

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lowriting: Shots

Rosie Flores · Wednesday, July 20th, 2016

(“*Tomorrow’s Voices Today*“ is a new series curated by poet and educator Mike Sonksen.)

The following essay is a celebration of the book, *Lowriting: Shots, Rides and Stories from the Chicano Soul*, an anthology by Broken Sword Publishing with photographs by Art Meza. Edited by Santino Rivera, over 50 photographs are paired with stories, artwork and poetry from Luis J. Rodriguez, Luis Alberto Urrea, Lalo Alcaraz, Gustavo Arellano and Alvaro Rodriguez.

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 I see men in their typical black and gray t-shirts, with words and pictures representing who they are and where they’re from. I see the same men, bald-headed and buff, standing together to share their excitement for their own built, airbrushed, shiny cars. *Cholos y Cholas* coming together to not only enjoy themselves with their art, but they come together to introduce **their** English language poetry of street slang, that fill Mexican *barrios* with Spanish echoes of truth. Not only did Luis Rodriguez share his view points on how life was in the near part of L.A, but he introduced me to the idea that togetherness was the only way to be heard. Togetherness is a type of warm fellowship, like members of a family or simply the feeling of closeness and affection that comes behind unity itself.

It was long before I was born when the films *American Me* and *Boulevard Nights* appeared on the big screen and I myself grew up watching these films. With *American Me* we’re introduced to a rise to power of a Mexican Mafia that began in a California prison during the mid/late twentieth century. This film was a result of the aftermath of the Zoot Suit Riots that took place in Los Angeles 1943 where Latinos were raped and beat. With *Boulevard Nights* we find what life truly was like in a gang from a Chicano that attempts to get out of it, but keeps finding his way back into it, time and time again. The film is focused in East Los Angeles where the *lowrider aficionado* began his journey along with his brother who seeked to prove loyalty. Both films took place in the “lowrider movement,” said Santino J. Rivera. With stories and memories from the rides they took, the shots they dodged, and the Chicano souls who explained it all.

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Rides & Stories

 The rides that people made with their 1962 Chevy Impalas or their 1940 Mercury’s was

nothing, but an expression of pride along with a creation of Chicano culture that was always connected through experience. With rides from a *barrio* queen reminiscing on what life was like *con su* (perfect) *rey*, I began to feel what she felt. It was probably because I knew what it was like riding in one of those cars, windows down with my right arm getting slightly darker than the other because of the hot beaming sun. With faces just admiring its beauty, it's art, the rush of feeling like superman when I hopped 10 feet in the air, and that same feeling of happiness I got whenever I saw a 1948 Chevy Fleetline. Lowriding was the only thing that saved them from being confused because together they found themselves and they always knew where to drive to.

With “hood bouncing in slow rhythm” and the feeling of driving down The Boulevard was another adventure in their home. They escaped from reality in their cars and along the way they put *palabras* together that showed people who they were as a whole. It was like going back in time when Nancy G. drove down the street and saw little *carnalitos* y *carnalitas* running through sprinklers on a hot summer day while *abuelos* y *abuelas* remembered what it was like when they were their age. She let me get a taste of my present because it seemed like nothing has changed since then. Her ride made me realize that I had more in common with a book than I did with most people, even my own family, which is probably why I love it when anyone gives me a book. I feel like it's somewhat of a guilty pleasure.

From an all-woman lowrider car club called *The Unique Ladies*, to *la tierra* filled with music blasting from the third world, there was always a story. You can honestly gain something from reading this, not the name and year of different cars, but the story that built them, the Chicano history that is hidden from the history books placed on our desks, “El Movimiento, Caesar, Che, Tijerina, Aztlan, the walkouts, the boycotts, the riots, the resistance.”

HALF OF THE THINGS WERE NEW TO ME!!! Reminiscing in their story (car), about their streets, listening to the oldies, the sparks, the smoke that comes out of doing donuts in the street, and with artwork and poetry from the people who write them on the low.

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Chicano Souls

 In life I've learned that if you love something at some point you'd have to sacrifice it, like the many stories written from a mouth fed Chicano. They spoke tongues of sacrifice, but they never forgot the memories because that's the one love they prohibit to be taken from them. I spoke to two wonderful people that are apart of this community and asked them a couple questions about the life they built out of Lowriding.

I first spoke to a woman named Lux. She's been lowriding with her father ever since she can remember.

Lux

Me: What's it like riding?

Lux: “It's the best feeling in the world. A veces te en cuentras en diferentes partes de la ciudad, you know? You can be anywhere and just knowing that you're doing what you love washes everything else away.

Me: What was the first lowrider you've ever driven?

Lux: “Pues, esa es una larga historia, but it was my father's car may he rest in peace. I had just turned 18 and all I remember was my dad telling me how proud he was of me and that one day I'd get his 1965 Buick Riviera lowrider. I couldn't wait so I took his car for a joy ride and I ended up getting pulled over. Him paying the ticket was my birthday gift.”

Me: Do you think that if you're father wasn't into lowriding, you wouldn't be either?

Lux: YES!!! Pero, I'm glad that he was. I honestly found my future in lowriding. At the end of the day we all have free will, we all make choices. Eso es lo que dios nos da. I took it upon myself to be apart of riding and everything else happened because it was supposed to happen. In it I met my husband and had my kids. And the funny thing is, is that I couldn't have imagined my life any different. It's not perfect to anyone else, but it's as perfect as it can be for me. Pero dejame preguntarte algo, Rosie...What do you want from life

Me: I don't expect anything from it, I just wanna be apart of it.

Lux: I can see that you are, literally. But seriously dig deep mijia.

Me: Well, I want to love and be loved, I want to be able to fix the promises that I've broken and fix the ones that I'm still waiting for to happen, but I don't ever want to forget what I did or said even if it was bad or good. I want to live to be old and sit in my front yard watching the children get wet with the sprinklers, haha.

Lux: Me recuerdas mucho de como yo era cuando era nina. You're going to do great things, I mean you wouldn't be here (lowrider car show) if you weren't serious about the rest of your career and that's something to put in your essay. But just remember to not avoid the things you've known all your life for things that you've barely been introduced to. Que dios te bendiga.

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Later I spoke to this middle aged man who requested for his name not to be mentioned in the article, but felt that it was time to finally speak about the way he felt about his passion. He's been lowriding since high school with his cousins.

Middle Aged Man

Me: How does it feel to ride?

Middle Aged Man: "I still get mixed feelings whenever I ride. I guess what I'm trying to say is that when I ride it's not really to feel it's more to express. Sometimes I ride porque I want to and sometimes I ride because I have to.

Me: Express?

Middle Aged Man: Miro a los caros como si fueran personas. I mean they all have a name right? And they all technically have a birthdate right? My point is that us humans we express ourselves with tattoos and the designs on my car whether they be naked girls or fire or even nuestro dios, those are the tattoos that I put on its body to tell my story. It's never about the money I put into it. (thousands)

Me: You said sometimes you ride because you have to. What do you mean by that?

Middle Aged Man: When I ride it's not to show off mi caro chingon. No, that's not the case (chuckles). Sometimes I feel like no one knows me. I feel alone so I go out in my lowrider and just cruise it...why? I don't know, but all I know is that in my Gangster Paradise I feel understood without even having to talk to anyone. The car says it all. Seeing kids all over smile and tell me to hop. Man, como si fuera famoso or something.

Me: If you don't mind me asking, but your "Gangster Paradise"? And really it makes you feel famous?

Middle Aged Man: That's the name of the car. And yea driving down where I used to live. I just cruise to let that wind in my face and let me feel those rushing flashbacks of how it was when I was there. Even the bad ones I'm grateful for because now I know what not to get into or do.

Me: Last question. What's lowriding to you?

Middle Aged Man: It's an escape. The smell of that fresh paint job reminds me of painting my

room when I used to live at home. The interior, that's the most important part, only you can make it comfortable for yourself porque al fin representa como te cientes adentro de ti misma. The music playing in the background defines the detail outside of the car...it kinda tells my "fans" what I'm all about haha. But the detail, the tattoos tell my story. The girls, the guy in between all of them trying to pick a happiness, but wants it all, the jail bars, todo...that's me. It's my escape, everybody needs one. Even the busiest and happiest people in the world have an escape. They eventually realize what it is. Question is what's yours?

Me: This. I guess you can say I found it while writing on the low.

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