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CULTURAL WORK

CROWN Crónica

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Abstract

This creative non-fiction piece (written in my signature *su/si generis* Spanglish) called 'CROWN Crónica' stems, as much of my writing does (al menos partially), from an email exchange. This time with a student, who found suddenly being back home with her parents (sent packing, like many university students, in the early weeks of CrownVirusMundo) to be hazardous to her (mental) health. In trying to comfort her, I grapple with the issue of shame, its paralysing grip on so many of us. In the ironic Coda, added some 8 months later, I show just how wildly misplaced those feelings of shame were, and reach toward a tentative sense of plenitude, even gratitude, as CrownAño 2020 draws to a close.

Keywords

Susana Chávez-Silverman; Short story; CROWN Crónica

22 abril, 2020

Earth Day

Encuevada en casa, Claramonte, Califas

Para Marian 'Pink' Williams

Y para mis médicos

Una longtime estudiante mía, lozana y brishante, en su 3rd (4th?) class with me, me mandó un e-macho pidiendo disculpas por haber ido MIA last week. Results that tiene un desorden (I had no idea) y que estar patrás en casa, thanks to CrownMundo, le desestabiliza. Believe me, I can relate. Nuestro exchange produjo esta accidental croniquita—my first after months of sequía.

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Encuentro que home sweet home is anything BUT para mucha gente, I wrote her. Es difícil tener que regresar al ‘nido,’ I get it. Even in non-pandemic times. Yo dejé mi casa a los 17 y no regresé (except for visits). Me llevaba muy bien con mi papá. Con mi mamá fue ... otra historia. Which I’m exploring for a new book, even as we speak.

It was a hard week for me, ella me dijo, but I think I’m getting past the embarrassment and shame I felt. Me to her: Well, good thing que tus padres se dieron cuenta ¿no? Also: shame SUX. It’s unproductive and just straight-up awful. Hablo de mí. It hit me yesterday: I’ve had a practice of 3-mile healthwalks (3-4 times/weekly) desde 2005. Since that time, I also practiced yoga weekly. Llevo diciéndome que I fell off the healthwalks maomemo since October 2019, después de lo del catastrófico verano, con el custody case de mi hijo, providing infant care (todo el verano) para Jem and then the excruciating, mysterious physical pain that started up about mid-October, y que me ha machacado cual freight train ever since.

Pero eso no es cierto. De hecho: cuando volví del trip to London, con mi ex-estudiante (ahora amiguísima) la Pink, in early June last year, and was immediately caught up in custody battle madness ... *that’s* when I began to seriously neglect my own routines, my body and overall bienestar. It was like ... not exactly a death wish sino una especie de dogged, anxious self-erasure. Me convertí en warhorse, vulnerable a los desperate entreaties del Juvenil (él a su vez vulnerable a la cruel roller coaster de un mental disorder), espoleada into action by the thought of him—us--losing my infant nieto, Jeremiah.

Coño, me di cuenta. I’ve been ‘on lockdown’ loooonng before el guapetón del ricachón del Gov Gav de Califas made it a thing. Since about mid-2019! Almost a year! Esto me cayó como ton of ladrillos. And then (predictably): the sickening, acid-drip of SHAME. Que how can I be a good mentor, preaching about boundaries y mindfulness y wellness a mis students si yo misma soy tan hipócrita, y bla bla. I don’t even take my own fucking advice about exercise, meditation, creativity ...

Anygüey, I began to improve un little hair con los at-home exercises (2x/day) de Benjamin Chen, el genial (Virgo) physical therapist que me tocó dizque al azar, en Kaiser Permanente. I’ve done them faithfully desde el 12 de marzo, día en que llovía a cántaros, I remember. Y ... after that, the darkness. No más in-person appointments. CROWNVIRUSMUNDO nos clausuró ... well, todo.

Ben’s ever-more-byzantine exercise regime has helped—un poco. The pain is not as lacerating or 24/7 as before. O tal me parece, a veces. Pero last Friday el Ben dijo que I had to return to the healthwalks, pues los muscles están en desuso, and this produces oxygen-deprivation, DOLOR, stiffness and even impinges en los nervios (hello, numb, encased-in-cemento brazo derecho y fingies). El problema (o excusa) que me inventé en CROWNMUNDO es que el Thompson Creek Trail, where I always go (and where I’ve hatched some of my best writing), está CLOSED for CROWN.

Pero ni modo. El Ben insistió en que caminara ‘around the barrio,’ even if I start out really slow. So I made of tripe, heart y ... lo he hecho twice. El primer día hice solo 20 minutes (oh, the shame). Pero ayer hice media hora. Disturbingly, far from the trippy, meditative jouissance del trail, where I can really pick up steam, y hacer Zen-out con todos los endorphins, me sentí ... odd. Off. Baby birdish—unsteady in my gait, endeble, tiesa, apaleada. Una stand-outish, ridiculous cruza entre Gumby y el Tin Man. I worried I was almost limping! Yo, que siempre he tenido un caminar elegante, giraffe-like (so they told me cuando vivía en Africa). Plus, es banal y anodino caminar por un suburb, refunfuñé. No es como el health trail. Por acá, in my own neighborhood, tengo que concentrarme, pa’ no tropezar en las sidewalk cracks, parriba y pabajo en los curbs.

Salí de casa en esta sudden, global calefaction heatwaveish spring en una pandemia mundial y doblé, titubeante y grouchy, en la Shenandoah (suddenly tarareando la epónima canción, “Oh Shenandoah, I long to hear you...,” que tocaba mi mamá en la guitarra), giving wide berth a las Zorro-like parejitas con sus baby strollers (ya que yo iba maskless) y dejando que otros (unos runners bien fornidos y chix en full SoCal sports gear, tipo trendy leggings y sports bras con sus ubiquitous, annoying water flasks at the ready) me pasaran.

I was going slow, pero OJO: I was going. Subí por la Lindenwood, en honor a mi pana el Wim (su surname—Lindeque—significa ‘linden tree’ en Belgian o Flemish or some sexy Viking Scando-lingo, no me acuerdo bien). To my horror, vi que en vez de tilo esa calle ostentaba jacarandás. Ya sé, it’s my fave tree, I should have been mega-chuffed. Pero estos trees eran dweedly, yellowish and scraggly, disconsolately pre-bloom y además, well, lo que venía al caso eran los linden trees ¿no?

Pero ni modo. Esa false-advertising callecita led to a sort of park: a largish circular grassy space, con un little paved path around it, donde caminaban, purposefully, más newly healthwalk-inclined parents con sus prams, y una mujer asiática, masked, ridiculously walking backward (en un private, hyper-sporty challenge-to-self, supongo), pendejamente swinging her arms como me había aconsejado el Ben Chen. —*You can do this*, me dije. Medio grimly al principio, pero after a while—especialmente tras ver los tiernos Earth Day chalkings de unos neighbor kids on a curb, ya casi patrás en casa, ‘Love your Mother’ y ‘Every little thing is gonna be alright’—con algo más de convencimiento. —*You can do this*.

Well it may or it may not be alright, kids, les dije pa’ mis adentros. Pero my eyes welled y se me ensanchó el corazón (mi oddly mushy pero igual de arisco heart), remembering, de golpe, ese primer Earth Day, hace ya (OMG) 50 años. Cuando—esto lo alega mi hermana Sarita, yo no tengo memoria—ella y yo descubrimos (en el garage de nuestra casa en Santa Cruz) los kittens que había parido nuestra gata. Pero—nostalgic sigh—esa es otra.

CROWN Crucible Coda

8 diciembre, 2020

*those sharp teeth cut through
 every other circumstance
 to bite my life clean
 and set an unforgettable edge
 on eternity.*

Mimi Foyle

Next to *nada* de lo que escribí arriba—almost 8 months ago—tiene sentido ahora. Lo siento lejano, todo eso. Los meses de unexplained, epic pain. Todas las arcane theories que barajamos: que auto-immune disorder, que early-childhood unresolved trauma. All that seems so remote now, cual si fuese otro planeta. Or as if I *myself* were the alien, extraña ahora de ese mi antaño-ser. So much has been revealed en este Pluto-Saturn transit (uncannily solapado con este *annus horribilis* en CROWN Mundo), hovering over me cual enorme murciélago, pitiless pero a la larga benévolo. Velvety underworld wings and sonar-guided maniobras pointing the way, según los astrólogos, hacia una total metamorfosis.

Porque todo se esclareció—todo ese fuzzy kaleidoscope of gasp-inducing, 24/7 dolor, ese terrifying numbness, ese caminar de robot—el 1 de junio cuando el neurólogo, Dr. Lee, y el neurocirujano, Dr. Tashjian, took one look at my MRI y al tiro me pusieron at the top of the list para emergency spinal surgery. Simón, gente: el 8 de junio—exactly 6 months ago today—me salvaron la vida. En medio del (first) CROWN-surge! A couple of more weeks and it would’ve been cortinas—o al menos quadriplegia—for me, según el Dr. Scott, mi longtime primary care physician.

So por smarmy e insólito as it sounds, este CROWN Mundo/Pluto-Saturn transit may have taken me down to the pegs, pero a la vez it threw mi a lifeline (indulge me las mixed metáforas). Y heme aquí hanging on for dear life, carnales. Simón, I’m undeniably, hasta gratefully hanging on.

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