

Latinidad – 7/11-8/11: Toni Margarita Plummer

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“After spending two years trying to write a novel, but not knowing how to get into a writing community, or unsure of the stepping stones to take to further my craft, I contacted Marcela to edit my manuscript. Not only did she help with sentence structure and formatting, she opened up a whole new world to me. She suggested a number of classes that would act as building blocks to strengthen my writing skills and gave me many resources to use that will help me in the future. She introduced the publishing world to me, giving me wonderful insight into what editors look for and how to get exposure for your work. I am very grateful for her advice and would happily use her services again for future projects.”

--Kelsy Yates

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<http://www.marcelalandres.com/services.html>

1. Saludos

As you put together your summer reading list, add to the mix some short story collections, not just novels. One standout collection is *The Bolero of Andi Rowe* by Toni Margarita Plummer. Cool fact about Toni: not only is she a gifted writer, she is also a talented editor at a major publishing house. Read this month's Q&A with Toni to learn more.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Toni Margarita Plummer grew up in South El Monte, California and attended the University of Notre Dame and the Master of Professional Writing Program at USC. She is the author of *The Bolero of Andi Rowe*, the latest winner of the Miguel Mármol Prize, and a fellow of the Macondo Foundation, an

association of socially engaged writers. Toni is an Editor at Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, where she acquires fiction and nonfiction, especially crime fiction and women's fiction. For more information, visit:

<http://tinyurl.com/6htmov8>

Q: Which author or book inspires you, and why?

A: This may be cheating, because he's one of my authors, but I was a fan of his before I bought his novel. Michael Jaime-Becerra wrote a story collection *Every Night Is Ladies' Night*, published by Rayo/Harpercollins. I read it because it was set in El Monte, which is right by my hometown. I loved that someone had chosen to write about this neighborhood and these characters, which were very familiar to me. Growing up, I didn't really think of my hometown as the landscape for great literature. Years later, when Michael was driving me around El Monte after our lunch, after I'd acquired his first novel *This Time Tomorrow*, having reached out to him through a friend, his mother passing along the message, Michael told me about El Monte, its history and current goings-on, and his interest and enthusiasm were so heartfelt, so genuine. He truly loved his city. That was inspiring to me. The setting is a big draw for me in books and I could see how he made this place come alive in the stories he wrote, to be accessible to anyone. That's the author's gift. Michael teaches at the University of California, Riverside and it boggles my mind to think how lucky his students are to have him. *This Time Tomorrow* just won an International Latino Book Award--if you haven't read it yet, check it out!

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 Curbstone?

A: I don't have an agent. I submitted my short story collection for the Miguel Mármol Prize offered by Curbstone Press, for a first work of fiction by a Latino author. My manuscript was selected the winner by judge Roberto Márquez, and that's how I came to be published! It's worked out very well and I've been happy and comfortable dealing with my publisher directly. When I'm ready to go out with a novel, I'll want to get an agent to represent me on that.

Q: In addition to being a fabulous writer, you are also a book editor. How has your publishing experience influenced your writing? How has your writing influenced your work as an editor?

A: I would say that my publishing experience hasn't affected the content or style of my writing at all. Now, it's true that when I mull over story ideas, I think about how marketable those books would be. But I also know that it's not worth it to follow trends, and I will ultimately write about something I care about. I'll keep the market in mind too, which is just smart and considerate on my part, I figure.

Working in publishing has, however, of course, very much informed my sense of how publishing works and it has influenced my ideas on promoting my book and myself. I know that as the author I carry the responsibility of getting my work out there. My publisher has been awesome with publicity, but they need me, too. My own contacts have been extremely important. Ideally, the author and publisher are working together to make the book a success. Having been on the other side, I know how much a publisher appreciates and sticks by an author who is easy to work with, who brings ideas to the table, and who does a lot of the legwork herself. I'm so appreciative of my editor, publicist, and everyone else--I know they work hard and that they've got a lot of books to handle. So, I try to be the kind of author I'd like to work with myself.

As an author, I come to meet and know other authors in capacities that probably other editors wouldn't. One author talking to another author is a special thing. That presents me with some wonderful opportunities to find new authors and to network on behalf of my own authors. I'm coming into situations now where I can speak about being both an editor and an author and that's very exciting for me. I hope other writers can benefit from my experience.

Of course, this all boils down to a lot of work! But at the end of the day, I believe each role enriches the other.

Q: What is your writing ritual?

A: I need to get one! I'm in a writing group now, so that helps to push me to write. I also really like contests and competitions. If there weren't any, perhaps I wouldn't have a book! I find the biggest challenge is simply sitting myself down in front of the computer and starting or continuing to work on something. Once I'm there, the writing comes easily. I'll have to revise later, but I'm there working and it's a great feeling. I hope to be like my authors one day. They write every day. Can you imagine?! They're novelists publishing one book a year, sometimes more, and you pretty much have to write every day in order to do that. I'm definitely more of a nocturnal creature, and I now write mostly on the computer.

Q: Other than honing their craft, what advice would you give to Latino writers looking to land a book deal?

A: I would say this to all writers: Make connections! Live your life. Pursue what you love and make friends and keep them. These are the people and networks you can point to when trying to get published. There's a difference between an author who belongs to 3 writers' organizations, has a hobby where they interact with others, is active in their college alumni group, blogs regularly, has a mailing list of 500 people, Facebook friends, and Twitter followers, and an author who doesn't have or do any of that. The difference

comes down to numbers--the first author knows more people and has access to more people! The examples mentioned above are all things you can and should be working on before you even begin to pursue a book deal. It's more important for nonfiction, but it doesn't hurt for fiction either. It will help you in the long run!

At the same time, only do what's comfortable for you. If it's not natural and you're not having fun, it's not worth it, I say. But you should know that there are some very generous people out there and there are people who love books (or who just think you're swell), and they will be happy to help you in what ways they can. You just have to realize that what you're giving them in return is a good book--and that's no small thing. These friends, even acquaintances, are the ones who will support you when your book is out--they'll help to make it successful so you can continue getting published. That's where it starts. Book events for first-time authors are almost always going to be exclusively attended by people who personally know the author! From there, you grow your fan base because they tell people they know--it's all about word of mouth. I've seen it happen. It's not always clear how a connection is going to be beneficial to your book, but it usually will be, in some shape or form. Publishers already have their own contacts, so what they're looking for from you is to add to that number, and to add your own personal touch. It's the best contribution you can make, aside from the book itself.

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>

\$5000 PRIZE FOR A POEM

Deadline: August 1

A prize of \$5000 and publication in *Rattle* is given for a single poem. For more information, visit <http://www.rattle.com/promo.htm>

AMY CLAMPITT RESIDENCIES

Application Deadline: August 1

The Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation offers residencies, including lodging and a stipend of \$2500 per month. For more information, visit <http://www.berkshiretaconic.org/>

\$16,200 FICTION PRIZE

Deadline: August 12

Manchester Metropolitan University offers approximately \$16,200 for a short story. For more information, visit <http://www.manchesterwritingcompetition.co.uk/fiction/index.php>

\$5000 ESSAY CONTEST

Deadline: August 15

Every woman has an inspiring true story, and Glamour magazine wants to hear yours. Winner receives \$5000, publication in Glamour, and a meeting with a top literary agent. For more information, visit <https://secure.glamour.com/contact/essay-2011>

\$10,000 POETRY CHAPBOOK AWARD

Deadline: August 31

Astounding Beauty Ruffian Press offers \$10,000 and publication for a poetry chapbook. For more information, visit <http://home.earthlink.net/~astoundingbeautyruuffianpress/>

\$3000 SHORT STORY COMPETITION

Deadline: September 1

A prize of \$3000 and publication in Good Housekeeping magazine will be given for a short story about women's lives today. For more information, visit <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/win/fiction-contest>

DETROIT WRITER'S RETREAT

Registration Deadline: September 10

Dates: September 16-17

The Springfed Arts Detroit Michigan Writers' Retreat features readings, presentations, and discussion groups on poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. For more information, visit <http://www.springfed.org>

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MFA

Application Deadline: January 1

The University of Michigan MFA Program in Creative Writing offers each student a full tuition-waiver and a \$16,000 fellowship in the first year, plus \$6000 in summer funding, and a full tuition-waiver and a teaching appointment in the second year. In addition, they offer a \$25,000 third-year

fellowship to all qualifying graduates. For more information, visit <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/grad/mfa/>

GOODBYE, SAIGON E-BOOK NOW AVAILABLE

Thelma and Louise meets the Joy Luck Club in this novel about two young women, one a fast-talking Vietnamese immigrant, the other an Anglo short on money and willing to risk all to get some. In the unlikelyst of pairings, they set up a bogus law firm in Little Saigon, CA, a community filled with racism, vicious gangs, and deadly scams. The New York Times calls it "a book to be treasured, to be read and read again." For more information, visit <http://www.ninavida.com/>

NEW BLOG: LATINA ON THE GO

There's a girl who believes in that old cliché: the journey is the destination. That girl is Alejandra Amaris. She believes in magic, that anything is possible, and that time will stop for those moments preserved in our memories. In her blog, you will find snapshots of her journey and critiques on film, books, beauty, restaurants, and more. For more information, visit <http://latinaonthego.com/>

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"There is a temperate zone in the mind, between luxurious indolence and exacting work; and it is to this region, just between laziness and labor, that summer reading belongs."--Henry Ward Beecher

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Marcela Landres

Author of the e-book "How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You"

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