Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Karen S. Córdova: Two Poems

Karen S. Córdova · Wednesday, March 2nd, 2016

Karen S. Córdova is a Southern California poet, who was born in Colorado and has deep roots both in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Karen participates in formal spoken word performances across the United States. She is proud to have participated in the *2010 Festival de Flor y Canto* at USC and many *ekphrasis* events—collaborations of poets, visual artists, and performing artists. Karen curated her inaugural show, *Ekphrasis: Sacred Stories of the Southwest*, in May 2014, at OBLIQ Art in Phoenix, AZ.
After reading several of the poems in the manuscript, executives from a Chicago production company featured Karen in the 2011 documentary, *Mary Kay Inspiring Stories.*

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Think about what happens to the old when no one fights for them.
The story of abuse suffered by the author's grandmother will shock most people. Unfortunately, elder abuse is a common phenomenon: One in ten older adults is abused, and the abuse may take a variety of forms—financial, emotional, physical, sexual, and that of neglect. Often these types of abuse coexist and are ongoing for months and years before discovered or the elder dies. This book will shine a light on this important issue that has been kept in the dark for much too long. It will also inspire the reader to develop a deeper understanding of issues that older adults and their families face and to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves.
Córdova's heroic actions and lyrical poems will inspire all of us to fight for them too.

—Laura Mosqueda, M.D.
Director, National Center on Elder Abuse and Professor of Family Medicine and Geriatrics,
Keck School of Medicine of USC (University of Southern California)

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Through the Mouth of the Rat

RATON PASS

This poem's for you:
Be careful to whom you hand your trigger pull—
your *Treatment Preference Sheet.*
I call it *An Order to Kill.*
It has a silencer: No one will hear you scream.
A single name on a POA (not Jesus) saves.

Most who said they'd pray
for Grandma and me did nothing,
might as well have cocked a gun.
I thought of Woodstock:
Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.
Don't kid yourself. Every state has legal suicide:
Your personal *Advance Directive*
with little boxes (*Yes or No*)
could be your last supper menu—
Choose the way you'd like to go.
Whoever has your POA will pick
like petals (*I do. I don't.*)
if you breathe or if you won't.
Twenty years ago, the sister of a triage nurse
pulled me aside to say the nurse believed
old people should be left to die—
They take up bed space.
Another scene: Round table.
University event.
As if I, the stranger, were not there,
nine hospital administrators
talked among themselves
about mistakes, care levels,
agreed they'd never leave a loved one
sick and alone in the hospital
they managed—or couldn't quite.
While we ate our Chicken Kiev,
I was quiet and polite.
It was almost time to do the deed.
I drove from the haven of Mora
into the mouth of the rat. Yes, the eye-
of-the-needle path between New Mexico
and Colorado orphan butte can be treacherous.
Though mountains of Mora blessed my leave
and open plains near a wagon mound
rose to comfort and guide, a traitorous trail
took the reins, twitched like the rodent's tail,
turned gray from twisting sheets of rain and hail
bellowing a startled-giant curse to all
who dared descend into the mountain's jaw
and tried to climb out from its pit.
Cerro felt all movement within its craw;
there was no safe or hidden track.
Was being spat from the mouth
of *raton* into the wide-eyed
southern prairie hem
more a welcome
or an omen?

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Pass the *Farolito*

Elegy for María Elvera Albert Córdova

Grandma churned butter with *cuentos*,
wrapped boiling of beans with curiosity,
so I wanted to remember. I heard:
Fly, hijita, fly
when she said:
Work, hijita, work
sometimes by heartglow
of a kerosene lantern
hanging on her porch.
She told me this story from decades before:
Poisoned air sang a death lullaby from a vent,
hissed her to sleep. She woke walking up
a dusty path. Voices luring her back
were louder than Light calling her to the end.
So she lived, kept spinning
words, pulling wisps from her past
to enchant us with tales:
family covered-wagon trips,
healing with *hierbajes*,
Abuelo Luciano's abrupt adiós—
slamming a door on a windless morning.
She thought, *Grandpa died*,
then finished her coffee, started her chores
until cousins on horses came carrying old news.
Mi abuela will walk toward her mother
down that path lined with sun-struck trees.
For a moment, she'll look back—
silently bequeath her voice to me—
roll the *petate* and leave forever.
Her voice will live in the heart of my heart.
I vow I will guard, pass it whole
to my grandchildren's children,
especially the one with the softest eyes
who finds treasures in stories.
Which child will it be?
Pass the *farolito*.
Let it burn.

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