

Latinidad – 7/10-8/10: Iris Gomez

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

"Marcela Landres doesn't just help writers get published, she teaches writers to see what they're writing through the eyes of readers, agents, and publishers. She'll teach you everything your M.F.A. didn't."  
--Shokry Eldaly, 2010 Pushcart Nominee

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

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## 1. Saludos

Have more books than time in which to read them? Take advantage of summer's (relatively) slower pace and make it a priority to squeeze in a little extra reading time every day—during commutes, over lunch, before bedtime. For those of you seeking more substantial fare than the usual beach book, I recommend Iris Gomez's *Try to Remember*, a page-turner which grapples with the clash between a young girl's duty to her family and her budding feminism. Read this month's Q&A to learn more.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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

## 2. Q&A

Iris Gomez's debut novel, *Try to Remember*, has been selected by the AAP for its Recommended Latino Books List as well as by Las Comadres book group for its July book. Gomez is the author of two poetry collections, *Housicwhissick Blue* and *When Comets Rained*, and her work has been widely published in literary periodicals, in addition to winning a national literary prize. For more information, visit <http://irisgomez.com/>

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

A: I've loved so many, many books that I've tried to repay a little of my debt of gratitude to some of my all-time favorites by sprinkling their titles across the trajectory of my own novel--although the time frame of my book limited me to what had already been published. Let me single out one novel for special attention: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This book helped me to see into the lives of another marginalized community in this society whose experiences I hadn't had much opportunity to read about before; at the same time, Janie's story renewed my faith in the power of love and human resilience. I will never forget the experience of reading the hurricane scene--a sense of having been lifted straight out of my own life into something more powerful than my own words could express. For me, that was an encounter with great literature.

Q: How does your experience and training as an attorney influence your creative writing?

A: The kind of lawyer I've become--one who advocates for the rights of disempowered people--shares something in common with poets, novelists, and others in the artistic realm: a spirit of idealism. You have to be an idealist to believe in what doesn't exist, whether it's the imaginary world of a novel's characters or the imagined society of a future in which all people are treated equally and with the dignity they deserve.

My professional experience as a lawyer in the immigrant rights field has also given me an exposure to aspects of the immigrant experience that are not well understood by the public at large. *Try to Remember*, for example, illustrates how a relatively minor or unintended criminal act, such as that committed by Gabi's father during one of his mental breaks, can result in punishment that goes far beyond the ordinary consequences of crime. For an immigrant, it may additionally result in the loss of a "green card" and possible deportation--and the destruction of a family. As a writer, I tried to explore how this vulnerability to expulsion, after one has been permitted to live here "permanently," shaped Gabi's coming of age experience in the novel as she struggled to determine not only who she was in relation to her family, but where she belonged in the world.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet him/her?

A: My agent is Stéphanie Abou. We met at the Muse and the Marketplace, Grub Street Inc.'s annual conference, where writers

are paired with agents and editors after submitting an excerpt from a manuscript. I submitted a chapter from my novel and then attended a one-on-one meeting with her, where she gave me some feedback and invited me to send her the entire manuscript. That later resulted in a representation agreement.

I feel fortunate to have had the privilege of working with her, in part because she reads and speaks Spanish beautifully and understood my aesthetic objectives when introducing Spanish words and phrases in my novel; she also has a rich cross-cultural background that gave her great insight into the actions and motivations of my immigrant characters.

Q: What is your writing ritual?

A: One of my rituals is to keep a journal. This is closer to meditation than to formal writing because I don't expect it to turn into creative work product, even though it does inspire images and ideas for my writing projects. I do it mostly to clear my mind and heart, and I think that helps me become more receptive to creative impulses. I try to write in the journal first thing in the morning whenever possible.

My formal writing and revision usually occurs on a planned schedule. I have to block out writing days, vacations, or sabbaticals from my professional "day" job, and I try to plan what I'm going to do with these scheduled writing periods. I have to be disciplined, but sometimes, I admit, I expect more of myself than I can realistically produce.

If the inspiration strikes, I also write spontaneously--inspired writing is such a gift and I want to honor it, even if that means sacrificing time for other things.

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

A: Two concrete things that have helped me are: (1) becoming part of a writing community, whether it's a nonprofit center like Grub Street Inc., an online network, or forming a writing group of your own--where you can not only improve your craft but also collect and share useful information about the publishing world and be buddies to each other through the ups and downs of a writing life; and (2) testing the literary waters by submitting work to journals, contests, and in other venues repeatedly, even though rejection is a tough part of that process.

Ultimately, I believe that staying on course with my own writing mission is the one thing that has served me well over time.

### 3. Upcoming Workshops

#### Getting Published Despite the Economy, San Antonio, TX

WHAT: Getting published is never easy, but the current economic climate offers additional challenges--and opportunities. In this workshop, you will learn: why debut writers are more valuable than published authors; what agents and editors are looking for more than ever; and the one trait that will ensure publication (hint: it's not about the writing).

Private consultations are also available. Space is limited, so register early!

WHEN: Saturday, July 17, Workshop - 9 a.m. to noon  
Private Consultations - 1 p.m. to 8 p.m.

WHERE: Gemini Ink, 513 S. Presa, San Antonio, TX 78205

REGISTER: Visit <http://geminiink.org/>

List of upcoming workshops:

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

### 4. Resources

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#### 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>

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#### EMERGING VOICES FELLOWSHIPS

Deadline: August 31

For poets, fiction writers, and creative nonfiction writers from underserved communities in the early stages of their careers. There are no age restrictions. For more information, visit

<http://www.penusa.org/feature/ev-application-2010>

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#### YADDO RESIDENCY

Application Deadline: August 1

Residencies as short as two weeks are offered to poets, fiction writers, and creative nonfiction writers. Artists from all nations and backgrounds are encouraged to apply. A limited amount of financial aid for travel is available. For more information, visit <http://www.yaddo.org/>

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#### MEMOIR IN PROSE OR POETRY AWARD

Deadline: August 15

A prize of \$500 and publication in Memoir (and) is given for a memoir in the form of a poem, a short story, or an essay. For more information, visit <http://memoirjournal.squarespace.com/>

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#### LGBT ROMANCE AWARD

Deadline: August 31

Rainbow Romance Writers, the first LGBT chapter of the Romance Writers of America, is sponsoring the Rainbow Romance Award for Excellence in Romantic Fiction in the categories of Contemporary, Paranormal, Romantic Suspense, Historical, Sci-fi/Fantasy, YA, and short/novella. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/23nwpvk>

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#### SHORT STORY/POETRY COLLECTION AWARD

Deadline: August 31

Black Lawrence Press is now accepting submissions for the St. Lawrence Book Award for an unpublished collection of short stories or poems. For more information, visit

<http://www.blacklawrencepress.com/>

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#### ROMANCE NOVELLA/NOVEL CONTEST

Deadline: September 13

Romance Writers of America, NYC chapter is sponsoring the Kathryn Hayes Love and Laughter Contest for novellas or novel-length fiction. For more info visit

<http://www.rwanyc.com/Love-LaughterContest.html>

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#### POWER OF WORDS CONFERENCE

Dates: September 23-26

Presented by Goddard College, features readings and workshops

in poetry and fiction. For more information, visit

<http://www.tlanetwork.org/conference/>

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#### SEEKING STORIES BY NEW PUERTO RICAN WRITERS

Professor, editor, and organizer of the Festival de la Palabra, Mayra Santos Febres is seeking short stories by new Puerto Rican writers for an anthology that will be published by Siruela Publishing in Spain. (Note this is only for short stories and not for poetry). Writers of Puerto Rican heritage born after 1952 are eligible. For information and submissions, please contact Mayra at:

[mayra.santosfebres@gmail.com](mailto:mayra.santosfebres@gmail.com)

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#### JUST PUBLISHED: 7 CUENTOS

Written in Spanglish and inspired by life, a collection of short stories and art exploring the nature of relationships, by Claudia Corletto-Coleman. For more information, visit

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/7-cuentos/11476759>

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#### GIRL SCOUTS SEEKS EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The Executive Editor, Program Content, is responsible for overseeing the concepts, research, writing, rewriting, and editing of core Girl Scout resources—print, online, multimedia, and other formats--at all grade levels and for national use by a diversity of girls, adult volunteers, and staff. For more information, visit

[http://www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/careers/](http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/careers/)

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"So my advice to writers would be to aggressively seek the truth --forget about your ego--and do one more draft than your agent asks you to. The writers who I have noticed being successful are the ones who are making their agents wait for that next draft."

--Jonathan Karp, Publisher, Simon & Schuster

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Marcela Landres

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

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