

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

liz gonzález: Two Poems

liz gonzález · Wednesday, December 7th, 2016

liz gonzález is a fourth generation Southern Californian. She writes poetry, fiction, and memoir, and her work has been published widely. Recently, her fiction appears in *Inlandia: A Literary Journey* and her poetry appears in the anthologies *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* and *Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts of Los Angeles*. Her recent awards include an Irvine Fellowship at the Lucas Artists Residency Program. She is a member of the Macondo Workshop, organizes Uptown Word & Arts, which promotes literacy and artistic expression in North Long Beach, California, and teaches creative writing through the UCLA Extension's Writers' Program. lizgonzalez.com

The Summer the Women Stayed Indoors

East Bay, 1997

Even those without air conditioning
kept their windows latched, doors bolt-
locked and chained; they sweat it out.

Only do errands during daylight

The rapist broke the m.o. of his kind,
struck during the afternoon in wide open
public spaces. No type: Any color,
any age, any size. Any woman.

*Be aware of locations where rape
is more likely to occur and avoid them*

He grabbed one woman walking
on a busy Berkeley sidewalk

*Remember, you are not trying to fight the attacker,
you are looking for a way to escape.*

The temperatures rose

and women were holed up in hospitals
sucking their dinners through wired jaws

*Whatever you do, don't let him
take you to another location*

Walking her big dog on a crowded path
(she took all the precautions),
a woman got trapped in a lapse of people.
He was waiting for her
The dog yelped, caught on the leash.

*Don't yell the word help;
people will ignore your call.
Yell fire or 911*

An afternoon in the soundproof
music room at a local college,
practicing the piano, her back to the door.
She didn't hear him.

Avoid exercising outdoors after dark

That summer I stopped
taking walks alone.
Like a child stuck at home with the flu
I stood behind the window
and watched with envy
as a neighbor man ran by
shirtless, wearing short jogging shorts
He crossed the street
without bothering to look both ways

(A version of this poem was previously published in *The Squaw Review*, Volume 6, 2001)

White Picket Fence House

All these years you fooled yourself,
thought your first home,
enclosed by a white picket fence
your father built,
was the safe one

where you could sleep
through the night
without being touched,
where the sting of a belt
never bruised your skin

He died when you were three
Imagination filled
the few, windless
memories you have of life there—
rooms warmed by sunlight,

daddy rolling his chopper
into the back drive
Before you understood the reasons,
you sensed he had earned
a long stay in purgatory

Fifty-three years later you find out
he hit Mama in that house
You couldn't have slept through
nights he came home drunk
Now you know why Grandma said,

“Your father was not a good man”

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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