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Author Sergio Troncoso Shares Incredible Truths About the Border and Storytelling

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Sergio Troncoso, author of "[From This Wicked Patch of Dust](#)" and "[The Nature of Truth](#)," was born to a legacy of storytellers, writers and educators, and he was obliged to follow suit and tell incredible truths through writing --even if his grandfather warned him against it.

Born on the east side of El Paso, Texas in a rural, *Mexicano*-populated neighborhood called Ysleta, Troncoso was raised in an adobe home built by his parents. During the first year in the home, the family used kerosene lamps and stoves, and they had an outhouse in their backyard.

Nonetheless, it was there, in Ysleta, that the author developed his love for reading. He spent hours at the main branch of the El Paso Public Library, where he fell in love with storytelling. The Ysleta public library branch would one day be renamed in his honor. Also, he frequently biked roughly fifteen miles to the main branch of the El Paso Public Library, reading authors like Rudolfo Anaya and S.E. Hinton, after he'd visit with his maternal grandmother. She was a woman who'd grown up during the Mexican Revolution and told him enchanting stories about Francisco Villa and "el rancho" where his *abuelita* grew up.

Troncoso's paternal grandfather, the editor and publisher of *El Dia*, the first daily newspaper in Juarez, Mexico in the 1920s, also influenced the author to pursue journalism. However, after being thrown in jail dozens of times for criticizing Mexican politicians and having his print shop bombed three times, Troncoso's grandfather warned him: "Don't become a writer, because if you tell the truth, people will hate you forever."

The author went on to become editor of his high school newspaper and participated in writing competitions across the country, often penning controversial articles. His interest in telling stories also moved him toward education, like many others in his family. He views teaching as a way to "help others develop their voices and tell their stories.

"I am constantly thinking of new writing exercises for my students at the Yale Writers' Conference and other places I teach," Troncoso told Latin Post. "I take my job as a teacher seriously, and I am devoted to my students, but I think teaching can also be a creative way to re-imagine your writing and storytelling. Teaching is a distinct craft, and I am always trying to push the envelope to give my students new experiences and perspectives to improve their writing."

Troncoso is a reality-based fiction writer who dabbles extensively in non-fiction. As a non-fiction writer, the author has the freedom to focus on what he knows and believes is true, sharing

history and actual experiences from the position of an observer. There's a limit to any particular perspective, and "the truth" can be a matter of debate. But Troncoso explains that it's still possible to pursue questions psychologically and philosophically through non-fiction. With fiction, the author is able "to fashion characters and interactions and stories that are not true, that simply exist in my head." Much of his fiction explores familiar backgrounds and situations, or even stories he's read in the newspaper.

"There is nothing like the freedom of the blank page, that freedom of the imagination. But even with that ultimate freedom--the freedom of fiction--I think we should always be striving for the truths ignored or neglected in society and the difficult truths of human nature," said Troncoso. "The irony is that the best fiction should have truth at the heart of the story."

With his writing, Troncoso has had bouts of experimentalism, particularly in recent short stories, as he's observed the shaping and manipulating of time in stories by Alice Munro. The author also enjoys stories that he hasn't seen in literature. He recently wrote a story about a Latino soldier in Iraq and an essay about taking care of his elderly, diabetic father.

His first book, ["The Last Tortilla and Other Stories,"](#) depicted tales about Ysleta, and Mexicanos and Chicanos from El Paso, which were also philosophical stories, a unique combination. As a graduate student at Yale, he became fascinated by Greek and German philosophy, and opted to write 'philosophy in literature,' stories that combined accessible characterization and storytelling with the weighty, complex questions of philosophy. "The Abuelita," the first story he wrote, does this, but so do many of his works.

"'Crossing Borders: Personal Essays' is a collection of essays about the many different borders I have crossed in my life: linguistic, geographic, religious, philosophical and cultural borders. This book is also a philosophical exploration of the self, but I use my life as an example for the same reason that I think particular characters have more impact on the reader than abstract treatises: the particular, if it is engaging enough, will have a moral effect on the reader to reconsider previous positions, to question him- or herself, to think about how this example might apply to his or her life," said Troncoso. "So I write about a severe fight I had with my father, for example, in 'This Wicked Patch of Dust,' but it is also an exploration into machismo, generational conflict with authority, and making sense of failures of character and situation.

"I also have several essays about how I slowly, and painfully, educated myself to better my English, how I adapted the immigrant values from Ysleta in the Ivy League, how I applied those immigrant values of discipline, responsibility, and work beyond exhaustion to my own children in New York's Upper West Side. So the sense of 'familia' gets translated, and re-translated, with each generation."

"Our Lost Border: Essays on Life Amid the Narco-Violence," which Troncoso co-edited, was inspired by changes along the border after the drug violence escalated dramatically in 2008. In his youth, he moved between El Paso and Juarez fluidly, visiting Juarez once every two weeks, or whenever he needed a haircut or wanted to dance at a club.

However, that bi-national, bi-cultural life along the border was severed during the rise of narco-violence. The collection of essays offers the hope that individuals will again be able to cross and re-cross international borders to explore another world, to have fun and reconnect with families. For the collection, Troncoso solicited the help of friend Rolando Hinojosa-Smith to write the intro, and collected works by Mexican writers Lolita Bosch, Diego Osorno, Liliana Blum who wrote on the drug violence and border life, including the causes of and solutions for this epic violence.

"Too often in the United States, we see the narco-violence as a problem for Mexico, and we don't appreciate that we in the United States bear a great responsibility--through our purchase of drugs and our selling of guns--for the violence 'over there,'" Troncoso stated. "The political, judicial, and police corruption in Mexico, of course, is also why the roots of this violence are not yanked out effectively, why judicial impunity flourishes in Mexico. We wanted to address all of these causes, but also to give hope by conveying the resiliency of many who have suffered and who keep fighting for transparency, honesty, justice, and freedom of expression."

While Troncoso has strayed beyond the themes of the U.S.-Mexico border in his writing, he's found that the border has come to New York and other places. He cited the burgeoning Mexican population in New York's El Barrio and beyond, and reminded that issues of immigration and undocumented immigrants have become more important nationally. With certainty, politicians have exploited this, and used it as an opportunity to vilify Latin American undocumented immigrants by gesturing to a few bad examples. This is xenophobia at its worse, Troncoso believes, and it's a political smear of the "downtrodden, the helpless and the most vulnerable." He calls it "the Great American Hypocrisy." Consequently, he continues to write about 'the border,' but the border is now in New York, Kansas City, Denver, Minneapolis, and so on.

Currently, Troncoso is one of three national judges for the 2016 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and he's tasked with reading hundreds of books for the next six months, which is an exhausting albeit enjoyable endeavor. He's working on a new novel, a few short stories and another essay. Also, he's constantly [working on his website](#), which he developed himself.

The official renaming ceremony of the Sergio Troncoso Branch Library will be October 2, 2015, and the author will announce the Troncoso Reading Prizes, which he established to encourage high school, middle school, and grade school students in the Ysleta neighborhood to read. There will be two sets of prizes (a total of six prizes) for younger students and for older students, and the library staff will administer the reading prizes every year, from September 15 until November 15.

<http://www.latinpost.com/articles/73086/20150820/sergio-troncoso-author-of-from-this-wicked-patch-of-dust-and-the-nature-of-truth-shares-incredible-truths-about-the-border-and-storytelling.htm>

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