VOICES de la Luna

A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine



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Voices de la Luna is a nonprofit quarterly literature and arts magazine. Founded in 2008 by San Antonio writers Mo Saidi and Jim Brandenburg, the magazine is the premier literary magazine in South Texas. All of us who are involved with the production of the magazine and with the many community services offered by Voices staff, board members, and contributors believe that poetry heals and arts advance the quality of life.

BY DR. JAMES BRANDENBURG



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Healing Arts

Letter from the Editor

Friends, we are living in sacred times. War is raging on nearly every continent, some of us have survived (are still surviving) the global pandemic of Covid-19, the United States is having a presidential election, over forty volcanoes are actively erupting around the world, and here comes the solar eclipse —supposedly a marker that we are entering "The Age of Aquarius". I am taking all this in as a writer and mother. Musing over how the kids have lived my strangest times as their typical times. Everything seems so precarious yet I am hopeful for healing through all that would otherwise harm us.

This Spring season I offer that it is important to keep ourselves not only grounded but to tunned towards *healing.* Voices de la Luna asked contributors to keep up strength because we are going through our own healing time. We are healing from certain losses. As you may know, we have been reeling from the unexpected death of *Voices* co-founder, Dr. James Brandenburg and copy editor Carol Coffee Reposa. Then, co-founder Dr. Mo Saidi had to retire from our previous board and we have brought in new members to bring Voices to a place of healing.

I came into *Voices de la Luna* as an Associate Editor but am now serving as the Executive Director and Managing Editor. James Adair has retired from Voices de la Luna, and we have given him the prestigious title of Editor Emeritus of Voices de la Luna. Meanwhile, poetry editor Dr. Octavio Quintanilla and prose editor Jasmina Wellinghoff have completed the work and are no longer editors at *Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Art Magazine*. We are grateful to them for their contributions to keeping Voices thriving through the pandemic and to those who will be leading us through the next fifteen years.

Voices is blessed to be working with outstanding new board directors who happen to be the established and esteemed San Antonio writers Josh Robbins, Gerard Robledo, Duncan Hayse, Jean Hackett, and Jonathan Fletcher. Together we have worked tirelessly to craft this bonus Spring issue magazine, even as I underwent a bout with Covid in February. When you have great team anything is possible. We have all worked to redesign this isssue and create new spaces dedicated to the brilliant works subscribers can champion.

You will notice the changes in design and columns, but much is the same quality work you expect from 15 years of Voices de la Luna. We have kept the columns curated by Ecopoetics and Poetry Medicine. Since Jim's passing, Lisha Garcia has taken over Poetic Medicine while Jean Hackett has taken on Ecopoetics, Stone in the Stream/ Roca en el Rio, and the Voices art curation is by yours truly.

The Yanaguana Review is a new feature column dedicated to amplifying Native American voices, particularly Native people who live in and travel this land known as San Antonio, Texas by government entities. The People native to this land know this place as Yanawana, or "land of the refreshing spirit waters". Voices recognizes this fact and with respect and have asked permission to use the title "Yanaguana" (pronounced Yah-nah-wha-nah) with the colonial spelling, because we wish to continue to hold sacred the true name of this occupied land. Voices de la Luna is seeking to operate much in the same fashion as refreshing waters such as the yanawana river in terms of poetry and art. To revive, refresh, heal and be a place to travel through in a good way.

Thank you for your support as we continue to evolve for the forseeable future. Voices de la Luna is hosting special guest editors to make our future selections. By hosting guest editors from around the world, we will keep our magazine thriving with submissions, readership, and an ever expanding vision. Send us any reccomendations for book reviews, featured artists, poets, and others you'd like to see in our pages.

Voices de la Luna whole heartedly thanks the generous contributions in guest editing this Spring issue to Lisha Garcia, Joshua Robbins, Duncan Hayse, and Natalia Treviño.

Viktoria Valenzuela, Managing Editor & Executive Director

Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine.

"I am taking all this in as a writer and mother. Musing over how the kids have lived my strangest times as their typical times. Everything seems so precarious yet I am hopeful for healing through all that would otherwise harm us." ~Valenzuela



Dear Queridx, Voices de la Luna Community,

A letter of welcome from Natalia Treviño, Chair of Voices de la Luna

As we stand at the dawn of a new year, and more significantly, the relaunch of our cherished Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Literature & Arts Magazine, I am compelled to reflect on the profound power embedded in the documentation of the human voice, the pen's indelible mark speaking on the page, and the music of our collective celebrations, questions, and laments.

Voices de la Luna, San Antonio's sole independent quarterly literature and arts magazine, has been a beacon of creativity, diversity, and resilience for fifteen years. During these 15 years, our city has flourished as a mecca for writers in so many sectors.

We launch the first issue of 2024 with a renewed commitment to our mission and vision—to illuminate and celebrate the profound impact of the arts on our collective health, mental, spiritual, and physical.

We must acknowledge the financial restructuring, which necessitated our temporary shift to an online-only format. During this time, we must ask for your continued support. As we travel these difficult and tight fiscal roads, we remain determined to be sustainable and to remain independent, ensuring the continuance of this home for writers and artists whose voices matter equally under the one glowing luna that all of humanity shares.

As the Interim Chair of Voices de la Luna, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each member of our community who has played a pivotal role in keeping this dream alive. To our Vice-Chair, Lisha Garcia, who has been an unparalleled champion; to our Executive Director, Viktoria Valenzuela, whose artistic prowess has breathed new life into our online presence and daily needs and wants; to every Board Director, past and present, who has lent their spirit, knowledge, and acumen to this beautiful endeavor — you are the pillars upon which Voices de la Luna stands. You have helped Voices de la Luna survive. Thank you.

A special mention goes to Jimmy Adair, whose unwavering commitment to editing and producing every edition prior to this one has shaped our magazine into a vessel of goodwill within the community.

I offer this issue to our dearly missed co-founder, Professor and Poetic Medicine Provider, Dr. James Brandenburg, whose vision shapes us today with life, with music, and with kindness. He served as editor, as educator, as a mental health counselor, and as a volunteer. To co-founder Dr. Mo Saidi, I thank you for your vision of a collective community-driven space where healing and art coexist. You brought me onto the board with faith, and I hope I have served well. You have made this dream a reality, leaving a meaningful and creative home on the artistic landscape of our warm yet still developing city. We intend to carry it forward and keep the embers burning beneath it, so that it continues to do its healing work.

As we release the wings of this exciting new issue, let us reaffirm our commitment to its truth, that the healing power of art is universal and that that creative power exists within each of us. Let our constellation of voices echo not only through the virtual pages of our magazine but resonate in the hearts and minds of those who seek solace, inspiration, and connection.

With gratitude and anticipation.

"Our magazine has always celebrated and featured talent that exists locally, regionally, nationally, and globally." ~Treviño



The Yanaguana Review
A focus on Native American Voices



(photo from Society of Native Nations

Society of Native Nations: The INC Global Plastics Conference

Interview by Viktoria Valenzuela

I.N.C. stands for "Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee" a committee formed at the Global Plastic Conference, which conviened in Nairobi, Africa, to address the concerns of the pollution from plastics in the world's oceans, lands and during the lifecycle of plastics in general. I interviewed Frankie Oruna, President of the Society of Native Nations based inSan Antonio, Texas about the good work they have been doing with the United Nations this season. They are taking action and creating treaties with the other countries and being a voice adding to the work of healing the planet for us all. The treaties they create is binding. All countries will have to abide by the framework being written by I.N.C.

The Society of Native Nations joined the call to help write the "Global Plastics Treaty"as part of the global effort to try to come together over global policy, "--a tangible global policy. It's a binding global policy. Meaning that all countries will sign onto it and have to agree to it, abide by it, and sign onto it."

By being in the room and voiceing concerns from The Society of Native Nations, Frankie and his team are helping to framing the framework and inflluence the language in the treaty where it concerns pollution in our oceans, our air, and land. He let me know that our agriculture culture, our human bodies are also added to he equations since what happens with plastics "is also seen as a human rights issue, a human health issue, because of the pollution that comes from how (plastic waste) creates sacrifice zones in these communities where these obstructions exist. Weather it be at the extraction or production site, or at the wayside and landfill, or you know the oceans, or the rivers and communities in the multiple different levels of where the impacts are.

"Which, I would say that the most impacted disproportionately are Black and Brown and Indigenous communities that these infrastructures in these pollution, the pollution, and that issues concerns really exist.... and so we're trying to make sure that front line communities and people those are directly impacted by infrastructure have a voice. And that they are coming up with the solutions and the policy to transition/phase out of plastics because of the toxicity that comes from it. The polution that comes from it; which is right now we believe is probably the most detrimental to the environment and contributes to the biodiversity losses that exist.

"If we don't make corrections now, then we're definitely be threatening the future well-being of our children. Our children's children, if we want to ensure that they have a healthy feature to look forward to. I would say that young people should definitely hold us accountable for what we so and don't do today.

"There is a lot of discussions about what is Indigenous knowledge and what is nature, base solutions, and knowledge, and and traditional knowledge and local knowledge and trying to blur lines within the global world of what that looks like and we have to be cautious with that because that means that's gonna be some accountability that's taken away from the local communities and where these instructions exist.

(...continued from pg. 6)

"So, I think that understanding that we're not separate from the environment or in the same. Right? Industry tends to separate it so that they can excuse the behavior, normalize (and dehumanize) the impacts from industry. And that process, of using fossil fuels --because most people don't know that 99% of plastics is made offossil fuels.

"Because it's during a cracking process when they get liquid natural gas and it goes through a cracking plant and it's what produces the small plastic pellets that then is used to manufacture plastic products and the chemicals that are used are also very toxic.

"Where many of the communities where this infrastructures exist, they have the 3to 4 times the national average where it comes to cancer. When it comes to organ failure, chronic lung diseases, respiratory issues and in some communities they are losing 5 to 15 years of their lifespan.

"And so, this continued process of what we're looking at, when it comes to what industry is trying--and industry is in these spaces, in the Global Plastics Treaty, as a very significant presence and is trying to control the narrative. Trying to dictate the narrative, and the framework and knowledge, when it comes to the solutions that we're discussing on how to address the negative impacts of plastics.

"I think that's really where we have to kind of realize and understand our presence and involvement... We bring the voices of our experience. That's what makes us experts, because we come from an intergenerational community, where we've been dealing with those issues for many generations. And, if we continue to continue to allow industry to go down the same path that we are in now, then we have to understand the government is equally as responsible as industry, because government allows them to get away with the things that to get away with that.

"That, in turn, is perpetuating the continued poverty in our communities in these sacrifice zones. That's what industry's doing. On top of that process for petrochemicals and plastics production is very water intensive, and energy intensive, which then now creates many of the environmental impacts that we are having to deal with this climate crisis that were in.

"And, it's also a process where they use desalination for water needs that, again, helps them to commodify water. And with carbon capture and other false solutions, they're controlling air, and will be selling air, because that's what carbon capture is. Right?

"You wanna live in a community where there you know the air is you know 80% (clean)? Well it'll cost you a couple million dollars, but you can live in this other community where this technology doesn't exist and your air quality is 30-40%, but you can afford it for $100,000 or $200,000 in that community. That's literally selling you air...and that's what we're gonna allow industry to do if we don't get involved, stay involved, hold the accountability as transparency, to saying that (industry) should not be allowed to commodify the air or commodify the water and come up with false solutions, without having the voices --and the people that are directly impacted-- as a part of this process, to help with finding the real solutions. Because, it's those that come from those communities that have real solutions."

I asked Orona if Society of Native Nations had a specific impact on the things being said and added to the policy that may have changed the trajectory of that day. He told me that there are many state delegates or countries would say that they want to see is more involvement from Indigenous people and frontline communities, frontline workers, and environmental justice communities more involved in the process of the INC., of the Global Plastics Treaty, to coming up with the language, and the framework, and the policies, but the inclusion isn't there.

"...to follow up with those words is.... They all like to say it, but looping in Indigenous People and frontline communities with observers, lowers the opportunity for us to engage, to participate more, in the process. So, our voices are not heard as much...and so it gives more platform to industry.

"Those that are from the industry, that are present...and, I think that's what we need to understand. When we say to them 'look, this is inequitable when it comes to the inclusion of Indigenous People, and frontline communities, in this process. And that needs to change.'

"And so a lot of times their excused is especially with the U.S. when you have means with the US delegation, you know they would sit there and say, 'look you know this process can take years. You know, sometimes between 2 to 10 years'

"And I speak up right away, many of us speak up, and say, 'we don't have another 8 to 10 years. People are dying now. And have been dying. And you have dehumanized and normalized that behavior, and that violence towards our communities, by allowing industry to continue to perpetuate the poverty in our communities,' and so that needs to stop."

Orona has attended more than one INC conference and this is the third one, held in Nairobi, Africa. There are more, at least four more conferences planed to continue this important work because there still isn't any real commitments or clarity on stats and positions in the Global Plastics treaty yet. He says there is more to come and that after three INC conferences in, we should have a clearer picture of what industry stances and goals are offering towards the framework and the language of the policy and industry agreements.

He says that the response is that Society of Native Nations is working to make industry folks feel uncomfortable by raising these excellent points, "because we help to bring the humanist back into that room where they've gotten used to disconnecting it. Right?

"And, that's why we're there. To make sure that they are uncomfortable, because our communities are uncomfortable, and have been uncomfortable for very long time.

"So, I think that ...I think our presence alone? Definitely.

"Because, they are not used to us being in the spaces and I think us being these spaces is part of changing the narrative, changing the process of more equitable, and more inclusion, in these types of processes that impact our communities. Our spaces.

(continued from page 7)

communities, making decisions on within the best interest of our of our communities, without truly understanding our hardships or what are the issues that we are dealing with..."

There are at least four more I.N.C. Conferences to come and everyone is hoping to have this agreement completed by the end of 2024, "but there is so much intersectional work when it comes to writing The Global Plastics Treaty. Some of these conferences, weather it be the chemicals and waste management or the nature based solutions discussions --all these discussions, contribute to the framework and language being used for the treaties, Orona assures. "Because it will be a treaty, which means that countries will sign on to it and it will be a binding agreement. We want to make sure the binding agreements are solid and really address the issues related to plastics solutions.

"Where we need to be careful is where they are saying items are listed as 'optional' instead of 'binding' and that's what we gotta make sure that we're clear on what is binding and not optional.

"I would just say, for the community to support way of learning, of understanding, building awareness around the issues that are impacting you, and your communities or other communities. Also, understanding that solution in one community, doesn't mean its a solution in another person's community, or another group, or another community.

"Our issues can be similar but different. Know that our actions can impact another community somewhere that we don't even know of.

"I can tell you being in Nairobi, Kenya and after going to some of the communities where these homes are literally built on top of trash mounds... If you take a walk through there, and you see where kids are playing soccer on top of trash, and you look down. Look at that trash, you'll see that the labels of that trash that's there, that they're living on and playing soccer on and walking on, isn't even from products they sell there in Africa. It's from products that come from United States, and come from the other parts of the world.

"We're shipping millions and millions—tons of trash every day— to developing countries . So, you know if you really will begin to understand how much we, us, ourselves, are contributing to another communities hardship. Their poverty.

"I understand that we have our own individual responsibilities and accountability but we need to force the one percent that dictates what society is dependent upon to make that change, if you want to happen quick enough fast enough."

The hope is that we can make a difference before 2050. I thanked Frankie Orona and The Society of Native Nations for his time spent informing me about the The Global Plastics Treaty and I will be interested to learn more as the conferences come up in 2024.

The websites for Society of Native Nations is here:

https://www.societyofnativenations.org

and to keep up with the INC, look for them here:

https://www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution



Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl

by Ana Gutierrez

Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Do not stop gauging your ears
because your Scottish Grandfather said
"They make you look like a whore"
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Do not stop taking your medications
because your native relatives
don't understand your disease
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
do not cover up your chin tattoo
because your boss
does not get it
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
do not change your name
because the white guy on the phone
cannot pronounce it
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
do not take your braids down
because your male professor
wants it tied in a bun
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
do not hide your limp, use your cane
because your elders were tortured
for you to be here
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Bare your scars with pride
because your ancestors bargained
to create you
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Do not change your appearance
because your boyfriend is worried
what will his parents think
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
hair loss
does not make you less of an Indian
your Creator still loves you
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Do not take that feather out of your cap
the university knew you were indigenous
when you submitted your application
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Wear the ribbon skirt
you cut and sewed yourself
healers need to be seen
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
Dance your prayer, beat the drum
sing to the moon
for you are alive, you are heard
Dear Disabled Indigenous Girl,
your poem is not over just yet.

The Confessional

BY ANA GUTIERREZ

agnus dei

Bless me father
for I believed an indigenous
girl could see the face of
God

qui tolis peccata
mundi

Bless me father
I prayed in my native
tongue while Sister whipped
my hands

in nomine patris

Bless me father
I danced under the full moon
the way my grandmother
taught me

hoc est corpus
meum

Bless me father
I cursed God & cried
as you penetrated my
young body

corpus Christi

Bless me father
I held my 8 year old sister
as she bleeds to death
from your rape

gloria patri

Bless me father
I used the palm ashes
to create my tribal markings
upon my face

anima Christi

Bless me father
I braided his hair
the way my mother
braided my father's

ave Maria, gratia
plena

Bless me father
I fought the Sisters
as they took my daughter
from my arms

oremus

Bless me father
I lite sage
in His church
while I prayed

ego te absolvo

Bless me father
It took far too long
to realize my
Native Heritage is not a
sin

Featured Poet

Interview with Jennifer Yáñez Alaniz

Community Activist, Scholar and Poet

BY LISHA ADELA GARCÍA

1. *How did you fall in love with poetry and the musicality of language? What is your first memory of Poetry?*

Jennifer recalls listening to her father, a professional musician for a Conjunto Band, and transcribing the words of his music when she was a small child. Her father could read but not write. He played with many famous bands as an opening act throughout her childhood. Doing this for her father is one of her favorite memories and since that time she has associated music and poetry together.

Her father was a Vietnam veteran. When her family moved from Texas to California and back following the crops, she learned the value of storytelling with family around a dinner table. Her family finally settled in Maverick and Valverde counties in Texas where her family has lived for generations. She moved to San Antonio later in life and her family of origin still resides in Del Rio. Jenn can trace her lineage to this land going back many generations before Texas was Texas. The stories of her family from both sides of the U.S. Mexico border were shared orally from one generation to the next.

2. *How did you become interested in poetry for your personal evolution? What are you healing through poetry?*

In her family's history and traditions of storytelling as migrant farmworkers following the crops, she learned the value of storytelling with family around a dinner table. Her family is from Bexar, Maverick and Valverde counties in Texas where her family has lived for generations. As a child in a household enforcing negative Catholic ideologies, she grew up with a lot of ignorance about her body. She was "body shamed" most of her growing years. A heritage of harsh matrilineal traditions led to the control of what she could and couldn't eat. The control was such that puberty was delayed twice and at fifteen she stopped having a period during a heightened experience with an eating disorder.

In 2013, Jen's father and brother died and then she herself survived Meningitis. This began what she calls, "the time of my disembodied self." A time when trauma took her outside the body to act as witness. When she joined the Wyrdd Writers about 5 years ago, she began adding language to those memories and creating poetry. She fell in love with process verbs and gerunds that could describe her story and world.

In her family, there was also generational shame not only associated with the shape of the female body, but also around the darkness of skin. Skin color was central to her heritage as one grandmother was Afro-Latina and the other, Indigenous. At that time in history, being alive with darker shades of skin was dangerous and could mean death. This constant reminder of being "dark" was present in her life from early childhood and her family carried this skin consciousness through the generations to the present day. Jen has embraced her ancestors and has been fascinated with her genealogy writing poetry in tribute. Bringing the hidden ones into the light has been an honor and a mission.

3. *You have done a lot of work in San Antonio with the refugee community and the human rights community and combined that work with poetry. Can you please elaborate?*

Jen worked for a local refugee resettlement agency via an ESL (English as a Second Language) grant to work with heads of households sharing literacy and survivability skills on resettlement in the United States. The clients that went through this program at the time were predominantly men and mostly, the ones earning revenue for the family. The elders and women were left out of this program initially. Jen, along with the education team and other community stakeholders, decided to incorporate the voices of elders who in their home countries were revered and respected and had lost all sense of place upon arrival in the United States.

The program served the women, teaching them about practical skills such as grocery shopping etc. and discovered that many of their native vegetables were not grown in Texas. To meet this need, The ESL program providers and community stakeholders facilitated accessing land for the newcomer communities to plant a garden. The elders became leaders again in their roles as skilled gardeners and many different exile communities came together to grow food. Food matters, and during the pandemic, the gardeners continued to feed their families which consisted of up to 250 people. Some families sold their surplus for a little extra money and the families were able to continue growing food for their traditional dishes.

Dr. Carmen Tafolla (a mentor to both Jenn and me) shared with us the value of poetry and food, along with the importance of sounds in the harvesting and cooking of food that could find its way into poems. Dr. Tafolla is a former Texas Poet Laureate. This began Jenn's interest in the relationship between, language, sound, food, the body, music, and poetry.

She savored the musicality of different languages and contends that they cannot be fully translated but rather interpreted via English. She brought poets together from various countries to read in both in their native tongues and then in English if they chose. I participated in two of the programs during COVID and gave a short talk about Poetic Medicine. She has hosted six different events with refugees, poetry, and a myriad of languages. She considers these readings to be "language justice" for exiles.

One event that was a milestone in the City of San Antonio occurred at the Guadalupe Theater. The West Side of San Antonio is a very historic neighborhood for mostly Mexican American families where segregation concentrated a lot of low-income families. As the Chicano movement progressed in the 1960's, this neighborhood became the center of the civil rights movement and the re-embracing of the culture and art of the ancestors. The Guadalupe Theater was a Spanish language cinema that was converted into the cultural and artistic heart of the neighborhood focusing on Latinx art and Spanish language entertainment.

Jen and Tino were successful in bringing refugee poetry events to this historic area and venue. This is a major accomplishment for the neighborhood and the City of San Antonio as many different nationalities presented work that did not belong traditionally to the neighborhood, to the Spanish or Nahuatl languages. The idea of exile, whether internal (within a city as with the West Side of San Antonio) or external (as one arriving as a refugee) could also be celebrated. The stories, the poetry, the music and food were all part of the shared exile experience. A new message of welcome for refugees from various countries emerged from the Guadalupe Theater. These voices of "language justice" were reborn on the West Side. They continue to move forward and add to the multi-cultural fabric of inclusiveness that is San Antonio and now extends through the Alamo Community College System and several of the universities in the city.

4. *How would you describe the intersection of poetry and the healing of community with these events and populations?*
Jen recalled that her personality and modus operandi completely changed when recovering from Meningitis and discovering poetry. She discovered that poetry was a useful modality for healing herself. Prior to that time, she was introverted and found it challenging to leave the house. She began emerging with the mentorship of Dr. Carmen Tafolla and then sharing with the Wyrdd Writers. Jenn claims she went through a metamorphosis in "a coming out to herself, her body, and the world." For years, she wore scarves that covered her throat like a security blanket around her voice. Now she feels comfortable appearing without a scarf and exposing her voice, her throat.

5. *Could you speak about your experience with the Wyrdd Writers and how that has combined healing and poetry for you? What particular events stood out to you?*
The collaborations of reading together and working on poems together is powerful, she stated. She especially appreciates that the Wyrdd Writers carve out space for the ancestors (as when we celebrate Día de los Muertos) and that all voices are heard, acknowledged, and respected. Her greatest gift from the Wyrdd writers is the camaraderie of the participants and how each individual success is celebrated. "It is a sisterhood where we all respect and encourage each other."
The participants in the Wyrdd collective have progressed over the years in their individuation through poetic medicine and the writing of poetry. Many of the writers have new publications, workshops and readings across the state and the country. As mentioned previously, Jenn has grown her work to a first book, Surrogate Eater published in 2023 by Alabrava Press.

6. *You are now working on a Ph.D. Can you explain how you are combining poetry and community in your academic work?*
Her initial interest in beginning her Doctorate derived from equity and diversity in the languages of ancestors and exile voices. Beginning in her second semester, her advisors have encouraged her community work to become part of her Ph.D. experience. She is doing an auto-ethnographic study of her ancestors and their lives in Texas and Northern Mexico including all their diverse ethnicities and languages. Her initial interest of beginning her Doctorate derived from equity and diversity in the languages of ancestors and exile voices. Beginning in her second semester, her advisors have allowed her community work to become part of her Ph.D. experience.

7. *You are very active in social media. How do you think this has helped your visions of poetry and healing in community?*
Jennifer became active in social media about five years ago. She felt the need to expand her world and leave a larger digital legacy for her family. She is using the data on her various social media accounts as part of her auto-ethnography studies. She believes that chronicling her various trips in reading poetry in multiple venues is a testimony of her growth. The gatherings she orchestrated to give voice to the exile community leaves memories and a healing culture for future

generations. Coming out of her shell and overcoming body limitations, also serves as a role model for her only daughter, Maribe. Jen wants to harness the power of social media as a public relations tool for her book and the coming together of disparate voices. Jen is also now part of a group of poets, known as the Corazón (Heart) Collective. This group includes the new Texas Poet Laureate, Ire'ne Lara Silva who writes in depth about the body and how different emotions and scars are carried within us. Ire'ne's book, Blood Sugar Canto, has become a classic "must read" in Texas where generations upon generations deal with diabetes and the lack of adequate medical access for many rural and marginalized communities. In her role with Corazón Collective, Jen developed a poetry workshop on the savory nature of words and the mechanics of the mouth. I was fortunate enough to attend this workshop. It provided a unique perspective on choosing words taking into consideration the use of the tongue, teeth and throat sounds to inform the creation of a poem.

8. You just had a book published by Alabrava Press. Can you talk about how that came about and your work with Corazón Collective?
In Surrogate Eater, Jen explores the relationship between poetry and food and poetry as food and the different sensualities that can emerge when choosing language for those sensations. As mentioned earlier, her own traumas around food began from her early life experience. She wanted to reimagine that history and push further with all the sensuality possible and build a new relationship between poetry and the body. She learned to feel lovely through the various senses as an ESL teacher.

9. You are a wife, Mom of 4, grandmother, daughter, and sister as well as a full-time student and community activist. How do you balance your various roles and your writing life and poetry?
Jen explains that motherhood and staying home to care for her four children was how she spent her earlier life. Now she just has her daughter, Maribe, age 23 at home. Her three sons are out of the nest, and she has more time to concentrate on herself. Her husband spent many years traveling as a federal agent, and she coped with the family on her own. Now her husband has retired and taken over a lot of her responsibilities at the community garden and at home so that she can concentrate on her poetry and Ph.D. Her evolution has come naturally as her family has grown. She is grateful that all her family is supportive of her endeavors.

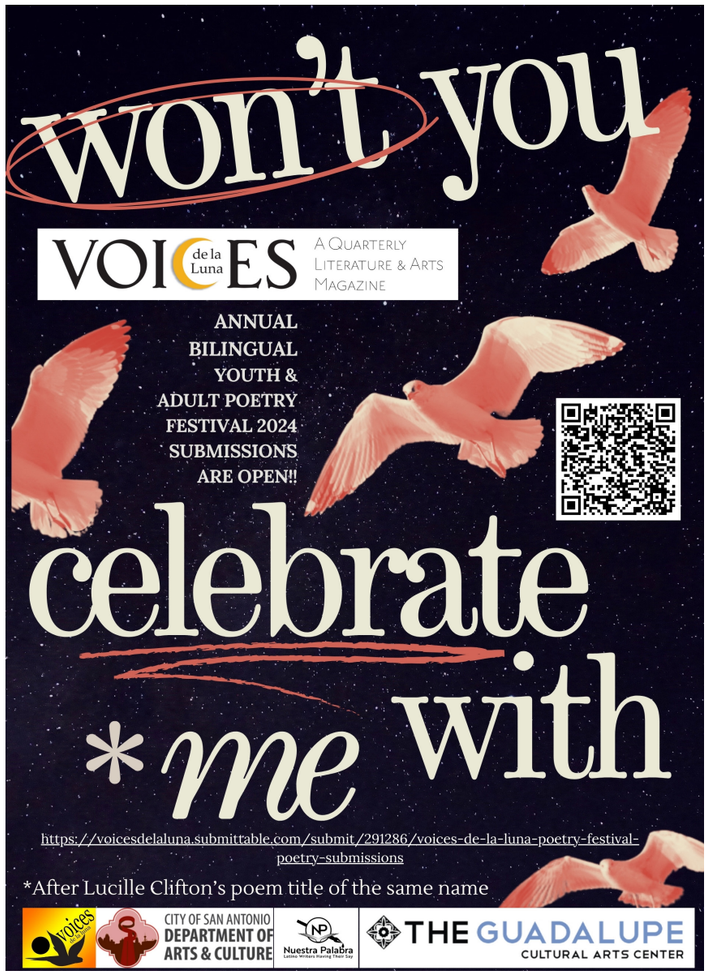
10. What is your vision of the future and your work of poetry and healing?
Jen envisions her future as being "unstuck" from the trauma of the body and the feelings she has about colonization and English-centric language. Her initial steps are to allow herself to feel completely. Sharing Surrogate Eater with the world is a release, a new freedom.

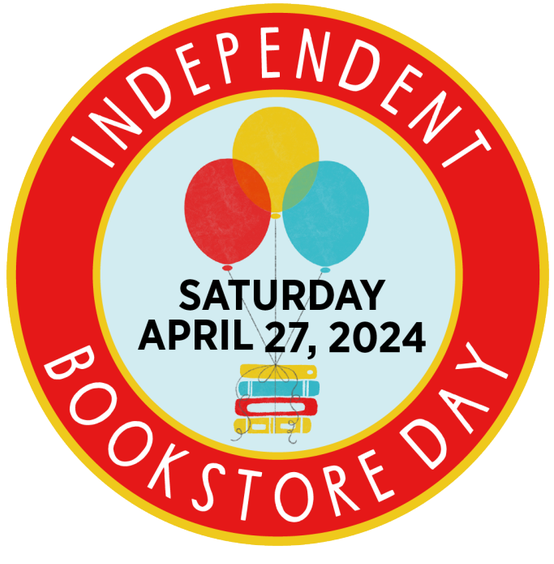
11. What is the most recent book of poetry that you've read?
She is currently reading: Bless the Daughter Raised by the Voice in her Head, by Warsan Shire. The author is a refugee from Somalia who uses her displacement and refugee status as a reflection of how the body endures. Jen mentions that many people have criticized her work at times as being too harsh or too sensual. She uses Warsan as a guide. If Warsan can say it in the context of her culture and body experience than so, can she. This is a very triggering, but necessary book that chronicles what a woman must withstand with rape and genocide.
Jen feels strongly that it is important to know these stories because they reside in the territory that is the body. They reside in the cells and the stories of refugees. She wants to be a part of bringing this poetry to a larger audience and help heal the cruelty of the world.

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Jennifer Yáñez Alaniz is a long-standing member of The Wyrdd Writers (a writing collective in San Antonio) and very active in the human rights arena of San Antonio, Texas. She works closely with Tino Gallego of the City of San Antonio's Office of Refugees. Together, they have hosted several poetry readings with the refugee community bringing their native languages and new English interpretive voices to the city via multi-cultural readings. Yáñez Alaniz has helped establish a community garden for the exile community that allows them to grow vegetables and food closer to their native traditions. The international/refugee poetry readings began during COVID and are now presented in person in conjunction with the Alamo Community Colleges and The Guadalupe Theater, a historic west side of San Antonio community venue. She embraces all these experiences in her auto-ethnographic work for her Ph.D. at the University of Texas at San Antonio.





Won't You Celebrate with Me: A Bilingual Poetry Festival for Youth & Adult Poets

Inspired by the poem, "won't you celebrate with me," penned by Lucille Clifton, Voices de la Luna is inviting San Antonio friends and visitors to send us poems that consider celebration as resilience and healing. Send us your best polished poems of resilience, healing, joy, celebration, or however the theme of "won't you celebrate with me" finds you.

Voices de la Luna's mission statement is "poetry heals wounds and art improves the quality of life." We are excited to read your poems. Our esteemed panel of judges will consist of published poets living in San Antonio who are familiar with all age groups and multilingual poetry. All poetry forms will be considered including visual and collage poetry. Voices de la Luna inspires and promotes poetry and art.

Our events and magazine serve as a platform for all poets and artists to share their work with others. It further uses poetry and arts for both educational and healing purposes in the community. Keynote Speaker: 2024 San Antonio Poet Laureate, Eddie Vega Special Performances and guest speakers from around San Antonio will add to our Poetry Festival and contest awards ceremony. Come join us.

The Voices de la Luna Poetry Festival will take place at:

The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Latino Bookstore,

April 27th, 2024

1PM to 4PM

****BONUS FEATURE: Voices de la Luna invites you to celebrate The Latino Bookstore since it will be National Independent Bookstore Day!

A Poetic Medicine Practice

OFFERED BY E. D. WATSON & LISHA ADELA GARCÍA

What is POETIC MEDICINE?

Poetic medicine is a therapeutic and holistic approach to reading and writing poetry, which harnesses poetry's unique ability to circumvent the rational, prose-oriented brain, allowing people to write from the heart. Poetry is one of humanity's oldest art forms, and belongs to everyone.

Poetic medicine is also a practice, like yoga, meditation, or other forms of self care and self exploration. It is a tool to help us process our emotions, learn more about who we are, and grow as individuals.

Poetic medicine is a two-part process: the first is the writing of the poem; the second is the sharing of the poem. Sharing our poetry can feel scary or vulnerable, but it allows us to experience the healing power of "being seen," and gives us the opportunity to practice holding space for others without judgment or criticism.

Poetic medicine is NOT about writing a "good" poem—because what does that even mean, really? This is not to say that beauty and "artistic merit" don't emerge during the process—they quite often do. But the goal is self-expression and healing, not making others ooh and ahh over your work.

Curator

BY HARLEIGH MCGOWAN

a poem in response to BIRDWINGS by Rumi

my fist was clenched for so long
that when I finally pried my fingers apart

flowers were pressed between them
like pages of a book

fossils had formed
in my life line

diamonds clattered from my palm
to the floor

my fist was clenched so tight & for so long
& when, finally, I let go

I realized I had missed the creation
of something beautiful

myself

Death Walker

BY VIRGINIA CHANG

Inspired by WON'T YOU CELEBRATE WITH ME by Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
the woman I have become, head held high
to walk and laugh and know thyself
i rose from the ashes of sorrow, loss & pain
no words of comfort spoken
or gentle embrace held me
how i wish you took my hand,
understood my tears & grief
adrift with me on the path towards light.
i found my way
through broken glass to stand
on a hill under open sky
so, come celebrate with me
i've become the guide i wished for once
a kind word, a hug, an outstretched hand
we walk together.

Shooting Star

BY VIRGINIA CHANG

Inspired by A FIELD GUIDE TO GETTING LOST by Rebecca Solnit

The light that does not touch me
    will only caress my face when I am dead.
It bathes me with gentle love
Icy fingers brush wisps of hair to reveal a soul
ready to fly.

The light that does not touch me
    is brighter than a thousand suns exploding.
It carries my energies into the stars
I have not died. I am coming home.

A Rageful Listicle

BY KUMA KITSUNE

Inspired by BILL PAY Janice Lobo Sapigoa

mountains of doom piles,
gummy bear wrappers left on the floor,
dust entombed home
sheltering the ghosts of our better past,
traffic jams,
breaking levies and dams,
envy,
desecrated land,
space junked by billionaires
(b/c they couldn't offload enough
of their own spunk),
or that the fruit
that got us kicked out of paradise
(Malus pumila) we've now endangered
over consumption and over production
turning patches of ocean into trash island
(2xs the size of Texas, 3xs the size of France)
how everything is a fucking brand
how no one talks about perimenopause
the infantilization of the marginalized
too bright of lights-
garish orange ones,
LOUD NOISES
disconnection
isolation
suffering alone

A Bodyself of Water

BY KUMA KITSUNE

Inspired by A FIELD GUIDE TO GETTING LOST by Rebecca Solnit

My eyes in the water see
geometric confluences of particle and wave
where every ripple sings anew octave
vibrational existence expanding and collapsing
in on itself seeking patternicity
My eyes in the water see
the support for all life (as we understand it)
here on this planet, the blue-greens
what buoyancy holds us tenderly
My eyes in the water see
myself, transparently
as my body too,
is a body of H20
My eyes in the water see
the gift of wetness
the ability to transmute a bodyself
in many forms
I wonder which today I will be,
liquid, solid or gas,
sacred river wind me down the path
transform this restless Spirit at last.
myself

Oxygen

BY CARYN LEIGH WIDEMAN

Because I have no breath
I have no desire
no spirit
no spark

I feel useless depressed angry
and what is worse
I don't care

Then I tap into the current again
and breathe
gift of grace

As in the story when God breathed
into Adam and he became
a living being
I come to life

I feel the sun warming my back
as I walk down the street

I take in the glow of a full moon
far from city lights

I share the joy of birds arcing
in gentle swaying shapes

I understand strokes of a loving hand
when words won't come

I Believe

BY JEAN HACKETT

Inspired by WHAT I BELIEVE by Kimberly Blaeser

I believe flies caught by the spider
worthy of the same introspection
given her intricate weaving,
their desiccated husks reliquaries
honoring life's requisite sacrifices.

I believe fading gray skies
and withered, bleached fields
offer clarity of color
overshadowing
the rainbow's garish light.

I believe the why do and how come
questions of childhood
cobble questing paths,
we follow all our lives
in search of understanding
and salvation.

Art Works



El Cuervo Y La Luna BY LAURENCE WENSEL

Laurence Wensel

El Cuervo y la Luna

Laurence Wensel is a Ph.D. Student at the University of Texas at Dallas in the Department of Arts & Humanities. His research concentrations are in Visual and Performing Arts, Latin American Studies, and Holocaust Studies. In July 2021, his paper was published in the London Center for Interdisciplinary Research Journal: In Lieu of Duration- "El Grito en La Frontera/The Howl Along the Border: the Chicano Border plays of Teatro Chicano de Laredo." As a visual artist his artworks have appeared in Stonecrop Magazine, Vogue (Italy- Online), Peculiar Magazine, and Carcosa Magazine.

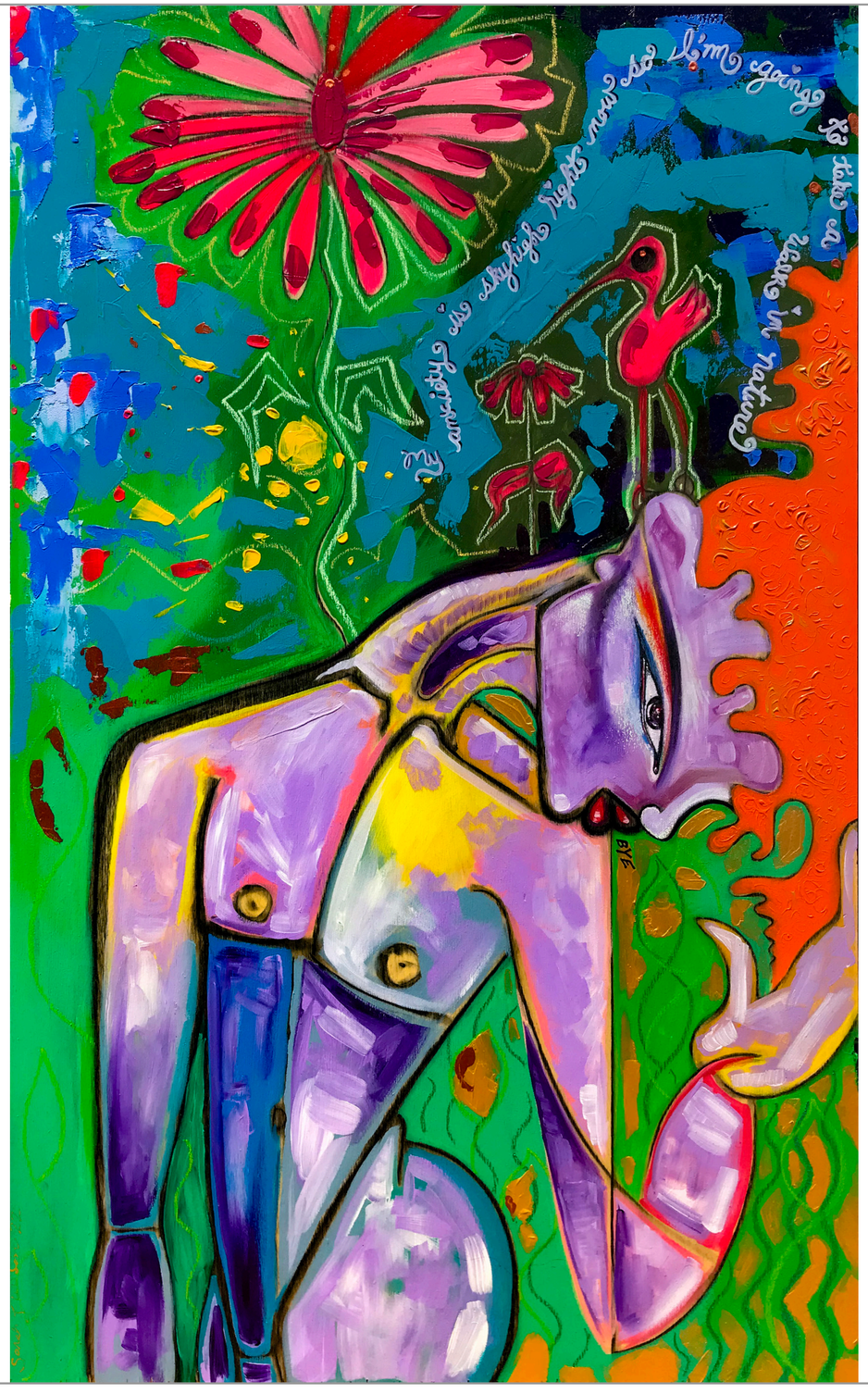
Sarah Louise Wilson

Earth Angel in Midtown & Birdie on a Walk

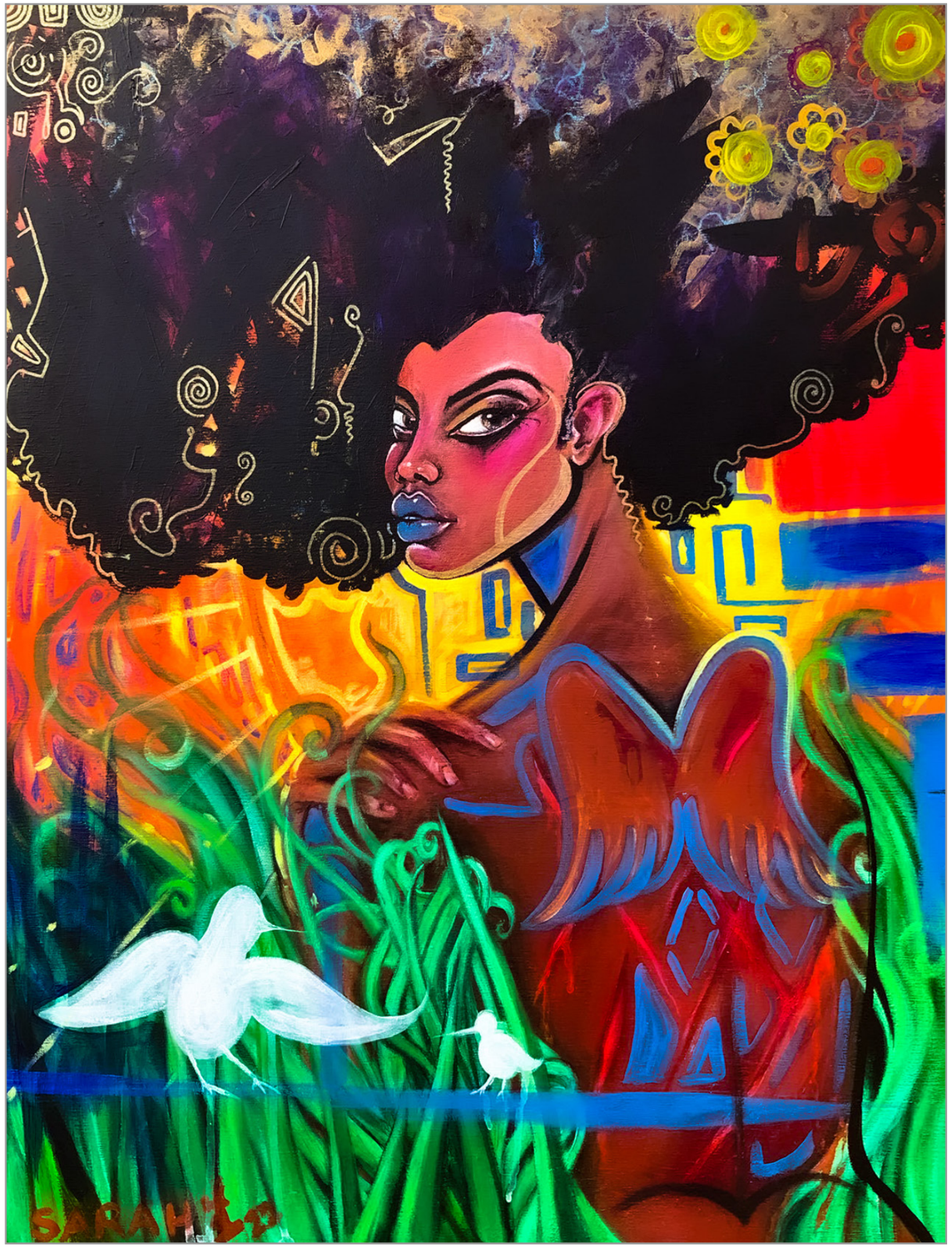
Sarah Louise Wilson is a California based artist. She writes, directs, teaches, paints, and acts. In 2006, she co-founded Stella Bella Productions with Mercedes LeAnza. There, she penned and starred in her pseudo-autobiographical romantic comedy "Jelly". It stars Natasha Lyonne (*Orange Is the New Black*) and Hollywood icon Ed McMahon. Jelly has since been released on Netflix, Hulu, PBS, and The Sundance Channel. The second film for Stella Bella Productions was The Accidental Death of Joey by Sue. The film premiered at the HBO Latino Film Festival and stars Mercedes LeAnza, Steve Talley, Lin Shaye, Ashley Fink, Caroline LeDuc, Ignacio Serricchio, Vanessa Libertad Garcia, and Merrill Davis. Throughout her career, Sarah has taught, wrote and directed short films, plays, music videos, documentaries— Anything she could get her hand on. In early 2016, while Sarah was living in Almaty, Kazakhstan, she shot *No Exit*, a feature film. The movie went on to win multiple awards. Her plays have been performed at The Walt Disney REDCAT theatre, California Institute of the Arts, and Artishok in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She has been featured in Esquire KZ, Variant Literature, Drunk Monkeys, The Huffington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Indiewire, Cosmopolitan, Variety, Diversions LA, and more.

The need to make something came from a place of overwhelming emotion. Some ideas—thoughts—feelings needed to be purged out of me. On the page is where the world began to make sense so it was to the page that I have always returned.

~Sarah Louise Wilson



Birdie on a Walk BY SARAH LOUISE WILSON



Earth Angel in Midtown BY SARAH LOUISE WILSON



Erin Cross

Epic Poem
&
Tempe Hymn

Erin Cross received her MFA in Visual Studies with a focus in multi-media studies. Her work has been published and exhibited nationally and internationally and resides in numerous private and public collections. Recently, her drawings have been published in The Poet's Touchstone, Women's United Art Magazine and Colored Pencil Magazine. A few of her favorite exhibition experiences have been at the Springfield Museum of Art in Springfield, MO, Rawls Museum Arts in Courtland, VA and Vespine Gallery in Chicago, Il. She was a 2021 shortlist recipient of the United Women's Art Prize and the awarded the 2021 Past President Award from the Pittsburgh Watercolor Society. Erin is currently a freelance artist and curator and resides in Lincoln, Nebraska.

My work communicates an ambiguous tension between viewer and the environment. Reflecting on the world I see and exist in, there is a visual potency in translating organic experiences and environments. As I create these dialogues, I allow for internal considerations between the realm of reality and fantasy, distorting and highlighting the interpretation within the visual elements. Composed of symbol driven narratives that focus on various aspects of connection and communication, I cultivate various scenarios within my work to assist in the engagement of dialogue between story and viewer. I often explore the power of juxtaposition through the ebb and flow of shape versus form. Overall, my art is an exploration of shape, color and various mark making methods through traditional, contemporary and experimental visualizations. I am interested in how far I can push the concept of what is a drawing or painting and what constitutes, "a mark." I translate my visual experiences as a narrative agent producing a lyrical movement and allowing dialogue between the elements and principles of design to interact within my various compositions.

~Erin Cross



Tempe Hymn BY ERIN CROSS



Epic Poem BY ERIN CROSS



La Quinceanera's Toys BY KATHY BRUCE

I am interested in how the poetic aspects of animal "nature" are interchangeable with psychological traits of humans. In these collages i am introducing the moment of hybridization in which animal and human nature merge.

~Kathy Bruce

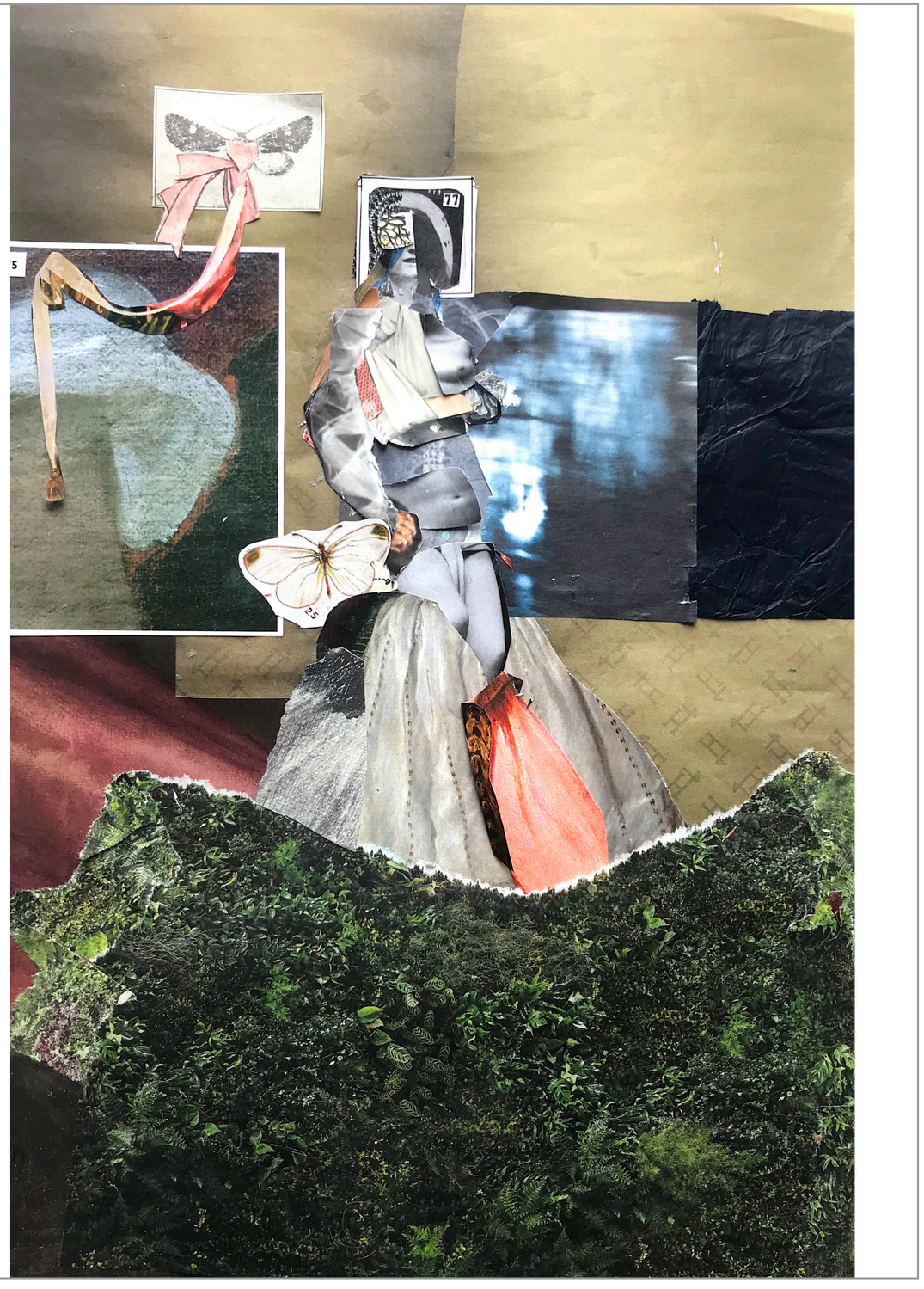
Kathy Bruce

La Quinceanera's Toys
Classification Series #3A & 3 Day of the Dead

Kathy Bruce is a visual artist based in Argyll & Bute, Scotland. Her work explores archetypal female and mythological forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment. Ms. Bruce is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Individual Artist Grant, 2 Fulbright-Hayes scholar grants to Peru and a Ford Foundation Grant. She has exhibited her work in the U.K., U.S. and internationally including Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada.



Classification Series #3A Day of the Dead BY KATHY BRUCE



Classification Series #3 Day of the Dead BY KATHY BRUCE

shahryar medi

celestial demon & incoherence happiness

Shahryar Medi **is a student living in the Islamic Republic Of Iran. A self described "painter without master" who started painting in 2015, but has had a lots of practical exercises and lots of background studies. Medi's paintings and graphic designs are paintings by a technique known as knife painting.**

ARTIST STATEMENT:
It may be difficult to undo all the layers of perception that have formed on the mind over time. My work is a paradoxical art between objective fact and subjective fact. Although my works are based on abstract form, and have not seen as a recognised form, this is not the same process as realistic art. I create art with composition and texture and form in mind and I always want to transfer the paradox between objective and subjective.

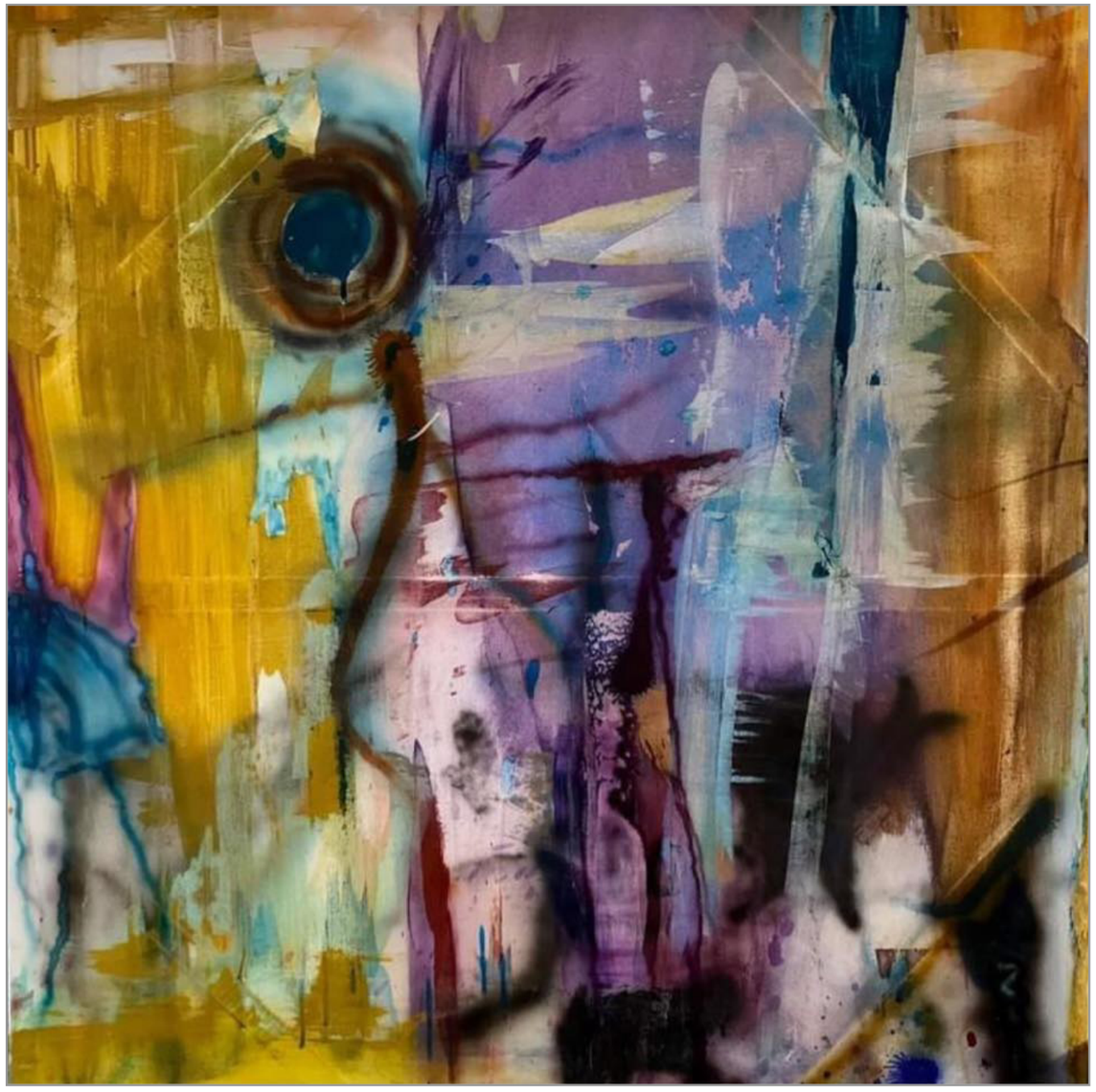
In fact, I was looking for a change at the form. I want to indicate that whatever I paint does not really exist in my mind or in real world, but I want to indicate the paradox that exist is between the real world and the virtual world. Most of the time I used to make texture by random for performing my works. I even use select colors at random until I reach to nearest position between subjective fact and objective fact.



celestial demon BY SHAHRYAR MEDI



incoherence happiness BY SHAHRYAR MEDI



Full Circle BY HEATHER WITKOWSKI

Heather Witkowski

Blindspot & Full Circle

Heather Witkowski is an emerging artist who lives in the Hudson Valley in New York State. She has synesthesia, a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathways. She hears sounds and feels strong emotions and is able to correlate these to painting vivid shapes and colors. During the pandemic, Witkowski developed her painting skills while listening to a friend's music and discovered that she was able to express feelings through art. Witkowski is currently painting a series of album covers for her friend, the musician Scott Chasolen.



Blindspot BY HEATHER WITKOWSKI

STONE IN THE STREAM | ROCA EN EL RIO

Ecopoetry

Stone in the Stream/Roca en el Rio

Prairie Fire

by Jean Hackett

Did you not know,
the grasses call me?
In dry, crackling whispers,
bluestem, muhly, and purple three awn
beg me to consume cluttered husks and dry leaves,
useless as nests after chicks have fledged.
You understand only what you see-
in the moments I flail and grasp all within reach,
charging forth in a charring apocalypse
I am unstoppable, unbridled,
a trespasser determined
to cross roads and cities
you have sculpted in sand and soil.
But it is your attempts
to contain my cleansing rituals
that devastate the land.
I move with quick purpose,
tracing down juniper and cherry trunks
to cull parasites
and low-growing woody invaders,
so greenery can rise
from deep-rooted slumber.
Tall grasses embrace me,
an emissary of their Prairie God,
angrily conflagrant only
when you force them
to submit to your religion
of plows and fences.

Biophilia

by Darby Riley

Our bodies dissipate into the Earth
and are reborn constantly – we melt
into nature, it melts into us.
Every being is always becoming.
All are connected to each other.
The myth of our separateness is
extinguishing life, our "dominion"
over nature a fatal misread
of our sacred kinship with all creatures.
Humans thrive even in the arctic by
knowing and loving it. In caring for
our home places, we can re-find ourselves.

Adulescentia

by Zan Green

The woods
our ears
primed for
listening
and our
strides glad
of rhythm
And we went
there for
the oaks
for their leaves
and their
ladders
(especially
the sturdier
ones) whose
canopies
welcomed us
For it was
elders who'd
lived there
when
the elk bulls
rutted
and the air
filled with
bugles
or when
bears used
to roam
or—even,
occasional
lynxes
And we
went there
for the
shadows
(amongst
them, a
cat-ghost)
its temper-
ament—
(skittish)
so, all we'd
ever see of it
were legs
speeding by us
or the tips
of its
pointy ears
And we
went there
for a
red bird
(the adults
called him
robin)
no taller
than a
teacup
yet color
gave him
courage
And we saw
his patch
protected
by the
sabering
of his chest
And we
went there
for the clearings
full of wood
doves
and warmth
rushing over
them in sun's
lovely wrap
and for
brambles
(and their
hiding places)
and bogs
like an ogre
(with a love
of wellington
boots)
and their
belly sounds
like burps
And we
went there
for the mosses
and their
1960's rugs
and for fungi
(often hidden)
where the sight
of them
meant ROT
yet buried
was a brain
connecting
all that sur-
rounded us
which on
the surface
(seemed solo)
that even
the oak trees
got trained on
allowing
threats to be
messaged
such as the
coming of
a tree-virus
And we
went there
for schooling
trawling with
our fishing nets
our leftover
beach buckets
streams full
of sticklebacks
whose spikes
made us drop
them—
for the slows
and the rapids
(which
belonged to
the flow of
things)
and for
hidey-holes
(mostly side-
channels—
chiseled-out
deeper)
where all
kinds of
creatures lived:
snails like
scuba divers
(who
siphoned
their own
air bubbles)
And if we
were lucky
a newt
or two
(their bodies
like lizards
and for
diving beetle
(a sub)
with a
mayfly
in its sights
And we
went there
for the pools
in search of
tiny hoppers
(tho' we never
did catch one—
since hoppers
hastily left)
yet what joy
we felt when
spawn got
delivered
the ponds
draped in
jelly (over
time—their
dots getting
bigger), like
apostrophes
on legs
And we
went there
for the bracken
their canopies
like caves
and for their
rapturous
radical greens
which as
the dazzle
broke—
turned neon
(Even
raining
we went)
unlike in
a dream—
its holiness
was obvious
to all of us
just kids

Poetry Selected by Voices de la Luna

Guest Editor Lisha Garcia

Black Iron Skillet

by Frank Jamison

Black as night, as black as say, pitch
or soot or boot polish or a cave.
How black can cold iron get and still
be warm like a quilt or a fireside
or a mother's heart beating in time
to all the dreams she birthed and nursed
like they were her own flesh and blood?
The strength of nations in those arms
that held every baby the world ever saw,
and stirred every batter ever poured
into a black iron skillet, smoking with heat
and fat and some of those dreams
as she mixed and stirred and sweated
over the outcome like this might be
the only chance she'd ever have
to turn out cornbread golden as sunshine,
glowing with heat as she turns
the world's great delicacy onto the plate.
Cornbread and family built by strong arms
and tears and some dreams shoved away
to wait like the black iron skillet
for another chance at heat and fire
in the knowledge that she is the world's

At a Supermarket Parking Lot and Beyond

by Joseantónio Contreras

July 10, 2022

See the exaggerated left-right wobble of an old man's gait
as he approaches a supermarket's entrance
and meager forward progress for such extraordinary effort.

See how tightly he grips a shopping cart,
to steady his unconventional canter
avoid impatiently passing cars.

See persistent pain somewhere in his feet, knees, or hips
safely concealed in his mind but begrudgingly revealed
by sweat on his weathered, melancholy face.

See layers of facial ephemera on his eyeglasses
and the blueish white of cataracts' clouds
conspire to obscure the clarity of his vision.

See him search from aisle to aisle
for a green-aproned anyone to show the way
to something needed but obscurely stocked.

See him shift his head up, down, then up and down again
adjusting hopelessly dependent bifocal vision to discern
prices on groceries shelved too high and too low too.

See how he stumbles at the self-check,
missing his neighborhood's family-owned store,
its short stacks of grease penciled cans,
and covey of grocery store boys
to carry full paper bags to his car.

Essentially Tremorous

by Joseantónio Contreras

June 19, 2023

A late-stage octogenarian sitting solo
in an ophthalmologist's reception,
attracts then holds my attention as I wait
to drive a friend's dilated eyes home
.
The elder fights a rebellious right hand,
desperate to stop its shaking so that
the hovering pencil he erratically points
lands in his choice of eighty-one squares.

I see too a cane, leaning against his hip,
with miniature statuettes lining its length.
Each is a sculptured figurine, hand-carved,
perfectly polished, exquisitely unique.

But eyes can't help but jump from cane
to images of mottled malignance
on the old man's near naked legs,
pain-painted patches, etched by time.

A friendly female's voice calls a name
but no one moves including he who owns it.
Having only partially heard,
the old man only partially responds.

He raised his eyes at the name's first mention.
At the second he sips first from bottled water,
doubtful it's he they really call
and returns to pencil and puzzle.

His third reply, to a now strident,
and clearly frustrated summons,
is a kinesthetic metaphor that mocks
the swiftness of sloths and tranquility of squirrels.

With great intent he deliberately exchanges
pencil, puzzle, water and cane from hand to hand,
eventually putting Sudoku in one pocket,
uncapped bottle of water in the other.

He positions the cane before him,
then using it and an armrest to balance,
leans what seems too far forward,
forcing his wobbly legs to stand.

Pseudo erectus begins a three-part ambulation,
Cane, leg, leg. Cane, leg, leg. Cane, leg, leg.
Building sluggish slow-mentum,
he moves monotonously on.

He does not speak but I definitely hear
delightful reflections about other times
when as a carefree little boy
he ran everywhere, for the sheer joy of running.

Taking Stock

by Joseantónio Contreras

August 2, 2019

An elderly man stands gripping an almost empty shopping cart fifteen feet from a bank of check-out counters, waiting and apparently worried. He has a lost, almost frantic look about him as with slightly trembling arms, he grips his cart, looking first over one shoulder as if expecting someone to appear, then with mouth agape, turns to scan beyond the other. No one comes. He pauses only momentarily before repeating the search. Several minutes later, he stands there still alone, still looking for someone, still distraught.

Another elder, a tall man with a frame as imposing as his posture, marches back and forth giving orders to faces visible only to him, in a voice as loud and insistent as it is commanding. Visitors to the unit experience the moment off-putting, while residents enmeshed in their own private struggles, some real but of ancient occurrence, others imaginary but currently pressing, move about, without taking notice.

An octogenarian stands before a lavatory in a public restroom, washing pants he should be wearing. Without soap or brush he rubs one pantleg over the other, desperately trying to remove feces he wished he had controlled. An acrid smell fills the room as he works the cloth, increasingly aware of the cooling excrement running down his legs and the dead silence of men gathering behind him, not commenting, unwilling to offend. He holds constant his lowered gaze, as resolutely as do the men behind hold theirs, all unwilling to let eyes lift, lest they meet in the mirror before them.

What kind word might I have shared, what gentle gesture might I have made to let each man know he was not alone? What could I have done then that I wish I could do now to let each man know, I know his value?

How could I help each man appreciate that I understood? You were once a healthy self-sufficient man, you were once an exuberant youth, a playful child, a loveable newborn baby.

Do I touch them?
Or is it really me
I'm trying to console?

Auricular

by Will Sharp

I.
At the Arter, Cevdet
Erek showed us precisely which
combinations of swipes, curlicues, zigzags,
and ups-and-downs of palms
pressed flat against carpet
best mimic the sounds of crashing
sea.— Do you hear it?
Give it a second. You'll hear it. Here:
to fatten the coffer of the mind's
ear, I offer these sounds in addition,
with instructions along the way:
II.
First, rain. Regular rain. But nineteen hours of it:
Drag a fingernail on the carpet, for as many hours,
ensuring your day is done.
A coterie of müezzins droning—courteously suspirant—god is greatest moments before dawn:
Drag your fist, slowly, underneath the carpet.
And later those same singers' strident evening songs
colliding, redolent, in the gulch at the base of the scarp
and counterscarp of staggered homes of Cihangir:
With every limb, flail on the carpet until you hear more than just
the sounds you make.
The strained breathing of the big, and slim, who pretend to find unending
charm in the neverending stairs of that same borough:
With one hand's fingertips, intermittent, short drags;
tap steadily with the free hand.
Three seagulls guffawing—some inside joke; then one, so inland and alone,
that instead of squawking caterwauls:
[Instructions redacted.]
The fizzy pour of Beypazarı.—But more than one,
to annoy Elif, who insists that's too much salt:
Like the rain, but more delicate, this time
for seconds instead of hours.
And finally the word for whether you're the ones we weren't able to turn into Muslims,
its daunting concatenation of suffixes appended on end without end:
Tap with your left ring finger the morse code
for "there is no god

but"

samsara

by Jacob Friesenhahn

like fireflies they float
glowing orbs circling above
sticky sparks craving
a place to land
or content to wait
for the chosen moment
of conception

teens in the back seat
of their parents' cars
married couples not expecting
anything new
a man positioning
himself just behind
a woman

many may be in shock
ripped out
from their former bodies
desperate to submerge
themselves again
chased by dragons
monsters on patrol
in the darkness
between worlds
a few departed in peace
in peace now they search
for new homes or drift
forever away

all of them are stars
of Bethlehem
watched by the wise
traveling night after night
drawn down
only by the heat
of bodies entangled
flesh alive
enough to tingle
and spasm
flesh warm
and wet
calling to lights
beyond the sky

İcadiye

by Will Sharp

The leaves of the sycamores
which line İcadiye
quickly aggregate
into a wall of fall gold
behind which the amazingly steep
neighborhood roads of Üsküdar
wind and charm and bend and go
to the Boğazı's bank—there
the viticulture cliché
what grows together goes together
reflected in the way
the swatches of silver
on the quarrelsome gulls' backs
reflect the querulous silver
of the rain-ready sky

A Snatch Of Dusk, Then Song

by Will Sharp

The tallest home
of the counterscarp of homes
that with the scarp bearing mine
forms a gulch in Cihangir
wore a pink halo,
dusk's sole show
after 36 hours of rain
just before a congress
of ghosts flooded
the gulch with moans
declaring god is greatest,
the many-fold amplification,
from each direction's
megaphonic müezzin.

Marigolds always lead me to you

BY OSMANI R. ALCARAZ-OCHOA

(for my grandparents, on Día de los Muertos)

Part I. Don Raúl
It's carved / In my memory / Su rostro / Voz / Manos trabajadoras / Que forjaron / Nuevos mundos / De este lado / Brown martian / Landing from the other side / His disabled ears / Wounded gradually / From the loudness / of the logging / saw machines / The disposable labor / Filled USA lumber mill fábricas / While withstanding / 1960's white supremacist / rural California
.
Part II. Doña Esther
Recuerdo las batas / Floreadas de mi abuelita / Her reading glasses / But don't let her TV Notas / And TV y Novelas magazines fool you / She could school you / On the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo / And how it came to be / That we were foreigners / In lands that weren't foreign / To us
/ That long ago / She lamented that / And the latest Middle Eastern war / Or genocide / She knew it was the same thing / With different people / in different times / I have yet to taste again / Your refried beans con longaniza / And the perfect / Freshly-squeezed orange juice / You had ready every morning /

Part III. Don Arnoldo
"¡Quiero!" / I'd hear a child customer / Yell at my abuelito / As she'd go up the steps / To get the groceries for her mom / Don Arnoldo / Would use the scooper / And weigh the beans / En su tienda de abarrotes / And jot down / how much her mom owed him / He was the town's first entrepreneur / And sold fresh milk / Ordeñada de sus vacas / 100% organic and pasture-raised / Before any pretentious certifications / And way before machines / neo-liberalism and NAFTA / Invaded our farms and fields / I was a toddler / En el rancho / With messy black curls / When he'd sit me atop a cow / And gave me a white mustache / From the chocomil / Con alcohol (Para matar a los microbios, of course) /

Part IV. Doña Catalina
My grandmother / was an early riser / She'd make us queso fresco / And the smell / Of her corn tortillas / Was a surviving nod / to our genetic memory / Ella siempre portaba un mandil / a veces de color azul / y barría el pueblo chico / infierno grande / Until one day / She collapsed / en la vereda / on Cinco de Mayo / During her daily routine / May 5th / 1862 / An outnumbered rag-tag/ Army of Mexican resistance/
Sent shivers / Down the spines / Of Maximiliano y Carlota and
Napoleon / We defeated six-thousand French troops / Deported them / Back to Europe / Where"

"they came from / But diabetes and the heart / Were a battle my grandma did not win / She'd tell us stories / Of hearing la Llorona / Some nights / Woman hollering / from a nearby creek / I dreamt of them / Holding their rosaries / While chanting / Weeping and dancing / In eternity / Together / En el río / Donde ví a una señora / Catrina / Flotando / Bajando / al lado del Puente / Disappearing into the river / Under a full moon /

Part V. Prologue or Reflexiones sobre Mictlán
Fleeting memories / of real-life / magical realism / A part of my heart / Migrated with each / Of my abuelitos / You took segments of my past / To Mictlán / Or somewhere / Flying as a cloud / Or a beaming spaceship / Hovering / Waiting / To capture / a future version of me / Sus fotos / En mi ofrenda / De dia de Muertos / No faltan / The atheist in me / Still believes / In your prayers
/ To la Virgen de Guadalupe / And in your presence / Despite your absence / Despite the blackness / Of the night / The light / Of different realms / clashes / Like soft / Pacific Ocean waves / Greeting my feet / Mis pies hundidos / En la arena Jaliscience / Con una raíz invisible / Aunque de pronto / la memoria falle / El detalle de su rostro / Y sus susurrus / Reach me / Across space / And time / Through their pale and bronze / Double chin / Through la mirada / De sus ojos cafés / manos arrugadas / y temblorosas / I am sustained / On your shoulders / Until the end of me / And beyond / I close my eyes / Extend my hands / In front of me / Like if I believed / In a Catholic God / or in Mexica deities / And the wind / Caresses the / Scorching fire / of the petals / Guiding the way / Your whispers /
Eco across dimensions /

And the marigolds always /
Lead me /
to you /"

this lot

BY CORBETT BUCHLY

these battered cars
paint flaking in the sun
these dash ornaments
faded jesus and cthulhu
tassel and bare dice
these beaded seats
grid of steel mesh
breaking out of rubber treads
ready to challenge the road
cracks across chipped glass
you cannot reupholster a living cell
we may be weathered and ungaraged
but we have miles to go
before the crusher can have its way
we have untold miles to go
unwritten unpaved

# of things

BY CORBETT BUCHLY

when I have need for an item acquired
realize it hides among the detritus
I mount the expedition into home
to re-discover the lost artifact
warranty, staple, inflatable raft
for days at the shore – my life of things has forged
a new frontier as of yet uncharted
I for one lack the courage to conquer
sometimes it is necessary to need
and not obtain to feel the want settle
over me a heavy wooden mantle
of deep green need. my bearings lost, shadows
grow amid the pines this hunger grows cold
and restless in my belly – press on

Absence

BY LINDEN VAN WERT

This is how it begins
the underneath dust upon the floor
definitely a light coat of not-quite color
schema of between distances
a pale scribble of webs
rocker to floor to sill
elaborating itself
while the light—
a hypotenuse—
sun to wood
seemingly
pauses.
And this chair
where you used to read—
as three bandoliers of light shift slowly up its spokes
as the sun lowers
as the leaf shadows dust their hands again and again
as the wind sends its breath through the mulberries
as the house shifts, one tick and then another
as the neighbor's saw roars, stutters, stops
as the cars pass in a quiet bell of sound
as the distant airliner rumbles, fades
as the clouds drift
as I sit—
is still.

Transit from Rose to Marigold

BY TRICIA KNOLL

Held-tight bud, a satin skin of bloom
first lights May. White on white
night glint on sugar moon rose.
Love did not wither. Summer rises
again like lips held out for kisses.
Then long heat and the hiding
of the marigold, little stalk
swells to full, the creep
to Day of the Dead
as roses mildew and
leaves curl.
Marigolds stand up
so even in early dusk,
their orange coins
invitations to remember
soothsayers who mumbled
soothing words on the boat
to the other side.

Saying Good-Bye On Zoom

BY DOUGLAS TWELLS

for Dad, 1929-2020

Our sister—they'd let her in—had cut
his hair while he was asleep. He looked
better, but better than what? Someone—

Liz, or maybe the aid, we couldn't tell—
held up the iPad so he could see
with high-tech help my brother and me.

Mark took his outside to give us
a look at his new (old) Vette
and the antique signs he'd found

at the museum in Bowling Green.
Then we remembered the Mini—'64,
a real Cooper S, how they'd come up

to Hyde Park, stayed with us, then
went to look it over and finally buy it.
Car guys—his legacy to us. Car talk.

Safe talk. Dad engaged, commenting,
remembering, enjoying the visit. Finally,
direct, no mincing words, he said,

"I'm feeling pretty tuckered out now . . ."
and it was obvious. He was.
His voice weak, halting, hoarse.

Looking gray, frail, eyes heavy. Head
nodding. Oxygen line draped up
under his nose . . . then, "You fellas . . .

[gasp] behave yourselves . . . [gasp].
And if you can't . . . [gasp]
behave yourselves, at least . . . [gasp]
have a good time . . . [gasp]
along the way." Our sister says, "Dad,
are those your last words to them?"

Then, in the background, just to him
(but we heard), "Tell them you love them . . . ."
Old slide-rule engineer? Everything

and anything mechanical—cables,
gears, hydraulics, buckets, booms,
blades, transfer cases—lift loads,

move and drill earth, even shove
snow . . . love? And the PTSD . . .
suppressed so deep no one guessed—

until they found him on the floor again,
this time shoulder broken. Why?
Diving under heavy fire into a foxhole.

The fire? Just another spring storm.
Things you don't say, never admit, not
if you're a hardened-by-battle vet

from a Forgotten War. No! There
would be no "I love you, Boys."
Honoring him and his last breath,

we too stuck to the code. Who
needed to hear what we already knew?

Death's Prosperity

BY HIMANGINI PURI

You know why they say death is peace?
Maybe it's because we can finally stop arguing with the people we love.
Maybe it's because we can finally stop wanting more from life.

Maybe it's because our voices are finally low enough for no one to hear them,
maybe it's because we're finally far enough for nobody to bother us.
Maybe it's because we've gained something the living haven't.

Maybe it's because the monsters you're scared of,
have finally come to your door and you've joined their family.

Perhaps, it's because the legend that says our late ones are
watching over us finally becomes reality.
Perhaps, it's because we finally know whether they are up there or not.
Perhaps, it's because we gain the sweet satisfaction of reuniting with our happy endings.

And maybe it's also possible that we finally become someone's guardian angel,
looking out for them.
It definitely sounds more peaceful than here, than now.

A dance for the dead

Draw the curtains,
c'mon don't look.
I don't see anything,
not the chaos, not the calm.
I see buildings, blocking my view of the sea and the sunset.

My phone notifies me that there've been more deaths, of people I once knew.
of loved ones' close few.
I hear a bird in my kitchen,
it flew in through the window.
The same window through which I see nothing.

But then I notice the buildings once more,
I see a window where a woman is holding a man as he weeps in her arms.
Above it, a window where on the TV, IPL was on.
My phone notifies me that Faye D'souza disapproves of the sport in this present scenario. I agree.

A cool breeze drives in through the same window, this time bringing the sea with it.
I smell the salt, the fish, the sea.
My phone rings and it's my mother,
asking me for the 6th time if I'm doing okay today.
"I'm alright maa, relax!"

"I Can't Stand Losing You" by The Police plays on my iPad
as I slowly pour my below-average chai into my cup.
I groove to the beat and dance away to my couch.
My phone rings once more, another death, another fight, another betrayal.

I keep dancing to rejoice for the lives that once lived on this Earth,
who sacrificed themselves, for reasons unknown to them.

'maybe it was their time'
'maybe the virus was too strong'
'there was nothing more we could do'
'we ran out of oxygen'
'we ran out of time'
'there were no beds available'
'we got scammed'
...

They left, and I rejoice for their lives as I sway away in my privilege-
my privilege for being able to stay at home.

Because maybe they couldn't, and so they died...almost as if to save me.

Thank you.

The Crossing

BY KATHRYN JONES

My ancestry includes a Southern slave owner and a West African slave. A DNA analysis revealed I mostly am European, but also am part Senegalese. This poem is an imagining of an ancestor whose name I may never know, but whose blood flows in me.

I am riding on an ocean I've never seen before,
feeling the rising and falling, the terrible heaving of the sea.

I hear the roar of wind and crash of water,
blinking my eyes, trying to see in this dark tomb,

feeling briny water splashing on my face,
then realizing a man, delirious from days without food,

is pissing on me. If I could escape, I would hurl myself
into the waves, free from the stench that gags me,

from the moans of people hungry, thirsty, dying,
from the manacled bodies sweating and writhing.

I wonder where my sister is, my brother,
my mother, my father. They would not take

my grandmother, blind in one eye, hobbling on a cane,
although she begged them to seize her and not me.

Who will care for her now? I hear her weeping
in my soul. I've cried an ocean inside this ark of evil,

but still it will not sink. I am adrift, anchorless,
homeless, parentless, hopeless. I am nobody now

in this cage on the water. No one knows my name
or cares what it is. I have nothing left but memory

that I will cling to like a jewel or even a shred of bread,
never forgetting where I come from and who I am.

Maybe someday, someone will tell my story to the world.
Maybe I will have a daughter or a son,

and they will have daughters and sons who will go back
across this ocean and find that tiny village

where my grandmother likely died after we were taken.
Will that place even exist? Will my past be erased? Will I?

No, they can uproot me from my home, my family,
they can sell me, take my body, torture me,

even kill me, but they cannot take away my birthright,
my dignity, my soul and, most of all, my humanity.

The day of reckoning will come and someday,
a descendant whose name I will never know will find me;

Then the world will know about a girl from Senegal
who once was free and will be free again in a drop of blood.

Hurd Burial Ground

BY LDA

In the shadow of St. Katherine's in Alton
lies a tiny graveyard
barely noticed by parishioners,
the occasional truck on the local road
the only modern disturbance nearby.
Broken gravestones tell their stories
in fragments, piece by piece,
as we pick our way among them.

The bones of Adella Hurd, seventeen, rest
behind Emeline Hurd, who a generation before
died seven weeks shy of her tenth birthday.
Beside Emeline, her little cousin, Mary, had made it
to two years, ten months, and twenty days.

Here they all are, together inside their earth.
One can't help but wonder
what took these young souls,
if they were sweet like their names
or headstrong, driving their parents mad.

The stone over Emeline's remains reads
Daughter of Henry and Lydia
– Henry and Lydia Hurd, who had already lost
a baby girl fourteen years before, and another
daughter,
age five, just a year before Emeline's birth.

And yet here are some who lived
to sixty-five, eighty-eight, ninety:
grandmother Sally Tibbetts Hurd, born in 1779,
who lived past the end of the Civil War.
In her lifetime, the world at large leapt forward
in science, politics, literature, and art.

But here, in the New Hampshire countryside,
just up the hill from Alton Bay, the Hurds –
unknown farmers whose life was the soil
and the life they could coax from it despite
winters without mercy – lived and loved
and wept and buried their dead in obscurity,
their stories of sickness and stillbirth, lives
cut off early, unnoticed by the turning, bustling, world,
its revolutions and couplings, the leaf-fall and breaking
of branches in winter, the sproutlings pushing
through germ and earth, mere notes in a rhythm.

Sometimes – listen – their pace can be heard
in a pause in the sunshine in early spring,
when all is quiet, even the wind, and all is still,
even time, and the living stop for a moment
all their moving and breathe in, and the departed
sleep soundly below.

Midnight, Cape San Blas

BY FRANK JAMISON

I am the only human on twenty miles of beach;
Scorpio is rising, Jupiter crosses zenith,
stars wink out one after one as a cloud bank
hurries on the twenty-knot breeze.
I left my bed to do this, stand in the wind,
surf at my feet, soul in the midst of God.

Yesterday, I wanted to be like a child, my face
in the grass, the wind in my left ear,
a cricket in front of my nose.
Today, I will run between raindrops,
stopping to stick out my tongue,
hoping to taste the essence of heaven.

Manila North

BY ISABEL LEGARDA

In the north cemetery
a makeshift village –
sari-sari stores in abandoned crypts,
gawkers eating chocolate-covered ice cream bars
as someone is laid to rest,
children playing in the street.

One of the old-timers has a key
to a pyramidal mausoleum
at the far end of a tree-lined avenue.
The entire family tree is here –
ancestors only known by name,
their bodies in fragments,
their hurts forgotten.

Outside, the sunlight is bright
over cemetery villagers
sweeping leaves. Untold stories
haunt the air, moving through the crypts
like breath, whispering, their secrets
rippling through the living
and the dead.

In Black

BY BENJAMIN NASH

It was a blue moon last night.
The people in black remind
me of crows waiting to eat
corn early in the morning.
They are in line next to the
bridge, the Honduran food
truck, and the parking lot
where they found a dead
body in a car. They are not
going to a funeral. Most of
these men and women are
immigrants. They will work
all day in hotels and
restaurants. They will return
home to their apartments
tired. They cannot afford
to buy a car. Someone
wrote "stop gentrification"
close by on a concrete wall.
It is coming. It passes over
the bridge where the people
sleep at night under it. It
stops. One by one they get
on. I see a few smiles. They
find their seats. The blue bus
pulls out slowly and heads
on to downtown under a blue sky.

Book Reviews

In Search of Venusian Oceans,

by Matthew Tavares

REVIEW BY REGGIE SCOTT YOUNG

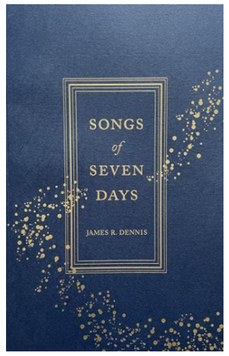


In Matthew Tavares's *In Search of Venusian Oceans*, poems that illustrate an outward gaze by the author are still deeply introspective. These are poems rooted in Tavares' love of poets from the past whose works are grounded in a lyricism that is often drowned out today by bombastic sounds of slam and other types of performance poetry. This is not to say that the poems do not perform well when read aloud by the poet, but that they are more likely to generate thoughtful reflections from listeners than ruckus finger snaps and verbal outcries from audiences wanting to be entertained. Tavares's poems do entertain, however, but they come across more like soulful wails from a Stan Getz or John Coltrane saxophone solo than hip-hop influenced rhymes that impress more for their sound than meaning.

Tavares is a young San Antonio poet and *In Search of Venusian Oceans* is his first volume, issued by Defunkt Press in Houston. Despite the water imagery from a distant planet in the title, the poems remain grounded as they finger still-live nerves from experiences that are assuaged only through the poet's writing. And there is plenty of fine writing to be found in the slim volume, including lines such as … when I draw you on the margins of books, the closest I can get to your face is water stains on a car window

This anticipates the poet telling us "I had to leave" because "all the vows / are ashes now on a barstool."The poems in the volume illustrate how painful episodes in life often outweigh triumphs. Instead of allowing his own painful episodes from the past to define him, Tavares uses them as source material for poems that have the potential to encourage us to ruminate beyond the words on the page and interrogate aspects of our shared humanity. These are honest poems, including "Nightmare" in which the poet recalls a dream in which his daughter's grandfather appears, leading him to admit that he cheated on the child's mother with a woman he would eventually marry and quickly divorce. The poem concludes with the further admission that "I don't / kiss his grandchild every morning / before she walks further and further / into herself."

Tavares's poems will lead some of us as readers to recall poets from the past who are now remembered primarily from their inclusion in college literary surveys: Sylvia Plath, LeRoi Jones (the poet before he became known as Amiri Baraka), Charles Olson, Lucille Clifton, Charles Bukowski, and Jack Gilbert, to name a few. Like Gilbert, one of Tavares's primary influences, Tavares' poems would not look out of place in an anthology of Beat or Black Mountain poetry. Unlike the previously mentioned image of a face etched in water stains on a window, the poems in Tavares' volume are clear, tight, neatly drawn, and full of images that are often surprising, while wrapped in a lyrical package of language. It is not a book that you merely read and discard; instead, it is a book that you will want to pick up again (and again) because the poet's search is capable of leading readers into flights of their own, even to the mythical healing waters of a distant planet.



Songs of Seven Days,

by James R. Dennis

REVIEW BY MARLA DIAL MOORE

If *Songs of Seven Days* (New Beginnings Press, 2023) is your first poetic encounter with James R. Dennis, you might be forgiven if you'd quickly skimmed his bio, locked in on the concept of "Dominican friar" that you'd see listed there, and assumed his latest title is a book of stiff, albeit reverential, religious poetry. His last collection, *Listening Devices* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2021), *did* win an International Book Award in that category.

But to rest on any assumption of starched religiosity would be to miss out on a body of work that is at once easily accessible, relatable and thoughtful – a meditation on the creative process that is only loosely framed by the structure of the Biblical creation story. Its sections are appropriately named for each day of that story, with poems inspired by the creation of light; the earth, seas and plants; the sun, moon and stars, and so forth.

In Dennis's hands, a theme such as the creation of light ("Songs of the First Day") becomes by turns a visual study of the quality of light prismed

(...cont. pg 48)

Dennis's treatment of these topics reads like a poetic travelogue by someone in love with nature, whose imagination stretches from the West Texas skies of his childhood to tropical archipelagos and far beyond.

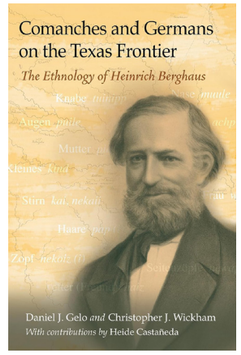
Consider, for example, these lines from "Ice Worlds" (Songs of the Fourth Day), examining (among other attractions of the solar system) the frozen moons of Neptune and the giant red spot of Jupiter,*which is actually a storm that measures*
about ten thousand miles in length
and has lasted for hundreds of years.
The weather there is even worse than Lubbock...

At the emotional level, the writing betrays a rapacious curiosity about both the physical world around us and the forces that govern it, leavened with generous doses of humor and a deep sense of social justice and compassion. No acrimony exists between the worlds of science and spirit, which merely inform and complement each other. And though *Songs* is seldom overtly political, such commentary – where present – is judiciously placed and on-point.

Genetically, they say we have
a common ancestor, a woman
they like to call it Mitochondrial Eve.
Maybe it was her idea
to skedaddle, to pack up
our prehistoric things and leave.

It seems we were born
out of restlessness, in search of
someplace new...
(From "Saudade")

Finally, the artistic collaboration between the author and his designer, Lana Rigsby, has rendered a visually gorgeous book that you will want in your own collection. From cover to cover – including internal artwork, typeface and epigraphs – no narrative detail has been left to chance or gone unexamined.



Comanches and Germans on the Texas Frontier: The Ethnology of Heinrich Berghaus by Daniel J. Gelo & Christopher J. Wickham

REVIEW BY JONATHAN FLETCHER

That Berghaus' ethnological research was not conducted in isolation and carries relevance for those outside the field. Indeed, Berghaus's work proved part and parcel of the German Romantic movement (drawing especially on the research of German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt), directly influenced the development of American anthropology (particularly the work of Franz Boas, a German-American pioneer of modern anthropology), had a profound impact on the growth and direction of linguistics (especially the work of American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf), and possibly (albeit minimally and no less unfortunately) contributed to the philosophy and politics German expansionism, culminating in the murderous aims and implementation of National Socialism.

Needless to say, Gelo and Wickham's rich analysis of Berghaus's ethnological research carries implications for not only ethnologists, anthropologists, literary critics, linguists, historians, and academics from fields that might initially seem unrelated or only tangentially related to such rich ethnological work. Notwithstanding the relevance and applications of Gelo and Wickham's research to other fields. Comanches and Germans in Texas on the Texas Frontier is not reducible to mere analysis; it also includes the authors' English translation of Berghaus's 1851 Ethnological Article, Geographisches Jahrbuch (Geographic Yearbook), as well as a Comanche-German-English glossary and Berghaus's maps, each accompanied by the authors' own critical commentary.

To read Gelo's and Wickham's examination of Berghaus's ethnology is to not only understand the political, social, economic, and cultural factors that played a role in the colonization and development of what is now considered Central Texas but to gain a glimpse into the history, politics, economy, and culture of pre-revolutionary Europe. As Gelo and Wickham early on identify as one of the primary motivations for the emigration of Germans to Texas, "Overpopulation and resulting poverty among the peasantry and lower middle in the states, duchies, and principalities that made up Germany in the early and mid-nineteenth century. . .with the increasing danger of social unrest and revolution as an additional stimulus." (Gelo and Wickham 8)

There were other motivations for the German émigrés, not least of which included the prospect of land ownership and the availability of communal services: "Three hundred and twenty acres…promised to each family and 160 to each single man, also provisions and supplies until the first harvest, as well as housing, churches, schools, and medical care" (ibid. 10).

In short, whether motivated to escape a politically volatile situation in Europe or drawn toward Texas for the promise of land and communal stability (or, for that matter, both), many Germans chose to emigrate to Central Texas. Obviously aware of the colonial nature of the German emigration and settlement, Gelo and Wickham, to their credit, acknowledge the nationalistic motivations of the Adelsverein (a German organization that sponsored German émigrés to the United States), despite its insistence to the contrary (ibid. 8, 9).

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Moreover, the authors also and readily acknowledge the colonial gestures of the aristocratic Adelsverein: the profit-making nature of the transnational venture, the planned Germanization of neighboring regions, and the renaming of places after German towns and surnames (prime examples being the toponyms New Braunfels and Fredericksburg, named for the hometown of the first general commissioner and the then-Prince of Prussia, respectively), etc. (ibid. 11).

Nevertheless, despite the likely expansionist motivations of the Adelsverein, even the German settlers themselves, they seem to have enjoyed better relations with the Comanches, as Gelo and Wickham also highlight in their analysis of Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels' positive characterization of the Comanches, in whom he sees a potential ally against the Americans (ibid. 18).

As much attention as the authors pay to the political, social, economic, and cultural factors that led to German emigration to Texas during the nineteenth century, Gelo and Wickham also devote equally careful attention (if less pages in total) to the Comanches themselves. As the authors note, the Comanches originated from the West (unlike the Sioux and Cheyenne), proved themselves among the first Native Americans to master the horse (an animal introduced by the Spanish), and displaced and decimated the Apache and Tonkawa, respectively (ibid. 1). More than merely providing a mini primer on the history and culture of the Apache, however, Gelo and Wickham also explore the social, political, economic, and spiritual significance of the Texan geography, outlining the reasons why such a region appealed to various peoples and thus a historical source of conflict between competing groups and interests: Central Texas enjoyed a moderate climate; offered an abundance of deer, bear, and antelope; provided a variety of vegetation that allowed for relatively easy adjustment to any fluctuation in the "availability of game and grazing"; and offered proximity to farming populations, which allowed for trade and cultural exchange (ibid. 4-5). In such conditions, German settlers not only arrived and settled but encountered and interacted with native peoples (sometimes violently), including and especially the Comanches. In the hands of lesser authors, an analysis of Berghaus's ethnology on the relationships between the Germans and Comanches might well do little more than valorize the German surveyor and geodetic mathematician. To Gelo's and Wickham's credit, however, the authors not only (though rightly) recognize Berghaus' contributions to the field of ethnology; they also acknowledge his shortcomings, such as his difficult personality (which ultimately led to his involuntary retirement from the Berlin Academy of Architecture), as well as his propensity for sloppy research: "Especially early in his career, he was less than scrupulous about matters of intellectual property" (ibid. 36). In the same chapter in which Gelo and Wickham highlight Berghaus's progressive attitudes toward the institution of slavery and his contempt for Methodist slaveholders, the authors not only acknowledge a fervent religiosity that frequently colors his otherwise critical and modern attitudes oward the study of native peoples; they acknowledge his problematic (though unsurprising) belief and German (Anglo) superiority (ibid. 58, 61).

In the end, Gelo and Wickham make a mostly positive assessment of Berghaus's contributions: his role in helping democratization of information; teaching and training future generations of future cartographers and ethnologists; contributing to the development of related fields such as anthropology, geography, and linguistics; and helping introduce others to what was often their first exposure of Comanche language and culture (ibid. 56, 82). In doing so, he helped paint a more accurate and sophisticated picture of an indigenous community with whom German settlers would sometimes clash, reinforcing a simplistic understanding of such a culturally rich people. For the research alone, Gelo's and Wickham's analysis of Berghaus's contributions is worth a read. However, the way in which the authors draw connections to

defining historical events and intellectual movements and developments, Comanches and Germans on the Texas Frontier proves itself an indispensable addition to not only those interested in the history and ethnology of Central Texas but in places and fields of study outside.



The Last Practice of My Quinceañera

BY SARA OROZCO

In ninth grade, when Mami asked if I wanted to have a quinceañera, I was so excited that I hugged her. I'd always thought we were too poor to afford such an extravagance, but my mother assured me that she and my father had saved the money and wanted to throw me a big, Cuban-style party to celebrate my official entrance into womanhood. The year was 1978. My parents had fled Castro's dictatorship in 1959, and my brother and I were raised in a Cuban barrio in Miami.

I immediately phoned my best friend, Darys, to tell her the good news. "I want the party's theme to be Saturday Night Fever!" I said. The movie had just come out.

Darys agreed at once. We came up with a list of the fourteen dance couples my mother said I was allowed to invite. They were the 14 damas and 14 chambelanes to perform the special dance with me. "Who'll play John Travolta?" Darys asked.

She was joking, of course. We both knew it would be my boyfriend, Ricky. We'd been together for three months, ever since meeting at the roller rink. Ricky was tall, with green eyes, blond hair, and a strong Spanish accent. He'd already turned 15; his family left Cuba when Ricky was eight. He and I would be the fifteenth couple at my party.

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Six weeks before my party, Lourdes de la Portilla Clemente pranced into our living room for our first night of dance rehearsals. Senora Clemente had been a dancer in Cuba, but now she lived in Hialeah. She wore a tight, bright yellow floral dress, eyeglasses that made her look like a cat, and black high heels with pointed toes.

"El baño, por favor?" she asked. I pointed to our one small bathroom down the hall.

"She seems much shorter and rounder than in her pictures. How old is she?" I said. Mami placed her index finger to her purs

ed lips and hushed me. "Come help me with the coffee." She dragged me into the kitchen. Soon, twenty-nine teenagers would arrive. Some parents would stay and watch the dance rehearsals, so we needed to make lots of coffee.

"Take some chairs outside," my mother told my older brother Ray when he appeared in the kitchen.

"But I'm hungry," he complained. My mother was too busy to hear him. "Make sure to place the chairs on the sidewalk and not in the driveway," she said. "We need the full driveway tonight."

Ray and I had been talking about this nonstop. He was as excited as I was. I scooped sugar from the bag into a bowl, poured two cans of evaporated milk into a pitcher, and then set them on the dinner table alongside a stack of thumb-size plastic cups and some napkins.

"Want me to take out the pastellitos?" Ray asked. "Yes, but don't eat any of them," Mami said. "I'm not sure we have enough for everyone."

Ray took the flimsy white cardboard bakery box from the refrigerator and began taking the flaky golden guava-filled pastries out of it. He laid the pastries on a tray while I watched his every move. Ray was nearly sixteen and seemed to have hollow legs after years of barely eating. I placed the bocaditos that Mami had made earlier on a serving tray and took them outside. One slipped off the tray, so I ate it.

My mother unscrewed the top part of the stainless-steel coffee maker and poured Café Estrella into the top. She filled the lower part with cold faucet water, screwed the two halves back together and set the coffee maker on the stove at high heat.

"Un cafecito por favor, Nina?" Señora Clemente click-clacked into our kitchen in a cloud of hairspray.

"Sugar and milk?" Mami poured Señora Clemente a cup of coffee.

"No, gracias." When she drank, the dance teacher carefully tilted the tiny coffee cup into her mouth, holding her pinky finger straight up in the air like an antenna, just like Mami did, when she sat on her front porch waiting for Papi to walk by after school.

Once my friends had arrived, the dance teacher introduced herself, and reminded us that we only had six weeks until the party. "So we don't have time for foolishness. You are all big chicos and chicas, and we need to be perfect!"

The parents who stayed to watch clapped enthusiastically as Senora Clemente instructed us to introduce ourselves, starting with me.

"I'm Sara, and this is my boyfriend, Ricky," I said, a bold move on my part considering Mami was so strict, and then we went around the group.

"All right," Senora Clemente said with a brisk nod. "Let's start with the chicos first. Chicas off the driveway. Quickly! Go! Go!" Her hands swept us away like a broom. "Line up, chicos. Seven in the front row and seven in the back row. Ricky, come stand next to me."

My boyfriend glanced over at me, and I smiled back."We're going to start easy," the dance teacher said.

"I'll demonstrate the steps first, then you follow me." She placed her arms in a chicken wing position and turned her back toward us. She took one step back, then one forward, then one backward, then one forward in what looked like a salsa

Her butt rose high with each move."Your turn, chicos," she cried. "Ready? 1…2…3!" She stepped back, forward, back, and forward. A few of the boys took a step back with their left feet, others with their right, and some didn't move. Some girls and I began laughing, but Señora Clemente cut us down with an angry stare.

At the end of the night, Señora Clemente said, "We need lots of practice. More than I thought. We'll have rehearsals every Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday."

The rehearsals got more intense every week, with the dance teacher counting down the weeks and telling us over and over, "We must practice until we're perfect!"

Each time we met, she introduced us to a few new steps. “If you don’t know how to do it, look at the person in front of you or beside you!”

Even after the sun set and the mosquitoes feasted, she didn’t let us stop, pointing her yellow flashlight at our feet. By ten o’clock every night, she started singling people out, roaring critiques.

“Carlos! Put your hands up higher on your hips! Ricky! Move your hips harder, side to side! Maria! Stop playing with your hair and pay attention!”

Sometimes, she’d shake her head in despair, and she even cussed out loud once. “Me cago en Dios! No, no, ¡no! You’re not listening!”

No one complained. We all knew she was right. We didn’t comprehend the seriousness of the group dance. I thought it was supposed to be fun.

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“We only have three more weeks!” Señora Clemente announced one night in a panic. Sweat was pouring down her face, and we hadn’t even started dancing. Mami had placed a water pitcher with a stack of Styrofoam paper cups on a little table by the front steps for the parents because it was too hot for coffee.

We took our positions on the driveway: seven couples in two rows, with Ricky and me in the front.

“I have a special treat today for you little pollitos,” Señora Clemente announced. Every week, she chose a baby animal name to call us. This week we were baby chicks.

“What’s the treat?” Darys asked.

“I have music for youuuuu!” Senora Clemente sang out, both arms stretched out to the sky. “Ready to learn some boogie dance moves tonight?”

“Si!” we yelled back full of enthusiasm.

“Make two fists and roll them one above the other in a circular motion like this,” she said, and demonstrated. “Roll your fists first to your right side as you bump your hips to the right, and then roll your fists to the left side as you bump your hips to the left.” We followed.

“Now with music!” She placed the record player needle on the Bee Gees’ Stayin’ Alive. “Here we go, pollitos!” She snapped her fingers. “And five, six, seven, eight. Roll your fists to your right! Bump to the right! Roll wrists to your left! Bump to the left!”

“Keep rolling your wrists in front of your chests!”

“Otra vez, from the top!” She rewound the cassette. It was challenging work to prepare for the party, but I never wanted those days to end. I felt like one of the popular girls in school, surrounded by many new friends. Papi was on his best behavior during rehearsals, so I didn’t mind having people at our house. I felt proud that we had an extra driveway at our home even though we only had one family car, and I wasn’t afraid to leave our front door open despite the roaches that might sneak into my bedroom. I wore an endless smile on my face, even when I slept.

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Two weeks before the party, Mami ordered food from a local Cuban cafeteria, as well as the flowers, balloons, and the cake. The cake, taller than I was, would sit on the center table.

We also went to the Woolworths and bought fourteen ceramic dolls as gifts for the girls and fourteen handkerchiefs for the boys. I bought the 45-rpm record of Always and Forever for Ricky, and when we arrived home, I autographed it and wrote my birth date on it. I wasn’t sure what Ricky was getting me and couldn’t wait to find out.

Rehearsals were canceled for much of the week because of rain. Señora Clemente called me halfway through the week and said, “This is a good week for you to learn to waltz with your father.”

“He’s not here,” I said. “He’s away fishing again.”

The dance teacher heaved a dramatic sigh. “Well, we’ll just have to practice when he gets back. After you are done dancing with your father, Ricky will approach him on the dance floor and ask his permission to dance with you. You and Ricky will then slow dance to your love song.”

“Okay.” A ball of dread was forming heavily in my stomach. What if Papi didn’t come back in time for my party?

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“Mis conejitos,” Senora Clemente said at the start of the final week before our party. She’d already called us bunnies, but no one dared correct her. “Time is running out! We must practice every night this week, rain, or shine.”

We nodded and cut out our small talk with each other to concentrate. I was so nervous we were so far behind that my party would be a disaster. No one would ever talk to me again.

“This is the last dance we’ll be learning,” she said. “I want you to imagine picking oranges off a tree. First, straighten your legs as you point upward with your right index finger until you reach the orange above your head. Then, bend your knees as you point down to your left with the right index finger and drop the orange in the bucket next to your left ankle. Repeat. Pick the orange, drop it. Pick the orange, drop it.”

We followed her instructions. It was humid outside, and I panted like a dog.

“Rapido!” she commanded.

We did it faster: left index finger, then right index finger, then left index finger, over and over until our buckets were full of oranges.

Two nights before the party, we ran through the entire routine several times. Most parents stayed to watch us and take photographs. To my relief, my father had returned.

“Ramóncito,” Señora Clemente called to my father. “It’s time to practice the waltz with your daughter.” The night noises faded into the background and my fingers went cold. My father put his water glass down and, with one hand, brushed his hair flat to one side. He grinned as he made his way down to where I stood.

Señora Clemente placed my father and me in the middle of the driveway, and everyone formed a circle around us. I suddenly felt overly shy and embarrassed that he would feel the slight tremors in my hand and body as I stood there, all eyes on me.

The dance teacher tucked my right hand into my father’s left hand. I couldn’t look up at his face, afraid of what his expression might be. Was he embarrassed too? Distanced? Irritated because he could tell I was scared to mess up?

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(cont... The Last Practice)

My father’s hands felt familiar: rough, dry, and calloused. Senora Clemente placed my left hand on his right shoulder, and he put his right hand on my back. He slowly swung his head in one direction and I in the opposite. I took in a whiff of his Old Spice. By now I was shaking.

“Just follow my lead,” my father whispered. A few people in the crowd applauded.Señora Clemente played “El Amor,” the song my father had selected for our dance. When the music started, my father took one long step to the side, and I followed his lead, our shoulders parallel with the floor, my right arm stretched out, our hands clasped. Papi turned me clockwise and I stepped forward in one smooth fluid turn.

Under a clear Miami sky, Papi and I glided up and down the driveway as though we were on roller skates, and I felt a wave of calm wash over me.

As we made a turn, I caught my mother’s eye and saw one of her rare smiles.

When I look back on this special birthday, the rehearsals on the driveway stick out for me most. I was surrounded by all the people that cared about me. I enjoyed having a boyfriend and feeling like I was like everyone else in my social circle. Mami smiled the entire time and loved hosting the other families and neighbors who sat around to watch us practice. It was the first and last dance I ever had with Papi. That last practice was the best part of my Quinceañera.



Halls so Softly Worn

BY MIRIAM IVO CRUZ

It was an innocuous sort of door, chipped and creaky, tall and lean, that led to my first school. You would find many doors like it, tucked in just outside the beating heart of Lisbon, the Baixa. In the centre, the streets are wide, flush with sunlight and people. The buildings smile at bumbling tourists with a worldly curl of lip. But it was the city’s oldest streets that I knew first. Streets like capillaries, so thin they shy away from maps. You must learn your way by heart.

My parents drove through them daily to the Opera House where they worked. I joined them when I was little. Every morning Mom, Dad and I headed off together, stuffed with purses, school bags, flute bags, my tiny stumpy cello and Dad’s concert tails in our family car. That grey Fiat galumphed through the city like a breathless, enterprising pug. My school was handily on their way, a sensible ten minutes from the theatre. Or it would be if we’d ever left on time. Every day we’d get caught behind a neighbouring school’s drop-off procession. In the front seat, they bickered over whose fault it was we would be late again. In the backseat, I watched the other kids — my innate rivals — with fascination. Their socks were milky white, their nappy’s plump like a duck’s tails. Their school’s fluorescent light seemed surreal to me. None of it was right. It was the sort of place a dentist would think was suitable for his children, but perhaps not this pair of disgruntled musicians.

When we finally parked, it was a scramble. Thrashing out of my seatbelt, slinging my backpack on. One hand in each parents’, we scuttled up the school’s street. Its buildings looked aloof, that door no different. But I smiled. I knew not to bother with its surly tricks. I knew what hid inside. We buzzed at the door.

My dad tells me that on my first day of school, at two, I refused to introduce myself by any other name besides Snow White. My mother disagrees. They’re both perfectly adamant, but I never cared to find out who was right. Childhood is such a jumble. Little truths and fantasies veiled in a haze, a fabric half as faint as tulle. Memories live cloistered, kept away. But I never fiddle with their lock. It keeps them safe. I’ll laugh with Dad, now, over that story, but muffle the memory of our door’s metallic shudder — the latch sliding into place when he walked, then drove away.

The silence he left was deafening. My mother buzzed again, and Cátia opened the door. She was the teacher’s helper, and had a smile you could hear. “Bom dia, Mimi,” she greeted me. I could never keep from smiling back. Not if I bit down my lips, turned their corners down, not even if I’d resolved to be sad all day.

“Olá, Cátia,” I said, giving her my free hand, and waving Mom goodbye.

Entering the school was like stepping into the sunlight after being in the shade too long. A feeling on your skin, a lightness in your chest. The school was named Árvore, I imagine for the orange tree in the courtyard. All told, there can’t have been more than forty children, but precise numbers are irrelevant. We were like twelve good friends and filled the space like a full circus. We had a hum that steeped the halls. The doorbell was always ringing, the lock clinking when we arrived; the headmistress, Sílvia, walked by, cooing at a little kid; Alzira, the cook, sang to a toddler on her knee, “Ah ah ah, minha machadinha, ah ah ah, minha machadinha,” but her voice was overwhelmed by the hollering of children playing. Someone was laughing, someone was crying, someone was calling out my name, “Mimi!” I followed, taking my place in the chorus line, eager to join the racket.

Yet, the commotion never suited the building. Inhaling deeply through the courtyard’s spiralling stairs, it sighed in frustration. I wondered whether it resented us. For the way it grumbled under our hurried steps, or how its walls forgot to keep out the cold, you’d think it did. He was a curmudgeonly old man, the building, made of stiff lines, and rooms joined by achy hinges. But we loved him anyway. We garbed him in all our finest art, and he never shrugged it off. He wore those drawings, paintings, and collages

(continued... HALLS SO SOFTLY WORN)

wall to wall, floor to ceiling, with pride. Only our own hands, at the end of the day, could equal his style. Stained rainbow, and doodled senselessly, we matched. I never noticed it, it was so natural — just a little care — but we wore on each other.

There wasn't one perfect surface inside the school. The wooden floors were swollen, and they tilted one way or another. Cracks ran up to the ceiling, leaving jagged crevices in their wake. But his blemishes were not something to be mended. As far as I knew, Árvore was this collection of halls worn thin. Not perfect, not broken, but complete. We rowdy kids only bewildered the tired old man. He was just used to quiet dwellers.

The whole city seemed fatigued. It leered bitterly when my mother and I passed. From the windows of their haggard homes, weather-worn women stared, suspiciously. We didn't have a car for a while, so we walked to school and my Mom onwards to work. The starved pavement took advantage of my tired feet, gnawing at the tips of my shoes, as I struggled to keep up with my Mother's stride. I was glad to reach the school — it was kinder. He loved us, really, in his own begrudging and clumsy way; kept us in his halls, in paintings, smudges, in all the oddest places.

We had our mysteries. The ghost in the toolshed, the treasure in the neighbour's yard. And we whispered, have you seen the room hidden under the kitchen? Sílvia showed it to us, once. It was the stuff of legends. We gathered around the countertop where we'd often baked biscuits and cakes, and awed as she flipped it open. She revealed a secret passage, a rickety flight of stairs whose final steps dissolved into darkness. We listened keenly to our Mother Goose, as one by one she took us down, telling us the chamber's story.

"Decades ago, we lived under a dictatorship," Sílvia told us. "People couldn't choose how to live, and if they disobeyed, well, they'd get in trouble."

The light waned as we descended. "Back then, boys and girls couldn't study together. The law said they had to go to separate schools."

The air felt different, below, swirling with flecks of dust.

"But the women that founded our school didn't think that was right. So, they welcomed all, to learn together."

The room was small. Indiscernible paraphernalia huddled together in the dark.

"The neighbours, however, became suspicious, and called the Police."

Sound distorted, below the floorboards. Voices were heavy and muffled. Children's twee steps now boomed, like a stampede.

"If they'd caught them, the teachers would've been arrested. So, when the police came, they hid."

I gulped and clutched the railing.

"They hid right here."

Where there were boxes, and shelves, where shadows hid little critters, there had once been children. I held my breath, as though my silence could keep them safe, and retracted, softly, sure there was a face in the darkness.

With a great and desperate gulp of air, I emerged.

The group dispersed. The world above felt sharper. Fresh air dazed me, babble too. I was engrossed by the feeling of my feet eroding the wooden floor. There was a chip there; someone nicked it. That had never occurred to me before. Reality was a thing stranger and larger than I had known. Not metal, fixed in shape. More like clay: mould and smear it in a stroke. Every scratch had an owner, each was like a well, with a history. I dragged my hand along the worn windowsill, eager to feel a part of it.

Looking around myself, I thought tensely, it was all a little broken. When would they fix it? I swallowed dry and stepped outside.

The great orange tree shaded the courtyard. It was home to many bird's nests, a couple of lost footballs, and fruit from which we made inedible jam. It was also a good cover from gawking neighbours, I noted now.

Below its branches, it was mayhem. A football whizzed past me. Cheers and groans erupted when it hit the imaginary goal, leaving a dent and a trail of flaking paint behind. It was a slapdash sort of authorship. Cringing away before the game restarted, I headed to the sunniest spot which we kept for the game of Macaca.

Every morning we drew the hopscotch's grid on the concrete floor. Those waiting for their turn sprawled on the warm ground, and with the leftover chalk doodled flowers — sowed a garden. At night, dew washed the concrete clean, but recess came like spring to the courtyard: blossoms and life with it.

On the opposite end of the playground were the ferros, bars for swinging, or somersaulting if you were a show-off. There were three of them, red, yellow, and blue, each one taller than the last. At some point climbing up your usual ferro became easy. Your feet dragged against the rubber., and you realised you'd gotten too big. It was time to graduate to the next bar up. Following these three, however, past the highest one, you'd find the Bananeira. It was a secluded nook, with a banana tree and a pair of benches that welcomed conversation. It appealed most to the older kids, those that had some secrets of their own.

A friend once revealed, there, that she was thinking of leaving the school. Mariana, who was Sílvia's daughter, brought me by my hand and bid me sit by her side, below the banana tree.

"Mimi," she called me. I looked on expectantly. Mariana tucked a strand of chestnut hair behind her ear. She wouldn't look me in the eye, so I knew it was a serious occasion. I straightened my back. It felt like the proper thing to do. She continued, "Não digas a ninguém," to which I nodded, vowing myself to secrecy. And with the glint of someone who has a wonderful secret, with a certain power, certain anxiety, she confessed: "Eu estou a pensar mudar de escola."

I jerked back. She wanted to leave? I thought about it for a second. A smile crept up my lips. I tried to hide it but failed and giggled. She did not look pleased.

"Desculpa," I apologised. But leaving seemed impossible, and I couldn't understand why she would want to.

"Mas… Porquê?" It felt absurd. Her shoulders slumped, and she looked away, embarrassed. Mariana's mouth tightened, flinching as thoughts bubbled.

Her growing restlessness was familiar. It was the kind that makes your fingers itch and your eyes water. The kind you can't soothe. We had twin troubles, but mutely,

"Mas… Porquê?" It felt absurd.
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"Sei lá," she sighed. My skin crept. I knew that sigh. A little fury, a little unhappiness that never learns the words to its reason. By instinct, I jumped up.

"Anda." The best I knew to do with that sound was to not let it brew. Besides, a game of catch was starting, we ought to join. I pulled her by her hand, and there was relief in her eyes. Together, we ran away.

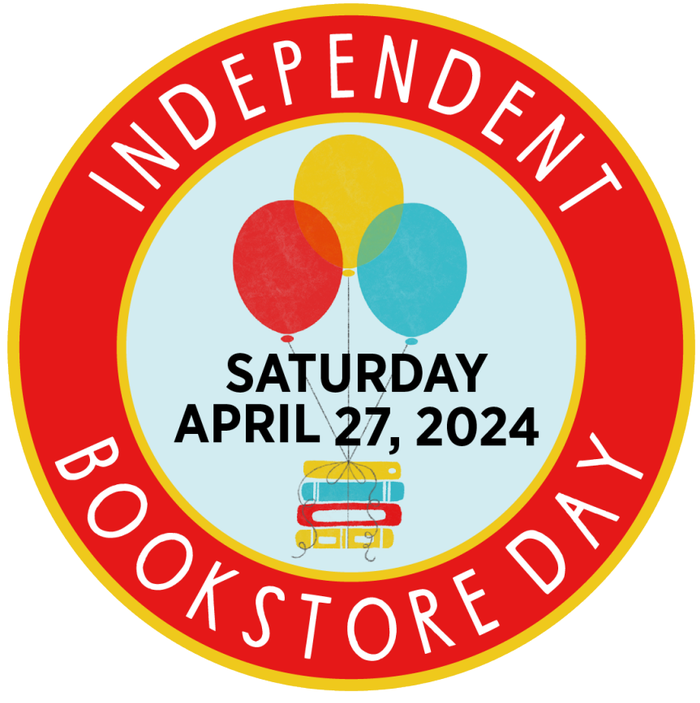
There's a game that children play when an eyelash falls. You get to make a wish. You pick it off your cheek, shut your eyes and press it hard between your fingers so you're sure it listens. Then you blow it away, and wait for it to happen. I recall playing it one afternoon while waiting for my Mom to pick me up. The eyelash was pinched between my fingers. Behind it was the school's open door. I never had to think about what to wish for, I only had one worth an eyelash: I wanted my family back. But that day I just stared at it. Kids around me were packing up, throwing on their winterwear. They left in trios, hand in hand with their parents. I couldn't, I realised.

We'd broken.

And that was enough, that day. It was enough to see we were little pieces torn apart. Whatever shape we'd had before was lost. I wasn't ready to ask why, I could hardly say it out loud. We are broken, I thought again. I inhaled deeply, and when Cátia called my name, ran to the door. The brass handle turned, unlocking the metal arms that had kept us safe inside. Its hinges swung the door open. The school sighed as I left.

Outside, I ran to hug my mother. Softy chattering, we walked together to our new car, blue for her favourite colour. We headed home.

It was an early July afternoon when I walked out that door, chipped and creaky, tall and lean, for the last time. The school shut down one year later. Gone, are our chalk flowerbeds. Weeds protrude, instead, wounding the concrete. It's become a little plot of wildness, burrowed just outside the heart of the city. The furniture, I'm told, the books, the toys, the drawings remain there. Abandoned, but still in place, waiting for us to come back. I don't think we ever left. You wouldn't know it from his frown, but he keeps us in those halls so softly, so lovingly worn. He keeps us like a secret.



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