

Latinidad - Summer 2015: Anthologies

Contents:

1. Saludos
2. Q&A: Jennifer De Leon
3. Resources: \$70,000 Fellowship

BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“I called Marcela seeking direction on a few book ideas I'd been pondering. I was hesitant at first—how much advice could she offer me, when I barely had these ideas on paper?—but it ended up being the best thing I could have ever done. After our 60-minute chat, I felt much more clear-headed about which idea I may want to focus on, and what my next steps should be from here. Best of all, I hung up the phone feeling confident. Marcela let me know that my dream was real and reachable, with just a little more hard work. She inspired me and I can't thank her enough.”

—Lesley Tellez, author of *Eat Mexico*, <http://www.themijachronicles.com>

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1. Saludos

Anthology editors require a skill set different from that of writers. Authors tell tales that rise wholly from their own perspectives and imaginations. In contrast, anthology editors are curators. Like a conductor who transforms multiple musicians into an orchestra, an anthology editor assembles distinct voices to depict a coherent story. If you've ever considered publishing an anthology, read the Q&A below with Jennifer De Leon, editor of the expertly curated anthology *Wise Latinas*.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Jennifer De Leon is the editor of *Wise Latinas: Writers on Higher Education*. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Ms.*, *Guernica*, *Brevity*, *Poets & Writers*, *Best Women's Travel Writing*, and elsewhere. Her essay, “The White Space,” originally selected as first place recipient of the Michael Steinberg

Essay Prize and published in Fourth Genre, was listed as notable in Best American Essays 2013. Currently she is revising a novel set in Guatemala and Boston, and she is at work on a memoir. If interested in contacting her for speaking engagements or readings, please visit: <http://www.jenniferdeleonauthor.com>

Q: Why did you decide to publish an anthology about Latinas and higher education?

A: This is the book I needed in college. As much as I loved and appreciated my experience at Connecticut College, there were times I really needed to hear voices like my own, to feel validated, to feel understood. Stories are so powerful. They can be as powerful—if not more—than statistics, policy, and research. I wanted to put together a collection of stories, cuentos, about Latinas and higher education so that others could feel less alone—whether they are Latinas, first-generation college students, or really anyone embarking on an experience for the first time.

Q: How did you go about finding such talented writers?

A: I have been participating in writing workshops for years—VONA, Macondo, Bread Loaf, AWP—and I am an active member and instructor at Grub Street (an independent creative writing center and just incredible organization) in Boston. Between personal contacts and word of mouth, I was able to solicit essays pretty easily. Many Latina writers agreed this was a critical and timely topic. Justice Sonia Sotomayor and her famous phrase, Wise Latina, was our muse.

Q: What three mistakes should newbie anthology editors avoid?

A: These come to mind:

1. Be fearless—and professional—in the actual editing (even if the person is famous and you can't believe she submitted an essay for the anthology).
2. Remember that you want a variety of pieces—in regard to content, style, voice. If every piece hit the same note, that would be a boring song.
3. Be honest. Communicate. Keep contributors updated. Even just to say, "Things are slow. But we're still on the train." I think often times newbie editors believe you should only contact contributors with big news, but really, it's considerate to send emails or whatnot in a way that taps the writer on the shoulder and says, "Hi. I haven't forgotten you or your beautiful story."

Q: Alternatively, what were three smart choices you made that other anthology editors would be prudent to emulate?

A: 1. Spend time on the book proposal. I actually took a class at Grub Street, “Finding Your Book,” taught by founder, Eve Bridburg. It was instrumental in helping me to shape the proposal, and ultimately, the book. Also, Erika Martinez, a friend and contributor to the anthology, graciously shared her own book proposal for an anthology by Dominican women writers.

2. In addition to soliciting work from specific and well-known authors, I also sent out a general call for essays. I wanted a range of writers in the anthology—some with published books, others with minimal publications. And yet: all of them had something important to say. I think this is really important.

3. Don’t give up! And when the door slams in your face again . . . don’t give up! I can’t express how many ups and downs there were in the development of *Wise Latinas*. A quick example: I remember sitting on a chair along the edge of a round kids’ pool in Sandra Cisneros’ backyard one summer at Macondo. I dipped my feet in the cool water. Sandra and others did the same. We were talking, laughing, and catching up in between workshops. I told Sandra about the project and she was so enthusiastic. Quintessential Sandra. Later that year, in the elevator of a hotel where AWP was held, I asked her if she would be willing to contribute an essay to the anthology. Literally, an elevator pitch. It worked. She said, Yes! Fast-forward a year later when it was time to send out the contracts from the publisher. Her agent did not share the same enthusiasm. At first. It took much knocking—gentle knocks, persistent knocks, one loud and pleading knock—to reach an agreement. So much of this work—of writing and editing—can be broken down into small steps. Like an eco-system of sorts. You never know what conversation will lead to what, what doors will open, what doors will shut. Be positive and professional. It’s amazing what can happen.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her? If you don’t have an agent, how did you come to be published by the University of Nebraska Press?

A: I had the idea for this anthology in 2004. It was published in 2014. While I had pitched the idea to agents during those long ten years, most of them smiled and thought it a worthwhile project, but not when it came to book sales. Therefore, no, I did not have representation from an agent for this particular project. I worked directly with my editor at the University of Nebraska Press. She was recommended to me by author, and *Wise Latinas*

contributor, Joy Castro. My experience with the University of Nebraska Press has been phenomenal. Currently I am in the process of talking to a few agents as I feel I do need literary representation for my novel, *In the Country of Memory*. It's very exciting—and very different (so far, anyway) from my experience with the anthology.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: I do! As I mentioned, my novel *In the Country of Memory* is one I've been working on for six years. It began as a short story, "Home Movie," which was originally published in *The Briar Cliff Review* in 2012. As soon as I am able, I will share some exciting news in regards to that particular story, but I can't right now. I also have a memoir-in-progress and a Young Adult novel, tentatively titled, *Volar*. In addition to fiction, I write nonfiction and some poetry. I love, love, love the essay form and I dream of putting out a collection of essays in the future.

In terms of future anthologies . . . well, while speaking at various colleges and universities across the country (mostly readings and lectures related to Wise Latinas) these past couple of years, I've often been asked: When will *Wise Latinas* be published? I don't have the answer to that question yet, but I love that there is interest.

3. Resources

HOW EDITORS THINK

"I read *How Editors Think* in one sitting and was engaged from beginning to end. It is well written, highly informative, and humorous—I found myself laughing out-loud in a few spots! Thanks for sharing the secrets of the trade."
—Mayra Lazara Dole, author of *Down to the Bone*

Inspired by my experience as a former Simon & Schuster editor, *How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You* reveals what it really takes to get published. For more information, visit:

<http://www.marcelalandres.com/E-book.html>

APOGEE JOURNAL

Deadline: July 1 for poetry/July 31 for fiction and creative non-fiction

Apogee is a literary journal specializing in art and literature that engages with issues of race, gender, sexuality, class, and hyphenated identities. They seek

unheard voices, including emerging writers of color. For more information, visit <http://www.apogeejournal.org/>

\$10,000 POEM PRIZE

Deadline: July 15

In honor of its 10th anniversary, The Rattle Poetry Prize offers \$10,000 for a single poem to be published in the winter issue of the Rattle magazine. Ten finalists will also receive \$200 each and publication, and be eligible for the \$2,000 Readers' Choice Award, to be selected by subscriber and entrant vote.

For more information, visit <http://www.rattle.com/>

NEW WRITERS AWARD

Deadline: July 25

The Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) New Writers Awards offer three prizes to a poet, a fiction writer, and a creative nonfiction writer to honor their first books. The winning authors tour several of GLCA's member colleges and receive an honorarium of at least \$500 from each college visited, as well as travel expenses, hotel accommodations, and hospitality. For more information, visit <http://glca.org/programs/new-writers-award>

\$1000 FOR ESSAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Deadline: August 31

Creative Nonfiction Journal offers an award of \$1,000 for Best Essay and \$500 for runner-up. They seek true stories that portray what married life is all about from a variety of perspectives—from finances and florists to wedding planners and divorce attorneys. For more information, visit <https://www.creativenonfiction.org>

\$5000 POETRY PRIZE

Submission Period: September 1 - November 1

The Walt Whitman Award sponsored by The Academy of American Poets offers an all-expenses-paid six-week residency in Italy, publication by Graywolf Press, and \$5000 for a debut collection of poetry by an emerging writer. For more information, visit <http://www.poets.org/>

WRITING FOR CHILDREN MFA

Application Deadline: September 1

Simmons College's Writing for Children MFA program offers writers the opportunity to engage with picture books, young adult realism, beginning and middle-grade readers, and graphic novels. Core classes will include teachers, librarians, editors, illustrators, and academics. For more information, visit <http://www.simmons.edu/>

\$70,000 FELLOWSHIP

Deadline: September 25

The Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers offers \$70,000, an office, a computer, and full access to the New York Public Library's physical and electronic resources. Academics, independent scholars, journalists, and creative writers are welcome to apply, as well as foreign nationals conversant in English. For more information, visit <http://www.nypl.org>

COMING SOON: EAT MEXICO BY LESLEY TELLEZ

Eat Mexico: Recipes from Mexico City's Streets, Fondas, & Markets is a love letter to the complex, flavorful foods of Mexico City, told from the perspective of journalist and food writer Lesley Tellez. Lesley grew up in a Mexican-American home in California but didn't know al pastor from alambre when she first moved to Mexico City in 2009. Yet before long, she became a daily connoisseur of the city's massive network of street vendors, was trained at one of Mexico's premier heritage cooking schools, and started a blog, The Mija Chronicles, selected by Saveur magazine as among the top culinary blogs in the U.S. Eat Mexico, which will be published by Kyle Books on June 20, can be pre-ordered now at <http://tinyurl.com/ob6w27c>.

COMING SOON: SHADOWSHAPER BY DANIEL JOSE OLDER

Shadowshaper by Daniel Jose Older is a vivid fantasy world where YA readers are introduced to Sierra Santiago, a Latina heroine who is ready and willing to change the world. Older was inspired by Harry Potter and combined the elements of music, art, and fantasy in his unique signature style that reflected communities of diverse backgrounds to which all readers will be able to relate. Shadowshaper, which will be published by Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic on June 30, can be pre-ordered now at <http://ghoststar.net/blog/shadowshaper>

JUST PUBLISHED: THE YUMA FRUITFUL VALLEY

A tribute by Pamela Carvajal Drapala to the people who work the earth so we can have herbs, fruits, and vegetables on our tables year round throughout our nation. For more information, visit <http://www.blurb.com/b/6053022-the-fruitful-yuma-valley>

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“Writers are like farmers: The harvest comes, but only after you toil for a few seasons.”

—Cheryl Strayed

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