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CULTURAL WORKS

Simón

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Abstract

This creative non-fiction piece written in Spanglish is called 'Simón.' The overarching themes of this story are death, spirituality, animals and pets in a non-conventional American family raised in Mexico. The narrative voice in this piece provides a unique perspective broadening dialogue(s) on Mexican American identity.

Keywords:

K. Angelique Dwyer; Short Story; 'Simón'

—'¿Te late?' Le pregunté.

—'Simón.' She replied.

Simón ... casually meaning 'yeah' in current Mexican vernacular, is also the name of my nephew's donkey. Following el Piti's footsteps, he has a vital connection with animals. Los caballos, los perros, las chivas y los gallos. That's where it's at. Pero la conexión que este niño de 8 años tiene con su burro va más allá. Somehow, Junior has managed to train this donkey into a docile and sweet companion. He stands on top of the donkey's back, lays down, jumps up, ropes and hugs him. Simón is chill. It's a friendship that reminds me of how my toddler used to look at our Golden Retriever. I am instantly hit by the sting at the remembrance of having to tell a 5-year-old that her 'big sister' had to be put down.

—'¡No!' gritó—followed by a sob—y lo único que nos cobijó fue el viento tropical mientras contemplábamos aquella playa. Ese momento la marcó and it defines who she is still.

Animals have always been a part of my life, of my dreams, even. El encuentro con un búho me ayudó a sobrepasar un reto académico. Un búho blanco vino a avisarle a mi mamá sobre la noticia de la muerte de su hermano. La Sra. Linda has always been close to animals in spirit; she says it's because her great grandmother was Winedot and her ancestors were Cherokee. I can already hear the readers in my subconscious mind complaining! Esta pinche vieja no solo se las da de mexicana, sino además de indígena ... White privileged a todo lo que da. Ojo: I'm not claiming this, I'm just telling you what my mom says.

Una vez en el Grand Canyon mi tía, mi mamá y yo estábamos manejando de noche and it could have been the Enigma soundtrack playing in the background or the intense emotions we felt during the day: quien haya ido al Canyon del Colorado sabe lo que es enfrentarse con esas vistas y a ese viento that strips you down to your core. As we made a turn, standing in complete forest darkness, our headlights revealed a regal elk. We pulled over and sat in awe of this majestic animal. Olvidate del hecho de que estábamos deslumbrando al pobre animal ... it was spiritual. No sé cómo más describirlo. Mi mamá y mi tía weaved together different thoughts about patriarchy, their dad, and their recently deceased brother, mientras que la seventeen-year-old yo tripiaba con la música de Enigma y la emoción profunda que sentía en esa oscuridad que le hacía fondo a aquellas astas y a aquél pecho erguido.

Mine is a family of storytellers. Most of my favorite family stories involve animals somehow: there's the one about the hairy wood rat that crawled down my mom's nightgown as they tried to shoo it from the house (esa es una de las mejores); the snakes that would swim by as my parents skinny dipped in Table Rock Lake as newlyweds; el del zorrillo que nos meó a Brenda y a mí, el del tlacuache que nos veía cenar noche tras noche por las ventanas del comedor; or the coyote that kept coming back for Piti's chickens. Our bedtime stories as kids were about dogs: 'Big Red' and another one about a St. Bernard I can't seem to remember. Luego, los libros cambiaron a cuentos sobre caballos 'The Black Stallion' y todos esos. Tanto asocio a los animales con los cuentos que hasta mis hijos me suplican:

—'No more bedtime stories about animals!' y yo que apenas me estaba emocionando ...

One of my favorites was the story about the dog that got stuck in the bear trap. Los Dwyers vivían en el bosque de Missouri, junto a un lago, y tenían dos perros: PJ and Mrs. Jackson. My dad used to cuddle with them and they would protect my mom and Piti when he was a newborn. Una noche, my dad got worried because one of the dogs didn't come back. Se oían unos aullidos a lo lejos, so he and the other dog went on a search. Lo encontraron con la pata en la trampa de osos que algún cazador había puesto. My dad tells this story way better ... but he had to push the clamp in further in order for it to release the dog's paw y dice que vio al perro a los ojos, they locked eyes and he could feel the dog's trust before it was released. Lo cargó de vuelta y lo puso frente a la fogata. Both dogs cuddled and layed by the fireplace together for days until the wound was healed.

My niece's bed was always covered in plush doggies. The vet set, the dog carrier, the food, blankies and other accessories were daily entertainment for her. Uno de sus primeros juegos de Nintendo era de perritos. Siempre pensábamos que ella sería la veterinaria de la familia, pero fue la otra sobrina quien acabó escogiendo esa carrera, para luego cambiarse. They say our pets absorb our negative energies and sometimes get sick because of it. We've had two dogs die of cancer. What about our energies did they so honorably absorb to the point of self-sacrifice? Tal vez es muy egocéntrico pensar así. Se murieron porque se murieron y ya está ... el ambiente, la suerte, la genética ... As a teenager, El Piti rescued a gray and white puppy that was part of our family for 10 years. She was loyal, brave and nurturing. She gave us 3 litters of beautiful mutts,

and mothered 3 baby kittens my sister-in-law found in a box. Se murió de cancer, dejándonos con los recuerdos de su noble mirada y cálida compañía. She was cherished so much that my niece was given the same name. So, perhaps it's not by chance that she loves dogs so much. Hoy día, mi sobrina anda por ahí como Kardashian con sus dos mini perros mejor vestidos que mis criaturas, all fluffed up and fab.

Hace poco fuimos a visitar a unos amigos que rescataron un gatito. Mis hijos se asombraron al ver el tamaño del bibi que le daban. This baby kitty took me back to my farming days when we had cats galore. Princesa gave birth to the litter that gave us Fluffy, and Fluffy gave us Patches, Pickles and Timmy Tip Toes. I still remember discovering them under the camper top. I would crawl in through the little window and take her a can of tuna. Nombraba -y disque bautizaba- a cada uno de sus gatitos. No me acuerdo quién nos dio a Beethoven y a Nieve, pero esos dos gatos blancos no se hallaban: uno sordo y el otro arisco. Once, I opened the back door and found 3 white mice cuddled up in a bucket. Ese ya es otro cuento ...

—‘Look at their red eyes!’ I said. Y en eso que se acerca mi mamá a pegar el grito en el cielo. They were rats and the mama would be showing up soon. I loved every bit of growing up on a farm: las chivitas (Bola de nieve y Blanca Nieves) who ate our geraniums and clothes hung out on the line as part of their daily routine; el ganado (Uva y Cara Blanca) sus lenguas ásperas siempre me hacían reír cuando les daba sal; our rabbits, roosters, turtles and hamsters.

El Piti knew all too well the pain of having his colts and foals die. The coyotes seemed to smell the scent for miles and though he would often sit watch through the night con rifle en mano, I don't think he ever got one. Farm living doesn't hide reality, eso que ni qué. I remember seeing our weimaraner, Jenny, get hit by a car en la curva and die instantly. Our neighbor's palomino, named Señor, drowned by falling into a well. Seis peones trataron de sacarlo por las patas y hasta a una troca lo amarraron, but he was just too heavy. Cuántas cosas no pasaron que se quedaron forever in my brain y que ahora forman quién soy and how I raise my kids. Cuando mis niños y yo nos encontramos a un pájaro muerto en el jardín, le hacemos un hoyito en la tierra. Our backyard is practically a dead bird cemetery. So, you'll see that the same girl who used to visit the cemeteries of Mexico with her family -stealing from the adorned tombs so that the bare ones wouldn't be lonely or sad-, still lives within me. Las tumbas de los pajaritos y de nuestra querida perrita fallecida. Ante todo, el respeto a la vida ... ay, la vida, la vida ... y el culto a la materia restante del viaje espiritual, como la piel que deja una culebra.

The same boy who rescued the gray and white puppy—y quien de muchacho ‘rescató’ a una gatita siamesa como mi regalo de quince- is the gringo mexicano who breaks wild colts today. Our childhood animal-loving-selves live within us as we face the adult world. So, though Simón has gone to pass and my eight-year-old nephew ahora es pleno quinceañero. That sweet boy still lies within the heart of an award winning charro, who trains with his borregos and his Australian shepherd, Max—o como le digo yo—Maximiliano Buendía.