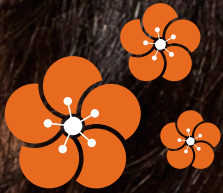




A Celebration of the Life of

# Janice Mirikitani

February 5, 1941 – July 29, 2021





Janice Mirikitani, the beloved GLIDE Co-Founder and Japanese American Sansei poet, whose activism helped define the social justice culture of San Francisco, and whose verse illuminated her struggles with ethnic identity and personal adversity, died on Thursday, July 29, 2021. She was 80.

Mirikitani was a teacher, artist, and activist whose work and commitment to empower and give voice to the most marginalized has transformed tens of thousands of lives in San Francisco and beyond. As co-founder of the Glide Foundation, she played a seminal role in creating what many consider the nation's boldest and most unique fusion of social justice activism, social services at the raw edge of society, and the celebration of human creativity, all converging to break through traditional lines of race, gender, class, and creed.

Mirikitani spent her entire adult life in a relentless pursuit of the kind of justice that brings the extreme and sometimes hidden needs in our society to the forefront of our

attention. She did this on three fronts: as a poet who rendered the rage of the oppressed, the incest survivor, and the invisible onto the page; as a teacher-choreographer who guided thousands of children, women, and men in the exploration of their own histories; and as Founding President of the Glide Foundation by ensuring those struggling the most in San Francisco had access to food, housing, recovery, medical care, and a place to grow.

Born February 5, 1941, in Stockton, California, Janice Mirikitani was incarcerated as an infant with her family in an Arkansas concentration camp during the mass internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. Following her family's release from the camp in 1945, the five-year-old Mirikitani moved to Chicago with her family and then to Petaluma with her mother. She has spoken publicly and through her poetry of these years where she endured emotional isolation, poverty, and the trauma of sexual abuse by her stepfather. Mirikitani is known as a woman who can illuminate the horrors of war, lead a group of homeless women in writing their own histories, and

confront institutional racism in public life — all while exposing the raw vitality, joy, and rage of speaking truth.

Mirikitani earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from UCLA in 1962 and her teaching credential from UC Berkeley. She also taught in the Contra Costa School District for a year before pursuing a graduate degree in creative writing at San Francisco State University.

In 1965, Mirikitani came to work at Glide Memorial Church as an administrative assistant. There she met Reverend Cecil Williams and quickly became active in political movements for human rights and the 1960s anti-war and peace movements. Her exposure to the injustices of structural racism and sexism, particularly against poor people, propelled her activism.

Calling herself a “warrior of peace,” as director of GLIDE programs beginning in 1969, Mirikitani shaped GLIDE's outreach and support for women and families facing challenges of substance abuse, domestic violence, single parenting, childcare, health

and wellness, education, and access to employment. Under her leadership, GLIDE programs increased in size and scope. In 1982, GLIDE named Mirikitani Executive Director and President.

On January 1, 1982, Mirikitani married Williams. Working closely together, they built GLIDE into a visionary, internationally known social justice leader, advocate, social service provider, and inclusive spiritual community.

In 2000, Mirikitani was appointed San Francisco's second Poet Laureate. Her works of poetry include "Awake in the River" (1978), "Shedding Silence" (1987), "We, the Dangerous: New and Selected Poems" (1995), "Love Works" (2001) and "Out of the Dust: New and Selected Poems" (2014). Additionally, she was the editor of nine landmark anthologies which provided platforms for writers of color, women, youth, and children.

Mirikitani and Williams collaborated on the book "Beyond the Possible: 50 Years of Creating Radical Change in a Community Called

GLIDE" (2013). It describes GLIDE's explosive growth, from a struggling local church within the GLIDE Foundation to a nationally recognized social justice institution.

In "Beyond the Possible," Mirikitani writes, "Our ministry at Glide started by listening to people tell us about their needs, and by engaging those people in creating programs ... True leadership, we learned through the years, was about providing opportunities for those who might not consider themselves capable or educated but nevertheless had the passion, street smarts, and commitment to change — to emerge and develop as leaders."

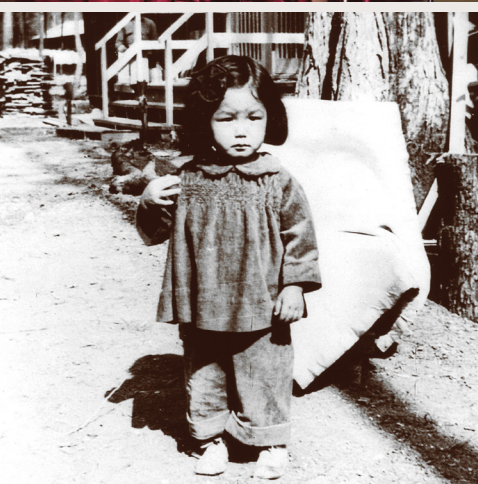
Throughout her influential career, Mirikitani has been the recipient of more than 40 awards and honors, including the Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women and Families' "Minerva Award," San Francisco State University's "Distinguished Alumnae Award," the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce's "Lifetime Achievement Ebbie," the American Book "Lifetime Achievement Award for Literature," the University of California at San

Francisco Chancellor's "Medal of Honor," and the "Foreign Ministry Commendation Award" from the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Mirikitani also received three honorary doctorate degrees.

Mirikitani's legacy of unwavering advocacy for the most marginalized lives on through GLIDE's bold strategic vision to reach more people in need with comprehensive services to help people off the streets, advance racial and social equity and build empathy to address large-scale issues across San Francisco. She will be remembered by many San Franciscans as a provocative, fierce-hearted, and enormously generous leader.

Mirikitani is survived by her husband, the Reverend Cecil Williams, her daughter, Tianne Tsukiko Feliciano and her husband Anthony, grandson Nicholas Feliciano, brother Layne Yonehiro MD, sister-in-law Susan Yonehiro, nephew Jason Yonehiro and niece Samantha Yonehiro, stepchildren Albert Williams Jr, Kimberly Williams, and step-grandchildren Kaya Grant, Albert Williams III and Zachary Williams.





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## IRON BUTTERFLY

By Janice Mirikitani

Silk, iron  
iron, silk  
flesh, feather  
window, open  
silk wing  
iron butterfly.

I am all of these, silk wings  
iron butterfly.

I recover myself from the wasteland of invisible.  
from dark closets, banished there when I was a child  
for crimes I did not understand.  
Shame locked me in prisons of silence.  
Language was incest's enemy

*shhhh . . .*

I grew up hungry  
Seeking men with hands of metal  
a familiar violence  
and pain that fit well.  
In this journey of bruised woman without speech.

I came upon a church where God loves  
criminals and samaritans alike.

A minister shouts to me,

*I accept you, unconditionally*

Love, he says, awakens us from the dead,  
And I in circles of recovery  
Discovered my tongue in the mouths  
of women telling stories  
changing whispers of shame and sorry  
to shouts for justice, truth, release.

Here is hope, in community,  
where diversity is alive,  
men/women in mutuality,  
breaking cycles of injury  
and children speak in poetry.

Here is hope *love transforms*.

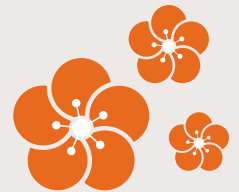
She who was banished to closet and beating floor,  
background, backseat  
no longer whimpers, but sings.

This is she/me-who dared not  
to laugh out loud.  
I see light burst into her mouth.

I am open window  
I am bird of paradise  
I am iron butterfly  
I am flesh and blood and silk wings  
rising up from dead bones,  
dancing in the music of our words.

Butterflies cannot resist her symphony of color  
they drink from her amber  
the nectar she makes from the plum of herself.

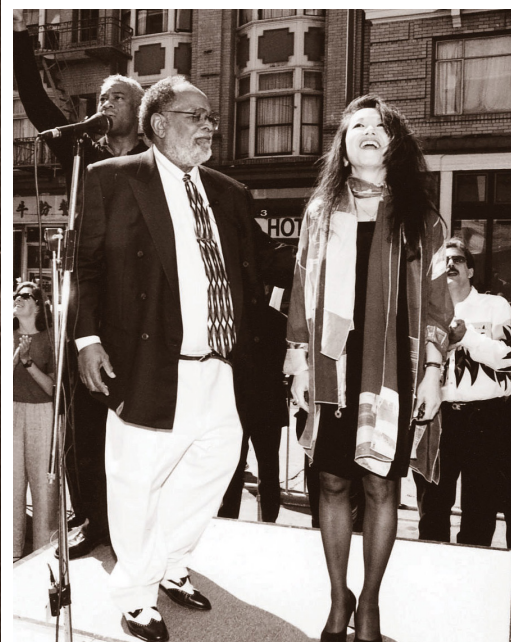
I am she/we  
of flesh  
and iron  
and silk wings,  
healing, flying  
into a gentle blue sky.



“Janice was a force of nature. She was fearless and transformational in the honesty with which she loved us all and held us all accountable. Janice’s legacy and her unique, powerful voice is all around us. It will continue to inspire GLIDE’s work as we transform hearts and minds, and the landscape of poverty and homelessness, in San Francisco.”

— Karen Hanrahan,  
GLIDE President and Chief Executive Officer







“Janice Mirikitani made an indelible mark on the San Francisco literary scene and on a community of writers like me. At GLIDE Memorial Church, her poems marched alongside farmworkers, Black Panthers, LGBTQ folks, BIPOC, women, and those stuck in cycles of poverty, addiction, and incarceration. Her poetry looked into the eyes of the marginalized and told them that they were, indeed, somebody. It was Janice who created a space, not for a leader to emerge, but for a poet like me, to guide. Thank you for your writer’s heart, your writer’s life, and your writer’s legacy, Janice. Amen, Hallelujah, and Write on Jan, Write on.”

— Marvin K. White  
GLIDE Minister of Celebration



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## SOUL FOOD

By Janice Mirikitani

### *For Cecil*

We prepare  
the meal together.  
I complain,  
hurt, reduced to fury  
again by their  
subtle insults  
insinuations  
because I am married to you.  
Impossible autonomy, no mind  
of my own.

You like your fish  
crisp, coated with cornmeal,  
fried deep,  
sliced mangos to sweeten  
the tang of lemons.  
My fish is raw,  
on shredded lettuce,  
lemon slices thin as skin,  
wasabe burning like green fire.  
You bake the cornbread flat  
and dip it in  
the thick soup  
I've brewed from  
turkey carcass, rice gruel,  
sesame oil and chervil.  
We laugh over watermelon  
and bubbling cobbler.

You say  
there are few men  
who can stand  
to have a woman equal,  
upright.

This meal,  
unsurpassed.





“GLIDE stands for unconditional love, radical acceptance, and social justice — three values that were keenly important to Janice. Her life experience as someone who suffered discrimination and marginalization helped form her core beliefs and endless empathy for others experiencing difficult circumstances. Janice’s values and spirit are forever part of GLIDE.”

— *Kaye Foster,*  
*Chair of the GLIDE Foundation Board of Trustees*

AION, Volume 1, No. 1	Janice Mirikitani	1970
AION, Volume 1, No. 2	Janice Mirikitani	1971
Time To Greez! Incantations from the Third World	Janice Mirikitani, Luis Syquia, Jr., Asian Editors; Buriel Clay II, Black Editor; Janet Campbell Hale, American Indian Editor; Alejandro Murguia, Roberto Vargas, La Raza Editors; Jim Dong, Rupert Garcia, Graphic Editors	1975
Awake in the River, Poetry and Prose	Janice Mirikitani	1978
Shedding Silence, Poetry and Prose	Janice Mirikitani	1987
I Have Something To Say About This Big Trouble — Children of the Tenderloin Speak Out	Collected by Reverend Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani	1989
WATCH OUT! We’re Talking — Speaking Out About Incest and Abuse	Janice Mirikitani, Project Director; Abena C.; Christina; Joyce Hayes; Ntombi Howell; Mary Lucas; Jan Neufeld; Virginia Shepley; Lori Jean Robinson; Edna Harris White	1993
We the Dangerous, New and Selected Poems	Janice Mirikitani	1995
Love Works, San Francisco Poet Laureate, Series No. 2	Janice Mirikitani	2001
What Matters, Young Writers and Artists Speak Out	Janice Mirikitani	2004
Beyond the Possible, 50 Years of Radical Change at GLIDE	Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani foreword by Dave Eggers	2013
Out of the Dust: New and Selected Poems	Janice Mirikitani	2014



At Janice's request, a GLIDE Memorial Fund for Janice Mirikitani has been established to support programs serving women and children. Janice was passionate about creating programs for women and families as they struggle with issues related to health, wellbeing, and safety. GLIDE is committed to continuing Janice's legacy. To contribute, please visit [glide.org/honorjanice](https://glide.org/honorjanice) or email [development@glide.org](mailto:development@glide.org).



“Jan Mirikitani was one of our City’s true lights. She was a visionary, a revolutionary artist, and the very embodiment of San Francisco’s compassionate spirit. As a poet, including as Poet Laureate of this City from 2000 to 2002, she used the power of her words to further the fight for equality and to call for a more just and peaceful world. Through her work at Glide Memorial Church, along with her husband the Reverend Cecil Williams, she served our most vulnerable residents for decades and provided a place of refuge and love for all. She was boundless in her energy and in her devotion to this City and to her fellow San Franciscans. My heart goes out to her friends and family, especially to Cecil. She was loved and will never be forgotten.”

— San Francisco Mayor London Breed

In Janice's final hours I made a promise to her: We would keep going on.

Janice was radical and intensely compassionate. Janice did not stand by and wait for things to happen. She stood up for all people to make the world better for everybody. It's time for all of us to keep going on. It's time for us to keep on being radical, because Janice was radical.

Janice was passionate about her work with women and children. She taught us that the women and children will lead us into a new world. Janice was a force ahead of her time, ready to take on anybody and everybody. Janice will always stand for something magnificent.

It's our time now, my time, your time. We must continue to do what Janice helped me to do. Janice helped me to build GLIDE with all of you. GLIDE is full of promise and possibility. It's time to confront what's important in life, to summon and offer our full humanity, and to expect greatness from ourselves.

Help me celebrate Janice by holding on to each other, so no one can hold us back. Keep changing the world, embracing a new way of being and begin to practice it relentlessly. Let us gather at the Wisdom Table together. Help me keep my promise to Janice as we all keep going on, with radical love and limitless courage.

With love,

Cecil

