

## Poet/Author Gary Soto to Present An Evening with a California Writer May 3 as Part of the Month-long César E. Chávez Celebration at UCSD

Jan Jennings

When asked what he likes to do most, not surprisingly, poet, novelist, and short story writer Gary Soto says: "Read. It appears these days I don't have much of a life because my nose is often stuck in a book - but I discovered that reading builds a life inside the mind."

A prolific writer, Soto will speak on Local News: *An Evening with a California Writer* at 7:30 p.m. May 3 in Copley Auditorium of the Institute of the Americas at the University of California, San Diego. The event is free and open to the public.

Soto's presentation is the finale in a month-long series of events at UCSD honoring labor leader and champion of civil rights César E. Chávez.

Soto, 52, has published more than 30 books of poetry, essays, and fiction, including *Too Many Tamales* and *Chato's Kitchen* for children, *The Afterlife* and *Buried Onions* for young adults, and *Junior College* and *Living Up The Street* for adults. He is the editor of *Pieces of the Heart: New Chicano Fiction*.

Much of his work is inspired by his Mexican-American childhood in Fresno, the setting for a childhood he recalls as both sweet and bittersweet. "A very specific regionality colors [my] writing," says Soto, yet his work is aimed at readers from all areas of the country and of all ages.

When asked if one needs to read in order to write, Soto zeroes in on poets. "Poets should fill themselves with the works of poetry and other writers," he says. "My advice for young poets is to read what's available in the contemporary landscape. Later ... study the grand masters such as Flaubert and Turgenev."

Soto discovered the works of Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Jules Verne, Robert Frost, and Thornton Wilder while in high school. "I was already thinking like a poet, already filling myself with literature," says Soto. After high school, he attended Fresno City College, then Fresno State College where he graduated with a major in English.

In addition to reading from his works, Soto will discuss his writing and offer insights into the inspiration for the varying pieces and how they developed. Following the presentation, Soto will take questions from the audience and sign his books, a number of which will be available for purchase.

Soto's honors include an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Literature Award from the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, the Author-Illustrator Civil Rights Award from the National Education Association, the Discovery-The Nation Prize, the U.S. Award of the International Poetry Forum, and the California Library Association's John and Patricia Beatty Award. He is one of the youngest poets to appear in the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*.

Soto makes his home in Berkeley. His visit to UCSD is sponsored by the César E. Chávez Celebration Planning Committee, Thurgood Marshall College, the Center for the Humanities, the Department of Literature, and the California Cultures Program.

For further information on the May 3 Soto presentation, call (858) 534-4002.

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