

SANTA MONICA COLLEGE

July 14, 1993

Dear Michelle Serras:

This is to confirm that
Santa Monica College Press
will publish your book,
Chicana Falsa (a collection
of poetry and stories) sometime
in the fall of 1993.

Ente Pachio
Publisher, SMC Press

Mr. Cano,

I'd really appreciate
if you could look this
over during the Spring
break and then I will
meet with you during
your office hours.

Thank-you,

Michele Serros

Michele,

I think it's a charming story and so
alive, especially at the end when the narrator
discloses her own grudges. I just made a
few comma additions & minor word changes which
you may or may not want to use. This should
go over well ~~with~~ at readings. It's got a
really good tone.

~~Choke hold~~ need new
title

My favorite uncle Vincent, is a professional,
one of few in our family.
For my uncle
owns a catering truck.
A coach as in
Super-rico taco-mariachi blaring expired license plates
loncheria,
but a nice one.

He always dreamed of
one day owning his own business,
becoming self employed man,
his own boss,
soccer on Sundays,
sleeping off hangovers
on Monday.
He loved short work weeks.
So finally after scraping up
what little money he had
he got the coach.
It helped Johnny,
his 4th kid get through college,
kept aunt Dolly up all night
chopping
and chopping
cilantro,
onions,
tomato,
with dull knives
no money left to buy sharp ones.

I knew every time
dad packed us up
to travel the distance
from Oxnard to Chino
we would eat good
we would eat free
Our uncle was a restaurateur.

His place had everything
any fine establishment had :
sesos, lenguas, tripas
and my favorite ,
chicharrones .

My mother always warned :
"That's solid lard
pure grease,
That poor dead pig's
'gonna have it's revenge on you yet ,
make you fat,
make you fart,
scatter your skin with
white tipped pimples
no man's 'gonna want you.!"

Trying hard to gross me out
but her graphic words
didn't work

Man, I couldn't get enough
of that crackly pork skin.
I crammed them in tortillas
that were always too small,
so I ate them right out of the pot, ^{the}
t Throwing the small crispy bits into air
like popcorn ,
letting them land in my wide anxious mouth.
I used to eye my cousin Amy's pet piglet .
With a wink I'd say ,
"See you in a couple of years ...
in my belly!"
That sent cousin Amy crying into the house.

Later in the evenings
my father drove us ~~back~~ home
I sat in the back seat
passionately inhaling my grease scented fingertips

And one day
an ordinary visit.
while I sat in the coach's shade
I could see my father
talking chickens with uncle Vincent,
My mother inside with aunt Dolly
I was shoving my dear chicharonnes
into my mouth

and then something happened.
They stayed right there
in my throat.
I swallowed hard to help them down,
coughed firmly to help them up,
but they wouldn't budge.
I could feel the coarse pig hairs tickle me,
but I wasn't laughing.
This was not funny.
I couldn't breathe.
I was going to DIE!
My mother was right.
The dead pig's revenge.
I was going to DIE."
My father was suddenly miles away from me

Thoughts raced through my mind.
Who will take care of Miss Rosie,
my pet goat?
I still haven't got student of the month
but more agonizing than
any of these things,
I thought of the head line
the head line in my obituary:

Chicharonnes Chokes Chicana child to Death (In Chino)

Oh my god!
I can't die with a head line like that!
the humiliation.
I didn't want to die.

great!

this could
also be
title

I wanted to live!
I wanted to live!
my legs lost balance
I was getting no more air
Suddenly a thud.
It was dark.

I woke up to find
cousin Amy above me.
"You were turning blue
So I punched you on the back
like they do on TV."

Now, everyone came running.

That night Amy got her favorite dinner.
My mom and dad shook their head with disgust
hearing her repeat the story over and over again.
But I didn't care
I was alive!
I was free!
to walk, to breath, to think,
and to eat
I stepped outside to the back yard
and walked over to the caged pen
to watch over Amy's sleeping pet piglet.
It was so full of life,
a beautiful breathing thing.
I spent all night with it,
Watching, thinking, waiting,
salivating.

Michele Serros 5/5/93

*This poem. Funny! Love
it. But the end
is weak. This is really
a story and not a poem.*

Untitled

Maria's hands speak to me ^{is a poet, but is it's her that}
 tell me what I am not. ^{reach my heart}
 tell me what I can be
 what I should remember
 I remember
 The Chilean activist/artist
 held mine
 as he tongue fed me homemade wafer cookies
 in between overdone kisses.

How about
 "Hands of
 the artist"?

"You have working hands"
 he whispered.
 I pulled away
 embarrassed
 of my inborn calloused tools.
 He pulled them back.
 Assuring me,
 "You don't want
 to look like those
 Cavachas on Wilshire
 manicured and ready
 ..to do nothing."

nice poem
 but needs
 title

My co-worker Yolie, ^{owns her own cleaning business never takes orders}
 sent out a defeated sigh,
 "No color
 no tips
 no wedding band
 a women
 is as good as her
 porcelain set
 and the rock a man gives her."

All these people are
 artists and they
 tell me

Between a flagging career
 and city college night courses
 my mother's
 own tired hands
 patted home-made masa
 coaxed roses out of dead soil
 nurtured two babies
 typed term papers till
 three in the morning
 never clenched a bottle neck
 or leather belt
 free of nicotine stains

who

women

seldom lifted a paintbrush
but died an artist.
and I remember
all of this
when I see Maria's hands.

Michele Serros 3/31/93

No Principles in Heaven

*Another
wonderful
story*

I
My great great grandpa Louie has died. It doesn't even matter to say if he was my mother's father or my dad's. He belonged to everyone. Everyone loved Grandpa Louie, Everyone spoke to him, and when I say that, I mean that no one held grudges against him.

I took my roommate Angela to his funeral. She offered to drive the long distance.

"This is going to be difficult," I told her in the car.

"Death is difficult," she replied.

If
"No, it isn't that.. it's my family. I come from a long line of grudgeholders. Nobody speaks to each other. When a certain somebody enters the room, a certain somebody leaves the room. It I had a turnstile that popped out a nickel everytime it was turned when someone exited, I would be a millionaire."

"Oh God, it can't be that bad. This is a human tragedy, stuff like this brings people to gether, especially family."

"You don't know my family," I told her.

I pointed to a fast food drive-thru. "Hey, pull up through there, I'm hungry."

When we were finally at my great great grandmas house, Angela observed the surroundings.

"Hey, it doesn't seem so bad. Everyone seems together."

"Oh no Angela, it's only certain ones, but their stubborn blood taint the rest, makes everyone sick. The little ones catch on early and the tradition is handed down generation after generation.."

Angela laughs. "Mexicans are so funny. It's always a pride thing with you guys."

"Not pride," I correct her, "principle, it's the principle of the matter."

I point out my cousin Linda to her.

"See her? About 2 years ago her parents, my unde Charlie and aunt Rosie, promised her a new car for her 16th birthday. Three days before her birthday, My uncle Charlie had to break the news to her. They just couldn't afford the car. He tells her this 3 days before her birthday! Months after she had been bragging to all her friends about her new Mustang 5.0. She promised to take them dancing in L.A. and everything! She looked like a fool in front of everyone. She swore she would never talk him again. And as far as I know, she hasn't."

Shift in tense
Angela said. "But she's just a kid. Teen-agers do that sort of stuff all the time. She'll get over her high school grudge."

"Don't you bet on it", I tell her. I point out my other cousin, Lupita.

past
present

"You see her? ^Tthat's my cousin Lupita. She been on a diet as long as I've known her. She's tried everything to lose those 30 extra pounds. But they'll always be there. It's just her. She's wasted so much money on diet programs, therapy, surgery. You name it. She just gains it all back. One time she was down to 140 and looking pretty good. My uncle Chuy saw her and started singing" Lupita, Lupita, still a gordita..". Man, was she pissed. I told her to ignore him, that's just the way he is. But she said, 'No, I'm not gonna forget that. He's a grown man, he should know better. Everyone always says 'that's just the way he is' and they let him get away with murder. Somebody should tell him he's wrong. But it won't be me because I will never speak to him again.' and she hasn't".

"Well, I can understand that," said Angela. "I mean, I'm real sensitive about my weight...but she still should have told him. It seems the grudgholders in your family are the women."

"No," I correct her again, "the men are just as bad. If not worse. I point out Uncle Eddie who's on one side of the room and my uncle Lalo who's on the other.

"See, my uncle Eddie doesn't speak to Lalo. It all started many years ago when they were just little kids. Their father, my great unde Eddie took them to the park. They came across one of those pony rides. You know, one ride for a quarter. My great uncle was poor back then. He didn't have enough money for both so he said they would have to flip for it. So he flipped a coin, probably the only coin he had, and said "Little Eddie heads, Lalo tails." When the coin landed on the ground it showed heads which meant Eddie should have gotten the ride, but Lalo grabbed that coin quick and yelled "Tails! I win! and ran off to ride the pony. Just like that. My Unde Eddie says that whole experience was real traumatic for him. And it just proved how selfish his younger brother was and still is. My uncle Lalo when he started making money even bought Eddie's kids a horse, but unde Eddie doesn't care. He says his 'inner child' is still wounded and that he'll never have anything to do with Lalo again."

But this time Angela looked exhausted. She didn't want to hear anymore. She just wanted to eat.

I pulled out a bag from my backpack.

"Whats that?"

"It's food, from the burger place," I tell her.

"I'm sure there's gonna be food here.. Isn't there?"

single

shift in tense

three shots

B+

"Oh, yeah, there will be." I assure her, " Lot's of it...Pozole, enchilalas,sopes,..good stuff like that. But we can't eat any of it."

"Why not?"

"Because," I tell her, " My aunt Alma made it. She once talked trash about my mother right before she died. I mean right there my mother is dying and she says ' I knew this was coming, your mother never took care of herself properly.and who's really suffering? Her? no. Me? no. It's you, that's who ..all alone in the world. Your mother did this to you.' there she was telling me something like that. I swore, right there and then, I would never speak with aunt Alma again.

"I don't want to hear anymore, Angela said, "lets just eat."

So Angela and I laid out our fast food picnic on my grandmother's shag carpet. We chomped on cold french fries and greasy burgers in this room full of principle.

My young cousin Linda ate in the kitchen, separately from her parents, aunt Lupita took her second helpings outside with her and ate alone. The bookends, Lalo and Eddie, stood there grounds all macho like at opposite ends of my grandmas living room.

And my great great Grandpa Louie he sat in heaven ,looking down , and laughing at us all.

Michele Serros 3/93

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"Oh God, it can't be that bad. This ^{death} is a human tragedy. Stuff like this brings people together, especially family."

"You don't know my family," I told her.

I ^{I saw a} pointed to a fast food drive-thru. "Hey, pull up through there, I'm hungry."

When we were finally at my great great grandpa's house, Angela ^{in the distance} observed the ^{ice her the same informal tone} surroundings. ^{looked around.}

"Hey, it doesn't seem so bad. Everyone seems together."

"Oh no Angela, it's only certain ones, but their stubborn blood taint the rest, makes everyone sick. The little ones catch on early and the tradition is handed down generation after generation.."

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"You see her? that's my cousin Lupita. She been on a diet as long as I've known her. She's tried everything to lose those 30 extra pounds. But they'll always be there. It's just her. She's wasted so much money on diet programs, therapy, surgery. You name it. She just gains it all back. One time she was down to 140 and looking pretty good. My uncle Chuy saw her and started singing" Lupita, Lupita, still a gordita."/ Man, was she pissed. I told her to ignore him, that's just the way he is. But she said, 'No, I'm not gonna forget that. He's a grown man, he should know better. Everyone always says 'that's just the way he is' and they let him get away with murder. Somebody should tell him he's wrong. But it won't be me because I will never speak to him again,' and she hasn't".

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"I'm sure there's gonna be food here.. Isn't there?"

"Oh, yeah, there will be," I assure her, " Lot's of it...Pozole, enchilalas,sopes,..good stuff like that. But we can't eat any of it."

"Why not?"

"Because," I tell her, " My aunt Alma made it. She once talked trash ~~about~~ my mother right before she died. I mean right there my mother is dying and she says ' I knew this was coming, your mother never took care of herself properly.and who's really suffering? Her? no. Me? no. It's you. that's who ..all alone in the world. Your mother did this to you.' There she was telling me something like that. I swore, right there and then, I would never speak with aunt Alma again. "

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And my great great Grandpa Louie he sat in heaven ,looking down , and laughing at us all.

*you made me
miss you
no change*

The Real Me

I miss you

The kids next door are on acid tripping
again
They are tripping
marvelling how they can see right through
my landlord's garbage can
it's filthy contents
in a full color spectrum
and how each vein
in each leaf
of our neighbor's maple tree is intensified.

I put off checking the mailbox
for fear that their
almighty psychedelic power
will enable them to see
right through ME
the real me:
gray chalky skin stuffed
into cheap J.C. Penney panties
with broken elastic.

M.M. Serros

*Nice poem. The last three
lines (the real me) could
be more revealing.*

*you build to nice by to
an intense revelation and
let down with frivolous
irony but it could be
brilliant that is a bit*

Economy

*and revealing: nevertheless
cutting*

more

~~High School Reunion~~ need new title

Somewhere,
my vomit lays
in petrified clusters
off Rose Ave. in El Rio.
Every weekday morning
between 8, 8:15 am
my mother
grandfather
neighborhood carpool person
pulled over
swung the passenger door
open
wide
QUICKLY
So I could flush out
the post jr. high anxiety
that in my belly
feriously tap danced
with sugar pop tarts and
blood red breakfast chorizo.

Well said (Once my mouth
was sleeve clean
the journey continued
the last mile
the long mile
to that secondary holding facility,
Rio Mesa High School.

Where everyday
my stomach and I,
battled
acid damaged ex vets
who taught calculus
Bio lab instructors flirting
with wealthy white girls
whose fathers owned country clubs
they so badly wanted to join.
School officials with unofficial titles
like Dean of all Dicks and Birdlegs Bennet
power played with students
tagged Weedboy Willie and La Spooky.

Monica Winters wanting
badly
to kick my ass
cause I wouldn't give in
to the pharmaceuticals
she carried
in a stolen Gucci bag.

This place
they had
Hawaiian day,
Pajama day
60's day
and everyone played the part
dressed the part
But everyday
it was I who wore a costume
The fears of this clown
That someday over the loud speaker
Dean of all Dicks
would announce

"Tomorrow will be inner self day
come as your true self."

And then I'd be dead.

I'd be caught
and how would I explain
to Tia Annies confused hands
to sew me a costume

portraying me,
the real me,
latch key emptiness
suicidal contemplation,

The internal jelly fish canker sores
stinging and sucking,
the last of my school girl esteem

A pain, a true pain.

Mo over the counter chocolate chalk
or weekend in Ojai could ever
soothe coat and protect?

thin could
be the title

great

Man, I hated this place ,
and everyday
I dragged my feet
in customized black and pink Vans
(the only thing about me
the right color, the right size)
slipping through Mary the hall monitor ,
and Petey the student super narc ,
to the girls bathroom
to find a stall
a toilet to sit on
to wait
and wait
for the 3 o'clock bell to ring.

A Belated Victory (for us)

Reesie B. cornered me good that day.
I cursed,
under my breath,
the teacher who held me in detention,
so that I had to walk
the home route alone.

"Hhhhey...,
wanna see something?
wanna see something real good?"
he taunted me.

I knew what "something" was.
I tried to ignore him
the way my mama does when
men,
in the back of pickup trucks,
hiss at her.

But he persisted,
his ugly blue bicycle,
duct tape on the banana seat,
zig-zagging
in front of me,
blocking my path.

"Hhhhey..."
can't you hear me?!
I'm talking to YOU!
Stupid Mexican!"

His words caused welts,
but I couldn't speak.
He was a ninth grader,
a boy.
I was in seventh,
a girl.
No such thing as talking back.

The primered Chevy
with the loose muffler,
I always made fun of,
came rumbling towards us.

My Getaway.

*Michelle your dialogue
is outstanding!
you have a good
ear for voice.*

✓ I flagged the driver down,
and our neighbor, Mrs. Macias, stopped.
I dived into the safety net of
torn, faded upholstery.
the front seat offered.

"Mexicans
always have the rattiest cars!"
Reesie B. yelled after us.

"Just ignore him, mi hija,
he'll never amount to anything,"
Mrs. Macias predicted.

But I was afraid.
Afraid of this kid,
who spent more time in the arcade,
than in school,
and who laughed after yelling,
"La Migra!"
in the E.S.L. classes.

Was he right?

Will I own a ratty car
when I'm older?

Will I always be afraid of big white men,
always looking for a car to flag down?

Twelve years later,
visiting home,
I saw there,
blocking the doorway
to Beto's Market,
THE BIKE.

A new seat, but I knew,
it belonged to Reesie B.

I heard that familiar voice,
get louder and closer.

I tensed up
and cleared the way,
as Reesie B. "the man,"
swung his big body onto the bike.

He peddled away
over his shoulder, yelling
"Stupid Mexicans!"
I'll just find someone who thinks
my checks ARE good!"

And, suddenly,
I wasn't afraid of him anymore.

Need not say
stronger without it.

mi'ja

comma
splice

Everybody
contracts
it.

could use
stars to indicate
time has passed

yelling

"Attention Shoppers!"

The rocks are
my
remembrances.

Discrimination breeds in the Ralph's supermarket on Venice and Overland.
Not in ^{employment opportunities} hiring; race, age or sex. Nothing like that, but rather in the icy depths of the frozen food section. My friend Martin pointed this out to me one day.

He and I were both on aisle 9, going for mixed frozen vegetables.. He was making Spanish rice later that night. The vegetables ~~would~~ make it colorful, festive like. We both thought Veg-All was gross and there was no way he was gonna cut down carrots to micro mini cubes or pick peas out of their casings like his mama does. Frozen veggies would have to do.

Seconds after he opened the glass door Martin shouted. "Look! Look at this!" He pulled out two frosted bags from the bottom compartment.

"Malibu Style Vegetables. and, check this out, Latino Style Vegetables ^{as if} Like we all eat alike..I've never seen this... ..Man, even in the lousy freezer they divide and they discriminate."

"Martin," I ^{asked} him, "They're vegetables, how can they be discriminating? Give me a break!"

He went on to prove his accusations and challenge my ignorance.

"Man, you don't even see it. You're so, so unaware. Look, look at this picture. Latino Style Vegetables. ^TThey have the vegetables cut up all small. Like what's that suppose to mean? Like little food for little people, little minds, little significance...and this Malibu kind, the broccoli, the carrots, are cut up large, all big and grand, like of great worth. The cauliflower, which is WHITE, is the biggest vegetable in the picture, overpowering all the rest. Just like always!"

use "as if" because
"like" conflicts
with "alike"

Keep a consistent
past or
present tense.
Don't mix them
unnecessarily.

"Oh Martin," I tell him, "you're seeing something that just isn't there. You're crazy to get so worked up over vegetables. Now just grab a bag and let's go."

"I'm not crazy," He protested. "This is how it starts. and look, look at this, the Latino Style Vegetables are all spilling out of this wicker basket. All overflowing, messy like. Insinuating that WE are overflowing, overcrowding what they think is their land. And what's with this wicker basket? You know we don't use baskets anymore. We don't fill them with our dirty clothes and take them down to the river to beat against a rock. The Malibu style ones, the vegetables are all neat and in order, properly arranged in a nice WHITE porcelain crock. No problem causing vegetables here, they are orderly, dignified."

"Dignified vegetables?, Martin, is there such a thing?"

"I said (teasing) sarcastically, } you need to add some note of emotion or sense of feeling in the narrator."

He was no longer paying attention. I had lost him to his new found cause. he continued to prove his point, →

....."and look at this, the packaging. Malibu Style is labeled from 'Ralphs Private Selection.' Private, as in 'Not everyone is welcome, no entry to YOU, especially you wetback, go back!'"

By this time a small crowd had formed. Everyone was listening to Martin. He didn't care, he continued, →

("...Malibu Styled are twice as expensive as Latino Style. Why? Are they better vegetables? Did white people from Malibu pick them themselves? Did they take off from some corporate meeting early or leave the tennis court mid game to fly up north, put on their designer jeans to get on their hand and knees and pick their own kind of vegetables? Did they? Did they?")

Michele,

This is a funny story. you have a droll sense of humor, which, in your narrator, comes across as subtle/innocent/pure. You may want to add a few description words + phrases now + again to add to the setting + feeling. The story, though, is good as is. you may want to

Martin was screaming at the top of his lungs as he waved the thawed out bags over his head and furiously flung them to the ground. The crowd cheered as an array of green orange and white exploded on the supermarket floor. Martin proceeded to stomp continuously on the soggy newly intergrated vegetables, mashing them into the store linoleum. And then this extraordinary thing happened. One by one people started to pull frozen produce bags out of the freezer compartments. I saw a Korean woman^a and her two children stomp on Oriental style vegetables, a young guy in cowboy boots kick Country Style Vegetables down the aisle toward the checkout lines, and handsome dark haired man rip apart a bag of Italian Style Vegetables. More and more people began to pull bags out of the compartments and destroy the "stereotypes in a bag" evidence.

Martin stood back by the Sarah Lee frozen desserts to enjoy the beauty of the revolt he created. But his clenched fist victory was soon interrupted.

An angry and overweight manager (aren't they all?) pushed his way through the crowd and ordered a break-up. "You," he said, as he pushed his finger into Martin's chest "are trying to incite a riot in MY store. You see this here?" He pointed to his name badge which stated: Bob Howard Smith- Store Management. I'm in charge here. I want you to take your groceries and take your friend and get out of here, NOW!"

Martin picked up our plastic hand basket and threw our other groceries onto the floor. The crowd cheered even louder. He looked straight into the store manager's⁽¹⁾ eye and said "Man, take your finger out of my face, fatso, I'd rather shop at Pavillions than come back to your sorry store!" He then grabbed my arm and pushed our way through the cheering, freshly liberated crowd.

try writing
longer stories,
developing your
characters more
fully. This will
help you learn to
control your
writing for
the big stories
you'll soon
begin to write.

Michele M. Serros 93

JohnwannabeChicano

John Michael Smith III is
a Chicano.

Every morning he ~~is awakened~~
by KOXD,

the local oldies station,
pockets his blond hair
into a black hair net
and stuffs his skinny white legs
into stiff beige khakis
severely creased.

He is now ready for McKinley Jr. high
The first school
in prestigious Belmont estates
to attempt busing,
The second year
of his new identity

At the breakfast table
he slurps on canned menudo
inoring his mother's french toast
and the stern silence
from John Michael Smith II

Leaving the house for school
he doesn't look back
when his mother calls out.
Exasperated,
she finally yells:
"Juan!"
"Juan Miguel,
you forgot your lunch!"

awakens to

*Try to avoid
the "To be"
verb.*

*Sorry, this
palm does not
do much for
me.*

But he ignores that too,
He's been humiliated
one too many times
in front of his homeboys
by her chicken salad and ambrosia
tucked in pink Tupperware.
Besides,
today the guys are taking him to "the coach"
for tacos de sesos.
whatever that is.

He peddles his lowered Schwinn Stingray
past rows of mini-mansions,
expensive cars,
and leaf blowers attached
to the backs of dark skinned gardeners.

"Hola!"
Buena Dias!"
John Michael yells out.
He waves.
They are his people.
His new familia.
He is happy.
He is smug.
He is a Chicano.

M.M. Serros '92

The Superhero Scam

Batman has a small penis.
I know this.
because Marsha told me.
She's head cashier,
co-worker of mine,
who had a stint,
as a waitress at El Torito,
years ago.
And in he walked,
Pre-bat, Mr. Mom,
No entourage or anything,
just Mr. B. himself,
for chicken fajitas
or something.

Anyway,
~~one thing led to another~~
and he liked either her blond hair
or how the brown polyester hugged her ass,
and the next thing she knew,
she was up in the hills,
Hollywood hills that is.
Dry humping,
zipper friction causing sparks,
but he never let her see,
the Bat Dick,
in bright light,
and now we all know why,
because batman has a small penis.

How I pity
those who try to outsmart
sensory perception
and how I pity poor Marsha
who was misled by Hollywood hype.
She couldn't bear to see Batman 2,
knowing what she knew.
Then the trade papers tattled:
"Popeye has herpes, girlfriend sues."
and now , Superman is DEAD!
Where have all the superheroes gone?
Are there any REAL men left?

Poor Marsha,
maybe Wonderwoman
will come through her check-out line.

Need not say, understood

cliché

great
poem
love it

Michele M. Serros

Winter 92

White Owned

(for Guillermo-Gomez-Pena)

Pink ~~M~~ama tugs at pink baby
→ "Don't wander off"

I sympathize
as a hopeful mother to be

"You never know,"
Pink ~~M~~ama warns,
"people today are crazy
.... 'specially the Spanish"

"You mean people
from Spain?"
I ask.

"No,
the Spanish people from Mexico."

~~My reflection in her sunglasses,~~
reminds me of my color
but block it out to her.

for some reason

"They steal white babies
take 'em across the border
for pornography,
slave labor,
human sacrifice."

Fearful of a letter to the manager
for outspoken counter service,

I stay silent

wrap her dry cleaned clothes
in air tight plastic ~~child~~

watch pink mama walk away
and wonder if white boyfriend
will give me beige baby
everyone thinks I stole.

image of
color

reflect my image
remind me my color is still there

Termination followed

Michele Serros 5-29-93

Hable

MI PROBLEMA

My sincerity isn't good enough
and eyebrows raise,
when I request: "Habla mas despacio, por favor"
My skin is brown,
just like theirs.
But now I am not worthy of the color
because I do not speak Spanish
the way I should.
Then they laugh and talk about it,
my problem
in front of me
in the language I stumble over.

A white person gets encouragement,
praise.
For weak attempts at a second language.
Maybe he wants to be brown
like us,
and that is good.

My earnest attempts
make me look bad,
dumb.
Perhaps I wanted to be white,
like THEM,
and that is bad.

I keep my flashcards hidden,
a practice cassette tape,
unlabeled,
because I am ashamed.
And I should know better,
they tell me,
Spanish is in my blood.

present
tense

I continue to practice,
with my grandma.
She gives me patience,
permission to learn.
And one day,
I'll be a perfected "r" rolling,
tilde using Spanish speaker,
A true Chicana at last!

nice poem

Michele M. Serros

Michele Serros
(short version)

"Attention Shoppers!"

Discrimination breeds in the Ralph's supermarket on Venice and Overland. Not in employee hiring; race, age or sex. Nothing like that, but rather in the icy depths of the frozen food section. My friend, Martin, pointed this out to me one

day. He and I were both on aisle 9, going for mixed frozen vegetables. He was making Spanish rice later that night. The vegetables would make it colorful, festive like. We both thought Veg-All was gross and there was no way he was gonna cut down carrots to micro mini cubes or pick peas out of their casings like his mama does. Frozen veggies would have to do.

Seconds after he opened the glass door, Martin shouted, "Look! Look at this!" He pulled out two frosted bags from the bottom compartment.

"Malibu Style Vegetables. and, check this out, Latino Style Vegetables Like we all eat alike..I've never seen this.. ...Man, even in the lousy freezer they divide and they discriminate."

"Martin," I ask him, "They're vegetables, how can they be discriminating? Give me a break!"

He went on to prove his accusations and challenge my ignorance.

"Man, you don't even see it. You're so, so unaware. Look, look at this picture. Latino Style Vegetables. they have the vegetables cut up all small. Like what's that suppose to mean? Like little food for little people, little minds, little significance...and this Malibu kind, the broccoli, the carrots, are cut up large, all big and grand, like of great worth. The cauliflower, which is WHITE, is the biggest vegetable in the picture, overpowering all the rest. Just like always!"

used dialogue

describe him
instead

who is
narrator?

"Oh Martin," I tell him, "you're seeing something that just isn't there. You're crazy to get so worked up over vegetables. Now just grab a bag and let's go."

"I'm not crazy," He protested. "This is how it starts. and look, look at this, the Latino Style Vegetables are all spilling out of this wicker basket. All overflowing, messy like. Insinuating that WE are overflowing, overcrowding what they think is their land. And what's with this wicker basket? You know, we don't use baskets anymore. We don't fill them with our dirty clothes and take them down to the river to beat against a rock. The Malibu style ones, the vegetables are all neat and in order, properly arranged in a nice WHITE porcelain crock. No problem causing vegetables here, they are orderly, dignified.

"Dignified vegetables?, Martin, is there such a thing?"

He was no longer paying attention. I had lost him to his new found cause. he continued to prove his point.

....."and look at this, the packaging. Malibu Style is labeled from 'Ralphs Private Selection.' Private, as in 'Not everyone is welcome, no entry to YOU, especially you wetback, go back!'"

By this time a small crowd had formed. Everyone was listening to Martin.

He didn't care, he continued.

"...Malibu Styled are twice as expensive as Latino Style. Why?! are they better vegetables? Did white people from Malibu pick them themselves? 'Did they take off from some corporate meeting early or leave the tennis court mid game to fly up north, put on their designer jeans to get on their hand and knees and pick their own kind of vegetables? Did they?! Did they?!"

Martin was screaming at the top of his lungs as he waved the thawed out bags over his head and furiously flung them to the ground. The crowd cheered as an array of green orange and white exploded on the supermarket floor. Martin proceeded to stomp continuously on the soggy newly integrated vegetables, mashing them into the store linoleum. And then this extraordinary thing happened. One by one people started to pull frozen produce bags out of the freezer compartments. I saw a Korean woman and her two children stomp on Oriental style vegetables, a young guy in cowboy boots kick Country Style Vegetables down the aisle toward the checkout lines, and a handsome dark haired man rip apart a bag of Italian Style Vegetables. More and more people began to pull bags out of the compartments and destroy the "stereotypes in a bag" evidence.

Martin stood back by the Sarah Lee frozen desserts to enjoy the beauty of the revolt he created. But his clenched fist victory was soon interrupted.

An angry and overweight manager (aren't they all?) pushed his way through the crowd and ordered a break-up. "You," he said, as he pushed his finger into Martin's chest, "are trying to incite a riot in MY store. You see this here?" He pointed to his name badge which stated: Bob Howard Smith- Store Management. I'm in charge here. I want you to take your groceries and take your friend and get out of here, NOW!"

Martin picked up our plastic hand basket and threw our other groceries onto the floor. The crowd cheered even louder. He looked straight into the store manager's eye and said "Man, take your finger out of my face, fatso, I'd rather shop at Pavillions than come back to your sorry store!" He then grabbed my arm and pushed our way through the cheering, freshly liberated crowd.

I'd like
some more
also. This is
quessable

New ending

michele Serros
Fall 93

This is sharp & very funny!
work on 2 principles:
1) use more description
2) break up the dialogue
look.
within the work as an
could work as an
Times P, 1961
A (Mun pay)

Tag Bangers Last Can

Flaco held his manhood
steady.
Aimed it at
a city block
pissing lifted Krylon
citrus yellow
cherry red
black.

His defiant stand
earned him
a loyal crew
customized baseball cap
t.v. tabloid expose'
and a toe tag.

Michele Serros 4/93

Powerful poem. One
of your best

Dear Diary

The repulsive repetition
of dry heaves and regurgitation
woke me up

I got out of bed
to look out the window
I found my newest lover
balancing on bent knees,
✓ vomiting in my landlords garden

My roommate Angela
entered the room
still in a robe
carrying two mugs of coffee.
Together we witnessed
my favorite rose bush
damaged
by unwanted fertilizer.

Angela smiled
"He found your diary didn't he?
and just like the others
took advantage of your sound sleep
and read it
didn't he?"

I didn't have to respond

✓ His acidic insides
of spaghetti and cheap wine
from last night's dinner
splattered on every
stem, petal and thorn
answered her question.

we sipped our coffees
and watched my new ex-lover
wipe his mouth
swagger to his parked car
and slowly drive away.

great
poem,
powerful
poem

next

"Don't worry,"
Angela said
"there will be others."

I looked at the yellow lumpy mess
he left behind
"Yes, "I agreed,
"but it was this rose bush
I liked best."

M.M. Serros

Preferred Ditching Michele
~~It is me~~ 7th Period

Alternative Roots Lead The Lost.

Seven years old
when uncle Eddie
threw me across the San Diego border.
He landed us both in T.J.
and announced
"This is your culture,
these are your roots.
Now lay in it."

need new
title, any
suggestions?

My eyes witnessed
dark skinned
legless men
paddling their way
on pink plastic skateboards
through the thick crowd
of drunk college kids,
gold tooth vendors,
young girls
pinching puss
out of boyfriend's back,
spray painted mules
with blood stained hooves,
and three feet high
serape covered women
rocking their meal tickets to sleep.

100% Imitation Culture
Supreme

My uncle Eddie
threw thirty cents down
for three tacos
and laughed.

Seventeen years old
high school counselor
Mr. A through M
put his certificate of
psychology to use,
"College is unthinkable"
he told me,
"you better try the service,
at the rate you people
are killing each other
you'll be lucky
to get out of high school
alive."

who
is seventeen
narrator or
counselor?

when
+ na

The blaring red light,
broke through his office blinds.
Another hair netted kid
wrong pair of numerals
tattooed on brown belly
being dragged away
to waiting police car.
Mr. A through M
shook his head
and laughed.

This was the entertainment
for these men
I wanted no part of it.
It was not me.

I preferred
ditching 7th period
econ class
hiding out
in the football bleachers
getting in touch with my culture
my way
smoking cheap Mexican sence
hanging out
with the cooler ones
taking Physical Graffiti
over territorial graffiti
watching the same
pimplly cheerleaders
practice their summer camp routines
over
and over again.

This was my entertainment.
My scene

It
is
me.

possible title

?

possible title

"La Angel" "La Letty"

Face to the mirror,
She outlined the inside of her bottom eye lid.
Thick,
it darkened to a deep velvet black.
The finishing touch nearly ended
forty minutes of labor
for this racoon eyed beauty.

"You know what you are?" she asked me.
Before I could answer
She christened me with a new identity.

"Chicana Falsa"

Irony,
coming from one,
who carpets her color with white face powder.

"M.E.C.H.A. don't mean shit" she told me.
"And that beginning Spanish of yours,
will never get you any discount at Bob's market."

"HOMOGENIZED HISPANIC"

Tish
She
had once been Angelica, Leticia
Angie for short,
Mommy's little 'Licca,
but now,
only two weeks into junior high,
She was "La Angel Triste" Letty
y que
no mas

I had once taught her,
years ago,
how to ride a bike
but that didn't matter.
She now preferred Chevy Impalas,
and they came to her house,
often.
Low and slow,
These Mexican Cadillacs,
done up in candy paint and metal flake,
chrome-plated spoke rims,
glistening like chariots.

chiche
need not
say. make
reader/listener
do some
work.
Poetry
must be
compressed,
economical

Solemn looking youths,
in hairnets and Dickies
~~were~~ lords behind the chain steering wheels.

And she fell for them,
for IT,
The whole creased khaki-pressed flannel-medallion wearing scene.

Awk. ["What does she know?" ~~each other~~ ^{they both} thought.
What did we know? ←

Cliche [Will the true Chicana please stand up?

This is a nice poem
but the last three lines
need some work.

This poem could use
a bit more development.
Let's have a bit more
dialogue

The Finish Line (Doesn't End Here)

5:35 PM,

~~He~~ routine time

My father entered our home

hung up his 40 year old work coat

~~and~~ slowly rubbed his cracked brow.

Unauthorized,

I watched him with my mother

listening

to the grown-up talk

take place between them

hiding my small body

in the ~~shadows~~

of the kitchen pantry. *shadow*

Over the flecked Formica

of my grand mother's dining table,

my father's large callused hands

enveloped my mother's.

His lament began:

↓

↓

"They"

he said,

"wanna give it to me.

early retirement

right in the rear.

The Bon Voyage Bomb.

Thanks for the 40 years of life,

but we don't need you

no more."

"I'm still a young man,"

my father claimed.

"I mean, look,

look at this."

~~He~~ pulled up a clinging pant leg

exposing dry hairless skin.

"These legs are strong."

he bragged.

slapping his chapped calf

to life.

~~Why~~ these are the same legs
that took Lincoln High
to state finals,
blue ribbon victory
not once
not twice
but many times
1927, '28, '29
I can't even keep count.
~~you'll~~ never see these legs
idle in some elevator
No way!
Five flights of stairs
Five days a week
these damn legs make it
every time.
Every morning
every evening
twice at lunch.

I sighed heavily *heavy sign*
~~before continuing.~~

~~And~~ now some pimply kid
in a poly-blend suit
who takes the elevator
in high school
ran only after skirts
wants to let me go!
wants to give this track star
a finish line
he ain't
~~and~~ will never be
ready for.

...I'll tell him,
tell him what to do with his
pathetic "full pension regretfully yours" speech
he tried to pull over on me.
I know exactly what I'm gonna do,
exactly."

} *nice*

"Of course you do"
My mother finally spoke
as she warmed the room
with corn tortillas,
last night's soup
and an encouraging smile.
Modest tools
to bandage a flagging ego
but that's what she knew to do
and like always
it worked.

Michele M. Serros 1/93

Disco Gymnasium

The 18 inch waist
buxom blonde
informs me,
"You're late!
bathrooms are a mess!"

I tell her
"No, I'm no cleaning lady
I go here, I'm a member."

Her left eyebrow arches
with suspicion.
She checks my plastic card
proof and signature.
Annoyed wave allows me in.

Feeling very intrusive
in this exclusive
gym.
No bobby socks
or baggy shorts
like Rio De Valle Jr. High.
P.E. class.
I'm the solo Mexicana
in loose chongo
ex-boyfriendssweatpants
oversized t-shirt.
Fashion outcast
creating a nuisance
to iridescent,
pearlescent,
flourescent
triple X,
spandex,
latex.

/ frag.

Need better
title. Some-
thing that
might say
the same
be
but
more
imaginative

Ahead and behind
my eyes can't hide
from the
neon green
thong thang
dividing large curd
 twin cheeks
tanning bed bodies
dying to be
brown
 (like me).

It's the Friday afternoon
last ditch effort!
to get it on
and get it off with
wealthy white westside women
sweating to inner city rap boys
 like they secretly do at home.

kick,
 higher!
stretch,
 farther!
squeeze
 harder!
DIE
 sooner!

and the whole time
I am thinking of
that double cheese
chimichanga supreme
I'm gonna pick up
on the way home.

Beverly Hills Co-dependant Co-star

The judge kept him
100 yards away

So instead
he stalked
J.C. Penney lingerie departments
searching for waist high mannequins
to finger
the cotton crotch'd panties
like the ones she wore.

His sloppy tongue
licked the heads off
Thrifty's double scoop
the brand she loved so much.

Traded in the Jeep Wagoneer
for a vintage VW
the same kind she was
saving up to buy someday.

He had controlled conversations with
old phone messages
on a tape labeled
HER

Spent 10 hour work days
staring out
and staring out
Century City high rise windows
tracing the mapped streets
he once drove her through

Instead
He drove her crazy
He drove her OUT

*This poem
needs to
be more
visceral &
(needs to
involve the
reader
more).*

She now spends time
in city bus aisles
supermarkets
sharing musty sheets
and cold cuts
with a man
much taller then
him.

Michele Serros 5/4/93