

I Love My Librarian!

Award

Janet Tom
San Francisco Public Library
San Francisco, California

Nominated by: Randi Thomson-Story, Jerry Dear, Joy dela Luz, Jeanne Gafar-Nakamura, Judy Goddess, Janeth Gomez, Connie Levy, Vickie Lew, Shirley Toy, Jane Watanabe, and Ann Wheat

JANET GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND IN EVERYTHING SHE DOES.

Janet Tom is a tireless collector of people and ideas. She not only brings community together, she creates it. She acts as a magnet for information -- sparking curiosity in library patrons, colleagues and friends -- and immerses herself in community events, experiences and resources to support the topics we care about. She is a San Francisco native and brings the best of the Bay Area together. By bringing individuals, professionals and outside groups into the library for the panels and programs her department offers, she widens the community network of friendships and collaboration for lifelong learning.

We are nominating Janet Tom for the *I Love My Librarian* Award because we are drawn to these programs and collections. They range from the recent, remarkable series of panel discussions on DEATH AND DYING to the many years of programs, exhibits and associated resources that Janet has provided about housing, alternative medicine, nourishing diets and healthy living.

JANET DEMONSTRATES LEADERSHIP BY BRINGING US PROGRAMS ON A SUBJECT LIKE DEATH AND DYING – THAT NO ONE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT – BUT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW

“I would like to nominate Janet Tom for the *I Love My Librarian* Award. This Death & Dying series has been fabulous.” Ann Wheat

“I went to the programs on Death & Dying. It really helped me to see so many people willing to think about a sad subject. I felt safe with my feelings of missing my parents who have both passed on.” Shirley Toy

“Janet Tom is an amazing, wonderful, eloquent woman and librarian. I had the pleasure of meeting her and speaking to her regarding her Death and Dying Library series earlier this year. She was so organized and I shared her excitement to bring such an educational and informative series to the public. She had great questions and helped me organize my presentation. I was honored to be one of the panel participants. I was impressed by her organization of the event. I observed as she warmly greeted guests walking into the event. She had organized handouts and had a creative way for guests to write down

questions and Janet presented them to the appropriate speaker during the question/answer portion of the event. I applaud her wisdom in bringing a sensitive subject to a large audience in such a comforting way. I would like to nominate her for the *I Love My Librarian Award*.” Janeth Gomez, panelist at the Death and Dying series.

“Janet really does her homework in preparing her presentations. Before the first Death and Dying program, I was the driver when Janet arranged for us to visit Fernwood Cemetery and meet Janeth Gomez to learn all we could about traditional funerals, cremation and green burial.” Jane Watanabe

“In the comfort of our living room, my husband Rito and I watched a video titled "What Happens to Our Bodies When We Die" on the SFPL YouTube Channel. A panel of experts presented many traditional and new ways to care for our remains after death. Knowledgeable speakers shared information about funerals, cremation, green burials and more. When we heard the speaker from UCSF’s Willied Body Program, we knew immediately that our choice would be to donate our bodies to science. All of us have received the gift of healing from medical research, and our lives have been extended with new discoveries and interventions. Donated bodies are used for medical research and as training cadavers for surgical students. The UCSF speaker said that students are often initially distressed about working with the cadavers, but end up thanking them, and even writing poetry in their honor! We are so grateful to the SF Public Library for providing this fascinating and useful program and making it available on You Tube.”
Dr. Becki Cohn-Vargas

“I was one of the main hands-on caregivers for my parents before they died. The eight programs of the Death & Dying series helped me process this profound experience. I got to know many other library patrons and panelists in a safe and caring place. In addition to learning about the many practical and spiritual aspects of our final days, we played a card game called The GoWish Game: Decide What’s Important Together. The cards are designed to help us articulate, in advance, our most important final wishes. In another program, we harmonized with the Threshold Choir, volunteers who sing to the dying at their bedsides.” Randi Thomson-Story

JANET GIVES BACK AND MAKES THE COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE.

“Passion that blazes the trail faster than a speeding bullet to help unfortunates lost in the unknown waters called Knowledge, the rugged terrain called Life. Look! Up in the sky! Unstoppable: Janet Tom.” Joy dela Luz

“Janet brings taboo subjects out of the dark and presents them with care and respect.”
Vickie Lew

Shirley Toy met Janet at the SF Chinese Alzheimer’s Forum, sponsored by the Alzheimer’s Association of Northern California, and held at the SF Public Library . Janet volunteered to coordinate the annual event on the library’s end. The program is a Cantonese/English bilingual forum that brings together speakers – from medical experts to social workers – offering the latest developments in Alzheimer’s research and resources to patients, their families, friends, caregivers and the community at large.

Janet volunteers at food education and community programs sponsored by the San Francisco Vegetarian Society (SFVS), where she was secretary from 2004-2018. She served on the planning committee for their annual World VegFest. She also coordinated the SFVS' annual Lunar New Year dinners at the Enjoy Vegetarian Restaurant in Chinatown. Many of us looked forward to this event every year.

In 2019, Janet extended this celebration to the Northern California chapter of the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA). Colleagues, plus family and friends enjoyed a delicious and healthy ten-course meal. Discussions at this feast included people's travels and culinary adventures and how Janet Tom had recently appeared on an episode of *Top Chef* where she provided research on medieval-era foods.

<http://www.apalaweb.org/apala-bay-area-lunar-new-year-dinner/>

THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF JANET'S FAR-REACHING COMMITMENT TO LOCAL GROUPS AND WAYS SHE BRINGS IT ALL BACK TO THE LIBRARY.

Janet was honored with the San Francisco Community Living Campaign's (CLC) Good Neighbor Award in 2017 for her contribution at the St. Francis Square Cooperative where she lives. She is helping to rebuild a strong sense of community there – particularly around the theme of aging in place. Janet's suggestion to the CLC Committee was to have a BYOB (Bring Your Own Bowl) event aimed at providing the opportunity for residents to come together to enjoy good food and socialize. Three long-time residents who are now wheelchair-bound and rarely leave their apartments, came to the first BYOB event and saw many of their friends and neighbors. Janet makes big pots of soup, others bring bread, salad and desserts. At St. Francis Square, the BYOB event continues and residents are breaking bread and spending time together.

<https://www.sfcommunityliving.org/good-neighbors-janet-tom/>

Janet also coordinated an exhibit in 2014 at the San Francisco Public Library: *St Francis Square: Celebrating 50 Years of Cooperative Living*. "The Square" is an important part of San Francisco history and the history of redevelopment in the Western Addition. The 300-unit housing development was created by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) to provide housing for their members. The goal was for residents to live in and manage their community based on the housing cooperative model.

The exhibit and turnout were amazing. Claude Stoller, 92, one of the architects who designed St. Francis Square, came to the opening of the exhibit. Janet found his contact information address and wrote a letter inviting him. For the first time, architect and residents met one another.

The exhibit included the original sales brochure advertising the merits of living in The Square, old newsletters, newspaper articles, memorabilia and photos of children who were raised there, along with their photos today, fifty years later.

Working with the Library's City Archivist, Susan Goldstein, and Carol Cuenod, the Square's unofficial historian, Janet and Betty Traynor (a current resident and former St. Francis Square board president) created an exhibit of information that has been archived and is now available at the Library's San Francisco History Room for anyone interested in researching of this incredible housing community.

<http://www.thewesternedition.com/?c=117&a=2525>

Janet volunteers as an usher for film festivals such as the Center for Asian American Media's annual Film Festival (CAAMFest), the **San Francisco International LGBTQ+ Film Festival** (Frameline), the SF Jewish Film Festival, the 3rd i South Asian Film Festival, and the Legacy Film Festival on Aging. She also volunteers for many performing arts organizations, such as the San Francisco Opera, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, American Bach Soloists and many small theatre, music and dance production companies.

In 2019, Janet organized a *Sneak Preview* of the Legacy Film Festival on Aging at the library. Sheila Malkind, Festival Executive Director, explained how the films were selected and screened several trailers of the upcoming films. The sneak preview program presented a perfect next step for those of us who were sad that the Death and Dying Series was nearing an end. Sheila had attended many of the D&D programs, and the films at the Legacy Film Festival continued to explore themes about life, caregiving and aging.

“I met Janet at a cohousing conference in Oakland about 5+years ago. She introduced me to her friends who live in the Swan's Market (Cohousing) community nearby and we had a tour. We've stayed in touch ever since and she has introduced me to a number of like-minded people and interesting events. I see her ushering at or attending many of the same events – especially film festivals – as I do.” Connie Levy

JANET HELPS US EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, DIET AND HEALTHY LIVING WITH PROGRAMS LIKE THESE:

- Dr. Robert Lustig: The Hacking of the American Mind. Dr. Lustig is Professor of Pediatric Endocrinology, University of California, San Francisco
- Dr. Helen Caldicott: Nuclear Weapons: Can They Be Abolished? The Nobel Peace Prize nominee formed the group, Physicians for Social Responsibility, in the 1960s to address the dangers of nuclear proliferation and war.
- Dental Health: Take Care of Your Gums. Dr. William Lundergan, chair of Periodontics at the University of the Pacific School of Dentistry, talks about periodontal disease and what you can do to avoid it.
- Fermented Vegetables. Kirsten and Christopher Shockey, authors of *Fermented Vegetables: Creative Recipes for 64 Vegetables & Herbs* show us how to make sauerkraut and tell us everything we need to know to transform fresh vegetables into colorful ferments. Samples available for tasting.

All the programs end with Q & A sessions and speakers respond to audience questions. Janet compiles extensive reading and resource lists related to each topic. In addition, she carefully reviews the audio and video recordings of the programs before releasing them onto YouTube for us to watch at our leisure.

“Organizing detailed, comprehensive and complex topics requires strong organization skills and attention to details. Janet has a calm, professional personality. As she's often approached by several people at one time, she always addresses each one cheerfully and professionally. I also saw her working patiently with a group of first time presenters during Asian Pacific month. Librarians like Janet contributed to the fact that SFPL won the Library of the Year in 2018.”

Jeanne Gafar-Nakamura

“Janet has improved my life and the lives of others by creating programs that have helped us lead healthier lives – Fermented Foods, Raw Foods, Vegetarian/Vegan cooking, Meditation.”

Jane Watanabe

Janet is the subject specialist for health/medical books and periodicals (Dewey 610-615). She has added especially to the complementary health collection; materials on subjects such as acupuncture, cranial sacral therapy, yoga, herbs, and other health and healing modalities. SFPL patrons in the Bay Area are especially interested in these topics and this is often the only library which has these materials.

Janet is a member of the American Library Association (ALA), RUSA RSS: Library Service to Aging Population, RUSA Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS), Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), and Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA).

“Janet offers a tireless base of knowledge that helps us lead healthier lives. She enlists the aid of others to participate in these volunteer corps. She pools the time and energy of friends and community groups, immerses herself in language studies, and passes on the knowledge. She shares cooking skills and healthy living ideas through the programs she sponsors and the book and resource collections in her department at SFPL.” Vickie Lew

“Janet creates a hub for community engagement at its best. Her initiative has increased resources at the library and brought together a diverse network of people with shared interests, for dialogue and exchange.” Jerry Dear, SFPL Librarian