

Danticat, Readers To Share Their One Book

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For Edwidge Danticat, it began as an essay for a high school newspaper in New York City. Danticat, then 18, wrote about her childhood spent with relatives in Haiti during an eight-year separation from her parents, who had immigrated to New York to seek a better life for the family.

That essay was the seed of Danticat's first novel, "Breath, Eyes, Memory," a haunting and lyrical tale of four generations of Haitian women and their complex emotional relationships. Her 1994 novel was selected as the first One Book for Greater Hartford community reading project, which ends Friday and Saturday with appearances by Danticat and a Festival of Caribbean Literature at the Albany Branch of the Hartford Public Library.

Tracie Hall, community librarian at the Albany Branch, said the festival will draw visitors from as far as the West Indies, as well as New England and New York. The free event will begin at the library, 1250 Albany Ave., at 10 a.m. and will end with an evening concert at the Artists Collective, 1200 Albany Ave. Highlights include a Haitian dance honoring Danticat at the Collective, a talk by Jamaican novelist Colin Channer, a one-woman show by Jamaican actress Andrene Bonner and panels on Caribbean literature.

Danticat is still surprised by the success of her first book.

"I began writing it so early, and my sense of audience was so narrow. .. I never imagined that it would go the places it has gone," Danticat said in a phone interview. "Breath, Eyes, Memory" became an Oprah's Book Club selection and drew enthusiastic reviews for its exploration of family conflicts, immigration and assimilation in Haitian culture.

She has since written other books, including the recent "After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti" (Crown, \$16) and her first book for young adults, "Behind the Mountains" (Scholastic, \$16.95).

Once "Breath, Eyes, Memory" was selected last April for the One Book project, libraries and other institutions throughout Greater Hartford were encouraged to sponsor discussion groups and events. More than 20 libraries held programs over the summer, and a West Hartford book-discussion group was selected through a lottery to meet with Danticat Saturday. Participating libraries distributed 300 free tickets to a talk and book signing by Danticat Friday at the Connecticut State Library. That event is at capacity.