

Davenport Local Explores Tragedies that Shaped Her Homeland in New Book

Written by Lauren Covello
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The Bells of Balangiga
by Dr. Eleonor Mendoza

NEW NOVEL EXPLORES LOVE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION AND WORLD WAR II

The Bells of Balangiga, by Dr. Eleonor Mendoza, brings to life two inextricably linked love stories set against the Philippine Insurrection and World War II.

The novel, which takes place in the Philippines, reflects the customs, traditions, and charm of the time. The story is set with Lieutenant Jack Stewart, a West Point graduate assigned to the Nueva Ecija Province in the Philippines in 1940. Jack falls in love with a young Filipina woman named Neneng, but when his parents visit to attend a reception for the officers, Jack's mother reveals that Jack has a sweetheart back home.

Crestfallen, Neneng seeks comfort in the arms of her mother Clara, who divulges that she was once engaged to Jack's father during the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902). Since then, Clara has been haunted by the sounds of the bells of Balangiga, three church bells taken by the United States Army from the Philippines in 1901. To her, they embody the conflict that shaped her early life. The book goes on to narrate each woman's story and the wars that got in the way.

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“We talk of countries going to war, but it is the people who go to war, who fight, who lose loved ones, who are killed,” says Dr. Mendoza. “The Bells of Balangiga shares two stories of people who fall in love, against the backdrop of human conflict.”

As the only Christian country in Asia, the Philippines holds its religious ideals close. The female characters’ beliefs guide their actions throughout the story, while a thorough appendix expands on the history, traditions, and military battles that Mendoza mentions throughout the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Eleonor Mendoza was born on the southern island of Mindanao, in the Philippines. A licensed physician, although no longer practicing, she came to the United States in 1974 and currently lives in Davenport, Iowa with her husband. She is on the Executive Board of the Filipino American Association of Iowa-Illinois and is active in charity organizations that aid the people of the Philippines. Recently, she has helped with humanitarian work for Typhoon Sendong victims in the Philippines’ Iligan City.