingdom. Her work often deals with juxtapositions of history, tradition and contemporary problems in Polynesian culture. She also worked as Education Director for Hawaii’s Mission Houses Museum and the Manoa Heritage Center. During her lunch break, she wrote for Hollywood productions. Victoria, who is part Hawaiian and part Samoan, considers herself a Pacific Island writer, and she is now writing about the violence carried out on women.

In 1994, she was awarded the very prestigious Hawaii Award for Literature. Boggled down in a novel about her family, she decided to write a mystery novel and took Ian MacMillan’s class. She compared writing a play and a novel. “Writing a play is like being on a ship with only the rigging. Writing the novel is easier, but it’s like steering a freight train.”

Victoria sticks to the “arc” when she writes prose. A well-made play has an inciting incident, a high point, and a resolution. Scenes must come together to make sense. She sees the different parts of the novel as scenes. Like a play, a mystery novel needs constant forward movement. Victoria likes a balance between forward action and breathing places, which give a sense of place. In a novel, she feels like she can take her time a bit more. In theater, conversation is broken into beats. A beat is when you change thoughts.

She’s chosen to place her novel, *Murder Casts a Shadow*, in 1935, which is her parents’ time. Her dad, who is 91, is a source of information. When she was little, she eavesdropped on adults and listened. Preserving old places is important to her, too. Her mystery novel is a place where one can keep a little snapshot of the past in place.

Victoria is now working on a second mystery novel. She also has a commission for a play for Kumu Kahua Theater about a Samoan woman and ghosts. She wants to look at issues that demonize women. Her examination of why that happens in culture will be from the point of view of the ghost.