

Latinidad – 5/09: Children's Book Week

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

"I greatly enjoyed all the feedback for "Campo Girl." I believe your consultation saved me many dollars. I would have kept applying to artist residencies and conferences aimlessly, and wasting my own precious funds. I feel more confident about my fiction. Thank you again Marcela!"--Jina Ortiz, author of "Campo Girl"

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1. Saludos

Not only is May Latino Books Month, it also features Children's Book Week (May 11-17). Librarians, educators, booksellers, and booklovers can find suggestions on how to celebrate Children's Book Week in a digital toolkit by visiting: <http://www.bookweekonline.com/>. You can also commemorate both Latino Books Month and Children's Book Week by reading the work of award-winning Monica Brown, who is the subject of this month's Q&A and is a writer who is as gracious as she is talented.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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

2. Q&A

Inspired by her Peruvian-American heritage, Monica Brown is the author of award-winning bilingual books for children, including *My Name Is Celia: The Life of Celia Cruz* (Luna Rising), which was awarded the Américas Award and Pura Belpré Honor. Other titles include *My Name Is Gabriela: The Life of Gabriela Mistral* (Luna Rising), *My Name Is Gabito: The Life of Gabriel Garcia Marquez* (Luna Rising), which was named a Pura Belpré Honor and a Críticas "Best Children's Book," and *Pelé, King of Soccer*, which received starred reviews from Kirkus and Críticas. For more information, visit <http://www.monicabrown.net/>.

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

A: Recently, I've been greatly inspired by Luis Urrea—the author of *The Hummingbird's Daughter* and *The Devil's Highway*, among others. His work is amazing—*The Hummingbird's Daughter* explores the life of the real life "Santa Teresita" in ways that sing on the page. I love the insight his writing gives on the history of the U.S. Mexico borderlands and also the way his words give balm to my spirit. His non-fiction work, such as *The Devil's Highway*, is devastating, but so very important. I'm convinced that if everyone read his story of the 14 deaths during a fateful border crossing, our immigration policy would be changed forever.

Q: Why do you love to write?

A: Because I love to read! Reading great (and even not-so-great) literature has "saved" me in so many big and small ways, that is a privilege and a joy to be a part of creating literature for children. I want to pass along the "book joy" as Pat Mora would say. And speak to them the way my childhood books spoke to me—with fun, flights of fancy, hope, and imagination.

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

A: My agents are Stefanie Von Borstel and Lilly Ghahremani of Full Circle Literary. They are amazing. I met Stefanie at an SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Author's and Illustrators) conference in Los Angeles.

Q: What is your writing ritual?

A: Well, because I work full time as an English Professor at Northern Arizona University, I write when I can! So my best writing time is during the summer, on weekends, and during holidays. My most productive year ever came during my sabbatical. And always—I write in the morning. I can edit, revise, and research at any time of the day, but for those moments of true inspiration and creation—when I'm creating the first draft—it needs to be in the morning. I'm not necessarily a morning person, but I do think it is the most hopeful time of the day and in order to write for children, you need free access to hopes and dreams.

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

A: Learning from you, Marcela, is a good first step! Aside from craft, I think that writers just beginning their journey need to professionalize—and that encompasses many things. Join your professional organization—join SCBWI if you want to write for children or the Romance Writers of America, if that's your genre. Then go to conferences and network—and

by network, I don't mean stalking editors. Rather, come with your best work and be curious, polite, and friendly to everyone. Open your mind to new ideas and listen! Create a website, get business cards. These are basic things, but sometimes creative people don't want to be bothered—or perhaps just aren't "good" at those aspects of the business. I certainly wasn't. But part of what we do is a business and we need to become literate in that part of publishing as well—networking, marketing, etc. And always—pass it on. It's my privilege now to be able to mentor newer writers the way I was mentored.

3. Success Story

"Marcela,

My novel, *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?*, is the first Chicana novel to be published by the University of Texas Press, under the Chicana Matters imprint, <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/subjects/chicana.html>.

You were tremendously helpful in getting me published, by teaching me what editors look for, and most of all, your support and praise of my dreams and hard work. I followed your advice, and though I went with a university publisher because of the attention they promised to pay to this book, I still owe you a lot--you understood my story, my strengths and weaknesses, and told me the truth.

One of the reviewers for the early manuscript of this book stated that my story belonged in the Mexican-American canon--we'll see about that, but I'm getting reviewed by *Ms. Magazine*, different newspapers, interviewed by *LatinoUSA*, and a good many others before it's over, I hope. Most proud of reading, accompanied by Eva Ybarra (one of the world's greatest accordionists, she's from here) at the Museo Alameda Smithsonian in June. I'm committed to writing a great story and inviting my community to read their own stories. You can see my publicity at <http://www.barbararenaud.blogspot.com/>

Gracias, Marcela, and hope to see you somewhere very soon."

--Bárbara Renaud González, anabarbararenaud@gmail.com

4. 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>

\$50,000 LITERARY PRIZE

Deadline: July 1

St. Francis College offers a \$50,000 literary prize for an author's fourth book, either a novel or collection of short stories. Judges include Michael Chabon and Jonathan Lethem. For more information, visit

<http://www.stfranciscollege.edu/literaryprize>

LATINO POETRY COLLECTION PRIZE

Deadline: June 1

First prize is \$1,000 and publication by Arte Público Press. For more information, visit http://www.pw.org/content/chicanolatino_literary_prize

BROOKLYN TEEN WRITER CONTEST

Deadline: June 20

Seeking stories, poems, essays, spoken word, raps, fiction, or nonfiction from Brooklyn writers in high school. First place winner will receive a laptop computer.

For more information, visit <http://www.visitbrooklyn.org/festival.html>

HOLLYWOOD BOOK FESTIVAL

Deadline: June 25

The Hollywood Book Festival has issued a call for entries to its annual Program celebrating books that deserve greater recognition from the film, television, game, and multimedia communities. For more information, visit

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

GIVAL PRESS OSCAR WILDE AWARD CONTEST

Deadline: June 27

First prize is \$100 for a poem about GLBT life. For more information, visit

<http://216.197.127.196/gp/index.cfm?rsn=210&mn=Contests>

SHORT STORY OR NOVEL EXCERPT AWARD

Deadline: June 30

First prize is \$1000 and publication in Hidden River Anthology. For more information, visit http://www.pw.org/content/william_van_wert_fiction_award

ESSAY PRIZE

Deadline: June 30

A prize of \$1500 and publication in Teachers & Writers magazine will be given to an essay that relates to creative writing education, literary studies, or the profession of writing. For more information, visit

<http://www.twc.org/publications/bechtel-prize>

FICTION OR CREATIVE NONFICTION AWARD

Deadline: July 15

First prize is \$1750 and the opportunity to be represented by the Irene Goodman Agency. For more information, visit <http://sfwpawards.com/>

MAYBORN LITERARY NONFICTION WRITERS CONFERENCE

Dates: July 24 to July 26

Features panel discussions, lectures, readings, and workshops. Participating writers include Stephanie Elizondo Griest and Paul Theroux. For more information, visit <http://themayborn.unt.edu/MaybornConference2009.htm>

MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD

Deadline: September 31

Lee & Low Books, award-winning publisher of children's books, offers the New Voices Award for a children's fiction or nonfiction picture book story by a writer of color. For more information, visit

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

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"You must write for children the same way you write for adults, only better."
--Maxim Gorky

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