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# SANDRA

# CISNEROS

## FULLER AWARD LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

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KEITH DANNEWILLER, PHOTOGRAPHER

## MARCH 13TH 7PM 2021

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Cover design by Mary Livoni

*“I don’t feel that the light I write from comes from me. I really feel that it comes from some higher energy. People think I have the gift, but everybody has the gift, every single one of us.”*

# TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Randall Albers	About the Fuller Award
Ray Santisteban	<i>What Would They Say?</i> Mini Documentary
Carlos Cumpián	Host
Norma Alarcón	Tribute
Richard Bray	Tribute
Sonia Saldívar-Hull	Tribute
Jorge Valdivia	Tribute
Donald G. Evans	Presenting the Fuller Award for lifetime achievement
Sandra Cisneros	Acceptance Speech
Donna Seaman & Sandra Cisneros	In Conversation
Randall Albers	Thank you and Good Night

*“We put something in because we love it, and if you trust your heart, and if you trust the thing you love and include it in your work because it is one of your passions, it will find a way of making a pattern and tying itself to all the other elements.”*

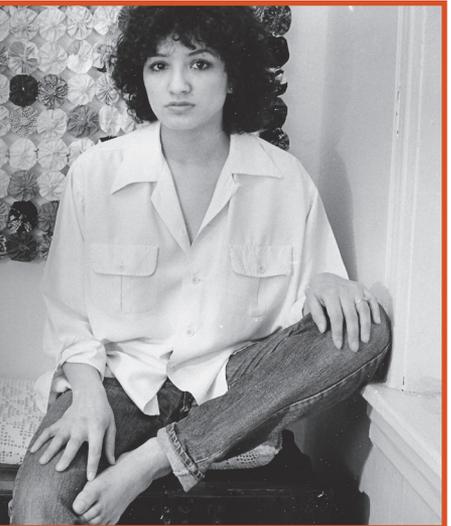


Photo Credit: Diana Solis

# THE FULLER AWARD

By Valya Dudycz Lupescu

“The Fuller” is awarded by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame to a Chicago author who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to literature. The first eight Fuller Awards were presented to Gene Wolfe (2012), Harry Mark Petrakis (2014), Haki Madhubuti (2015), Rosellen Brown (2016), Angela Jackson (2018), Stuart Dybek (2018), Sara Paretsky (2019), and Sterling Plumpp (2019).

With the passing of Wolfe in 2019 and Petrakis earlier this year, the CLHOF established a policy of elevating all Fuller Award winners to induction status, pending board approval. Both Wolfe and Petrakis will be inducted into the CLHOF later this year.

## **The Fuller Legacy: A Quick Look at a Literary Pioneer**

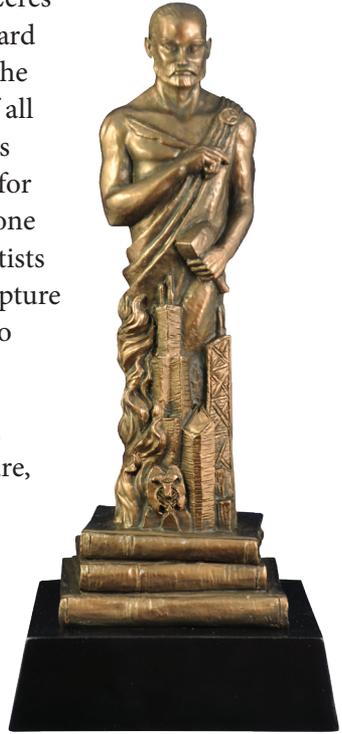
The award was inspired by the literary contribution of 2017 CLHOF inductee Henry Blake Fuller, one of Chicago’s earliest novelists and author of *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *With the Procession*. Both novels use the rapidly developing city of Chicago as their setting and are considered by many to be the earliest examples of American realism. Theodore Dreiser called *With the Procession* the first piece of American realism that he had encountered and considered it the best of the school, even during the days of his own prominence. There



are additional layers of meaning to the word “fuller.” A fuller is also a tool used to form metal when it’s hot, an important part of building and a nice metaphor for Chicago, home to the “First Chicago School” of architecture that rose up from the ashes of the Chicago Fire of 1871. Between 1872 and 1879, more than ten thousand construction permits were issued. Chicago emerged as a resilient city that took risks and made bold decisions—using iron and steel to frame its buildings, giving rise to the world’s first skyscraper. The fuller was one such tool that made it happen, a symbol of possibility and perseverance. Inspired by the sleek lines and Art Deco style of Chicago

sculptor John Bradley Storrs, whose sculpture Ceres is on top of the Board of Trade building, the award statue for the Fuller was based on Hephaestus, the Greek god of the blacksmith's fire and patron of all craftsmen. According to legend, Hephaestus was the only god who worked, and he was honored for having taught mankind that work is noble and one should excel at his or her craft. The patron of artists and craftsmen, he seemed a fitting symbol to capture the spirit of excellence embodied by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's Fuller Award.

Ron Swanson, Jr., who created the Fuller Award statue, is the founder and owner of R.E. Sculpture, Inc. Over the course of his career, Ron has worked on large sculptures, including public figures as part of an artist group at Friends of Community Public Art in Joliet. He has also worked on many original toy prototypes and various licensed character sculpts.



[www.resculpture.net](http://www.resculpture.net)



*“My mother was born like me— in Chicago of Mexican descent. It’s her tough, streetwise voice that haunts all my stories and poems.”*

Photo Credit: Diana Solis

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

***Puro Amor* (2018):** *Puro Amor* explores the intricacies of love and devotion. This inspired tale follows Mister and Missus Rivera as they navigate expressions of compassion, bouts of marital toil, and the highs of utter passion. With dazzling imagery both literary and artistic, Cisneros crafts a work that reminds us what life is at its core: full of love.

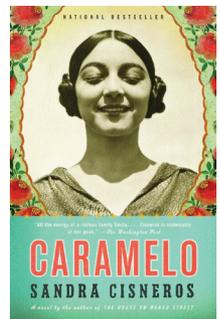
***A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (2015):** Comprised of numerous essays, this memoir explores the unique life of Sandra Cisneros. From Chicago to Greece to Mexico, *A House of My Own* emphasizes the importance of finding stability and love within relationships, experiences, and passions, not just addresses.

***Have You Seen Marie?* (2012):** After losing her mother, 53-year-old Sandra embarks on a mission to find her friend's lost cat, Marie. This raw and intimate, yet charming and honest, piece of fiction explores the effects of loss, grief, and the process of moving on. Illustrated by Ester Hernández.

***Bravo Bruno!* (2011):** Following Bruno, an adorable cockapoo, readers of this richly illustrated children's book experience a tour of Rome from the comfort of their own reading nook. With colorful illustrations and a charming canine narrator, this book is a fun read for children and adults alike.

***Vintage Cisneros* (2004):** A collection of some of Cisneros' most famous essays, poems, and novel excerpts, *Vintage Cisneros* combines just a few of renowned writer and activist Sandra Cisneros' best works.

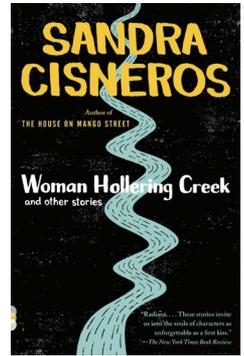
***Caramelo* (2002):** This multi-generational work explores the vibrant, difficult, and rich lives of two female characters: Celaya and Soledad Reyes. The former, a young girl who is the only daughter in her family, has tense relations with the latter, her grandmother who is coined as an awful woman by most. Believing this strain comes from a general disdain for the young girl's character, Celaya soon learns there is more to the family history that causes this friction, while also peeling back the layers of her so-called "awful grandmother." This epic reminds readers that while family can be tiring and vitriolic at times, in the end, they are still a part of one's soul.



**Hairs / Pelitos (1994):** Using each family member's hair to emphasize the differences in personality and being, Sandra Cisneros highlights diversity and uniqueness in this vignette, all the while crafting a story rooted in the importance and beauty of a mother figure. Illustrated by Terry Ybanez.

**Loose Woman (1994):** Sandra Cisneros' fierce and confident spirit is in full force with this striking collection of poems. Candid, honest, unfiltered, and passionate, Cisneros crafts poetry grounded in the female experiences of love and life.

**Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991):** *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* tells the accounts of Mexican immigrants after crossing the border into the United States. By including past and present memories from numerous female characters, Cisneros presents a wider representation of the Mexican American culture, all the while exploring the emotions of grief, rage, and more.



**My Wicked Wicked Ways (1987):** In *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, Cisneros has crafted a collection of poetry that moves through the life of a young woman, capturing her essence, beauty, troubles, and relationships along the way. Deeply intimate and impassioned, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* shines a light on the human experience, one built on sentimentality, love, and heartbreak.

**The House on Mango Street (1984):** *The House on Mango Street*, a novella comprised of vignettes, tells the coming-of-age story of 12-year-old Esperanza. Told from the first-person perspective of the young Chicago native, this piece follows a year in Esperanza's life as she struggles with her Latina heritage and the issues of social class, identity, sexuality, displacement, and perseverance. Partially inspired by Cisneros' own experiences, as well as those of her students, *The House on Mango Street* has become a literary classic due to its unbridled honesty, beauty, and ingenuity.

**Bad Boys (1980):** Published in 1980, *Bad Boys* is a seven-poem chapbook that propelled Sandra Cisneros into the literary scene. It was the world's first introduction to the writer and her powerfully unique voice, strong emphasis on female empowerment, and moving writing.

# AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

1984: Texas Institute of Letters Dobie-Paisano Fellowship

1984: Illinois Artists Fellowship

1985: Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award for *The House on Mango Street*

1986: Chicano Short Story Award from the University of Arizona

1988: Roberta C. Holloway Lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley

1982, 1988: Two National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowships in poetry and prose

1991: Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award for *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

1991: PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction for *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

1991: *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* nominated for Best Book of Fiction by *The Los Angeles Times*

1991: *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* selected as a noteworthy book of the year by *The New York Times* and *Library Journal*

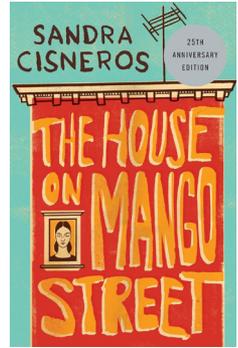
1991: The Lannan Foundation Literary Award for Fiction for *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

1993: Honorary Doctor of Letters from the State University of New York at Purchase

1993: The Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

1995: MacArthur Foundation Fellowship

1995: *Loose Women* wins The Mountains & Plains Booksellers' Award (Poetry)



1998: Founded the Macondo Foundation, an association of socially engaged writers

2000: Founded the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation, a grant-giving institution that served Texas writers for 15 years

2002: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Loyola University, Chicago

2002: *Caramelo* selected as a notable book of the year by several journals including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Booklist*, and the *Seattle Times*

2003: The Texas Medal of the Arts

2005: *Caramelo* awarded the Premio Napoli

2014: Honorary doctorate from DePaul University

2015: The Fifth Star Award presented by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

2015: National Medal of Arts

2016: Tia Chucha's Lifetime Achievement Award

2016: PEN Center USA Literary Award for Creative Nonfiction for *A House of My Own: Stories From My Life*

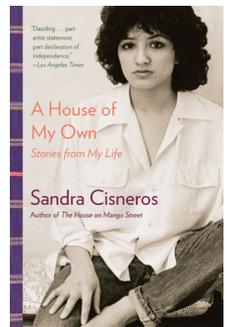
2016: The Fairfax Prize

2016: Honorary doctorate from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2018: The Ford Foundation's Art of Change Fellowship

2019: PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature

Also recognized as part of The Frederick Douglass 200.



# TONIGHT'S PARTICIPANTS



Professor and Chair Emeritus of Fiction Writing at Columbia College Chicago, **Randall Albers** was founding Producer of the long-running Story Week Festival of Writers, received the Columbia College Teaching Excellence Award, and, as chair of the Fiction Writing Department, fostered innovative interdisciplinary and community-based arts work in Chicago, and led development of abroad programs in Moscow, Prague, Florence, Bath, and Rome. A Story Workshop® Master Teacher, he has been a visiting professor at England's Bath Spa University, has lectured at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and has presented at numerous national and international conferences on the teaching of creative writing. His fiction, creative nonfiction, and scholarly work have appeared in a variety of literary journals. He is president of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's board of directors.



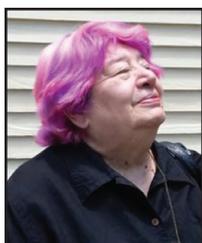
Independent filmmaker **Ray Santisteban** has worked for the past 31 years as a documentary filmmaker. A graduate of NYU's film and TV production program, his work consistently gravitates towards issues of Civil Rights and artist profiles, addressing the themes of justice, memory and political transformation.



**Angela Giron** has worked professionally in theatre and film out of Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Montreal and Toronto, Canada. Her long list of television and film credits includes a Venice Lion award winning performance for a public service announcement for Amnesty International and another notable performance as Alice B. Toklas in the classic film, *The Moderns*. She received a 2007 Zoni award nomination for best supporting actress in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Mesa Arts Center. She performed her most recently authored play, *Nitza – A Cuban Flavor* at the United Solo Festival, NYC, in 2016. Directorial credits include *Llamame Che* and *Après Opera*. She is the Program Director and a Clinical Assistant Professor of the Master of Liberal Studies Program at Arizona State University where she teaches film studies and humanities.



**Carlos Cumpián** has been a Chicagoan for five decades and arrived here in his mid-teens from Texas. He worked for various non-profits and as an English high school teacher for over 20 years. He has been an editor/publisher for March Abrazo Press, the first and possibly the only Chicano Indigenous and Latino poetry publisher in Illinois with a 30-year track record. His books include *Coyote Sun*, *Latino Rainbow*, *Armadillo Charm*, and *14 Abriles*. He has two new manuscripts: a poetry collection with the working title, *Human Cicada*, and a poetic and prose memoir *Accidental Rebel (1968-1974): The War Years*.



**Norma Alarcón** is a noted Chicana theorist and scholar. She is Professor Emeritus of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley. She received her doctorate in Latin American Literature and Culture from Indiana University. Her path-breaking essays shaped Chicana Studies and paved the way for contemporary theories of Chicana/Latino subjectivity. For over 25 years she owned and ran Third Woman Press, publishing key writers and texts in Chicana and Latina Studies. Writers such as Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo were first published in Third Woman Press. She resides in New Orleans and is currently working on a collection of her essays.



**Richard Bray** managed Chicago's legendary Guild Books, at 2456 N. Lincoln Avenue, from 1979-88. During that time, the Guild supported readings by a large number of national and international authors, but also nearly every important Chicago writer of the day, including Sterling Plumpp, Cyrus Colter, Angela Jackson, Maxine Chernoff, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lisel Mueller, David Hernandez, Tony Fitzpatrick, Haki Madhubuti, Michael Anania, and Reginald Gibbons. Though a consummate book person, Bray has also worked as a railroad brakeman, cab driver, community organizer, factory worker, Civil Rights Movement and War on Poverty veteran, human rights advocate, disability rights and older adult services organizer. He served for more than a decade as Executive Director and Freedom-to-Write Program Coordinator for PEN USA West, Los Angeles, and for 20 years as Community Librarian at Pasadena Public Library and Alameda County Library.



**Sonia Saldívar-Hull** is the Brackenridge Endowed Chair in Literature and the Humanities and the Interim Chair of English at the University of Texas, San Antonio. She was the founding Director of Women's Studies and the Women's Studies Institute. She is currently co-editing, with Geneva Gano, the anthology, *¡Ay Tú!': Critical Essays on The Work and Career of Sandra Cisneros*. Her book, *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Politics and Literature* was published by the University of California Press. She has also co-edited *El Mundo Zurdo*, Volumes 2-7, essays on Gloria Anzaldúa (Aunt Lute) and served as co-editor of the *Latin America Otherwise* Duke University Press book series, 1997-2020.



**Jorge Valdivia** is a Chicago native who grew up in La Villita, a Mexican-American enclave on the city's Southwest Side. Valdivia is an arts consultant with a special focus on curating performing arts festivals and events. He's dedicated his work to amplifying the voices of the Latinx and LGBTQ Latinx communities through the arts. As the performing arts consulting curator for the National Museum of Mexican Art he is responsible for curating their performing arts programming. There he also curates the Sor Juana Festival, which is one of the largest festivals dedicated to celebrating women performing artists of Mexican descent. Valdivia is also a consultant and co-curator of the Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA). Valdivia has served on the boards and councils of several organizations that reflect his passion for Latino and LGBTQ issues and the arts, including, most recently, the Victory Gardens' Council of Community Leaders, and Latinos Progresando's Mex Talks Host Committee.

*“When you ask a person a question, they feel you, they give you some energy back, sometimes they tell you things that are so beautiful.”*



**Donna Seaman** is the Adult Books Editor for *Booklist*, a member of the American Writers Museum's Content Leadership Team, and a recipient of the Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award, the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary Criticism, and the Louis Shores Award for excellence in book reviewing. Her author interviews are collected in *Writers on the Air: Conversations about Books*, and she is the author of *Identity Unknown: Rediscovering Seven American Women Artists*.



**Donald G. Evans** is the author of three books, most recently the story collection *An Off-White Christmas*, and Founding Executive Director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame

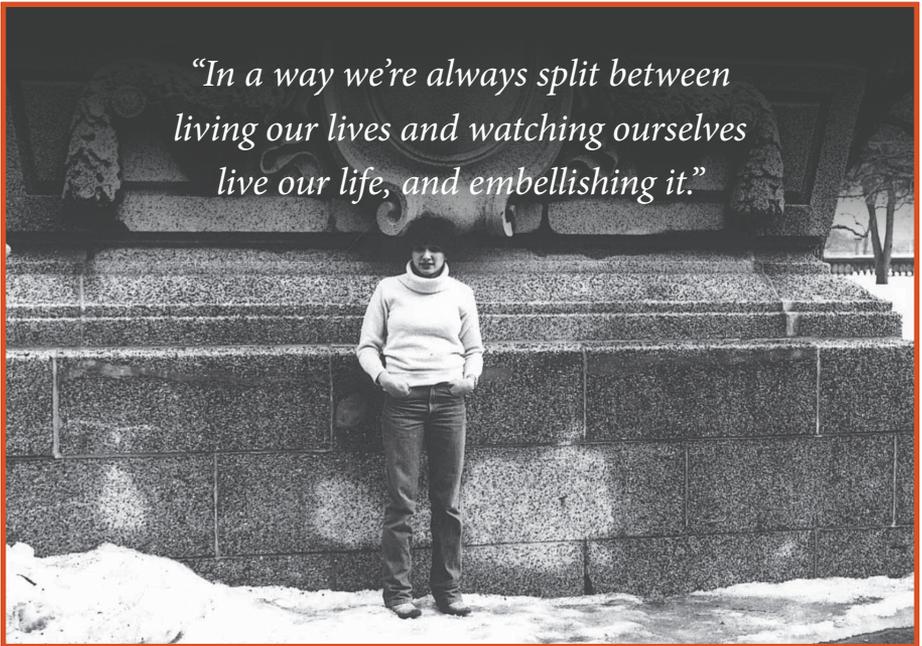


Photo Credit: Family Archives



Photo Credit: Family Archives

# Chicago Lives Inside Her

By Donald G. Evans

Before there was Iowa City, before there was Provincetown, before there was Greece, before there was France, before there was Yugoslavia, before there was San Antonio or Berkeley or Ann Arbor, even before there was Mexico, there was Chicago.

Sandra Cisneros was born five days before Christmas, 1954, in a blue-collar Chicago neighborhood teeming with myriad languages and cultures. Her father was an upholsterer and her mother responsible for the upbringing of seven children, all boys except Sandra. The family relocated frequently, in those earliest years toggling between Mexico and Chicago, and then during Sandra's school years from Chicago neighborhood to Chicago neighborhood. She attended five different elementary schools. The transient nature of her upbringing caused her to feel always like an outsider.

This was long before Sandra would publish her first poem, much less delight readers around the globe with stories and novels and essays, including fictionalized accounts of a lonely, awkward girl trying to make sense of her life and striving for some kind of belonging and security in a world that seemed disinclined to grant it.

Now, people know Sandra as a kind of supernova. An accomplished—no, celebrated—author who exudes, through her literature and her life, a rare combination of boldness, love and energy. Her genius defies easy classification—her intelligence, sure, but also her wisdom, the way she speaks poetry, her fearlessness, her intense interest in the world and people around her. When Sandra appears at a museum or bookstore or gallery, the line to see her extends outside the golden doors, snaking down hallways or sidewalks, an overflow of admirers wanting to snap a selfie or tell the great author the ways and means in which she has improved their lives.

But then?

The child Sandra, though she would not know it at the time, was living a life common enough to urban settings like Chicago, but rare in the annals of literature. At first her family rented in undesirable neighborhoods, always dreaming and scheming to get their own house, the one that would

represent permanence. The house happened in 1965, when Sandra was 11 years old. Once there, at 1525 N. Campbell Ave., Sandra experienced some of the joys of a true home, but also the political realities of living in a neighborhood increasingly made up of Latinos. As the city services declined, the neighborhood suffered. Still, hidden beneath the city grime there was all the magic that growing up entails.

Up until the Campbell house in Humboldt Park, Sandra “slept in bedrooms that weren’t bedrooms.” Often, like Lala in *Caramelo*, she stretched and curled herself into unconsciousness on a foldout Lazy Boy chair. Home, with all those children, was crowded, noisy; the neighborhoods tinged with danger and desperation. Sandra entered and exited so many schools, she felt perpetually like the new kid, shy and a bit awkward, lacking the confidence or instinct to claim a friend as her best. And yet, the foundation was in place for her to pursue and achieve an artist’s life.

Sandra’s mother, Elvira Cordero Anguiano, was a reader and an artist. Her brother Kiki took her to local Chicago Public Library branches, such as the Jefferson Branch when her family lived at 4006 W. Gladys. Her father, Alfredo Cisneros de Moral, possessed pride in their heritage that bordered on arrogance, insisting, as he was taught in Mexico, that good manners, not money or position or power, elevated one to the highest class of citizenship.

“We were a very creative family because we had so many kids,” Sandra said. “We had parades, we would do theatres, we would do ghost houses. We would create tickets, design posters. There was just so many of us. Kiki and I were the artists, we were always drawing.”

No matter where in Chicago the family stayed, there was a library, and trips there were experienced as “treats,” usually on Saturdays. Back then, Chicago’s museums were mostly free, and the Cisneros family made rounds at the Art Institute, Field Museum, and other cultural wonderlands. Sandra’s mom instigated a Sunday ritual of going to Grant Park, where the kids could run

*“I don’t live in Chicago, but Chicago still lives in me. I haven’t finished half the things I want to say about Chicago.”*

and chase and frolic with classical music as a backdrop to their childhood games.

“My mother would bring a blanket and we would roll around there,” Sandra said. “Then at dusk you could see the hotel neon signs light up in all these nice colors against the night sky.”

Sandra gravitated to visual arts, but segued naturally into juvenile literary efforts. She said, “I feel like writing and drawing is the same for me, so I was an artist first.” Around sixth grade, Sandra wrote her first poem—it was about the wind. She wrote poems about sunsets. Nature vibrated through so many of those grade school efforts. “I was a very spiritual child, very connected to these things,” she said.

Then in seventh grade, Sandra “published” her first work, a mimeographed short story printed in pale violet ink. In eighth grade, she wrote a children’s book. Early in high school, Sandra, caught in what the teacher mistakenly thought to be a daydream, was ordered to read a Sara Teasdale poem; she rendered it so beautifully that any similar performance became her job.

All of the forms and experimental techniques that Sandra would employ as a serious, mature writer were already on display.

“We live in a world of words,” Sandra said. “I thought from reading books that literature had a different language, a magical language; the books I loved were written in an earlier time, a different century. There were words you only saw in fairy tales and books. In my head, I had a narrator going on for anything I did. I’d add attributions; in my head, I would say, ‘she said.’ In a way we’re always split between living our lives and watching ourselves live our life, and embellishing it.”

A childhood that at times seemed smothering and scary felt different after Sandra experienced more of the country, including the kind of outback places that barred easy mobility and access to cultural opportunities.

“I’m very grateful for the journey my grandparents made from Mexico to Chicago, and I’m also grateful my mother married my father,” Sandra said. “My father gave us Mexico. My mother gave us the museums and the library. We took it for granted you could see real Van Gogh paintings. I just took it for granted everybody had that. All the advantages I had without knowing it. It gave me things, even the bad things, that shaped my politics.”

She was experiencing, she was observing, she was feeling that which had yet to be reflected upon or processed in published stories. She did not yet know that her voice would be a voice that liberated and empowered and thrilled many people, those in much her same circumstances and those in much different.

“We may have lived in a poor neighborhood, but my father made us have high goals,” Sandra said.

She began writing seriously as an undergraduate English student at Loyola University. For her family, especially her father, college was an investment in a future husband. For Sandra, it was the time when she inched closer to her life as an independent woman, a writer, a thinker.

That house on Campbell, near North Avenue, would become the model for the house on Mango Street, though for the block itself Sandra would merge observations and memories from many of the various addresses at which her family had resided. She concentrated at first on poetry, in fact the publication in 1980 of her collection *Bad Boys* announced her entrée into the literary world. That was after Josephinum Academy of the Sacred Heart, after Loyola University, two years after she'd graduated from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. She was back in Chicago, working-- as a high school teacher, a counselor, and a college recruiter. If you asked her then, Sandra would have said she was a poet, but at the same time, all the time, she worked on *The House on Mango Street*. As her experiences grew, so did her perspective on home.

“Where else in the United States would you find so many people of color and non-color mixed together?” she asked. “You don't see that everywhere. That kind of mix was what I knew growing up in Humboldt Park. I was naïve in thinking it was Everywhere City USA.”

Sandra would, in those post-graduate years, move and move again within the city, like her family had in her earlier years. But she settled long enough at her second-floor front apartment on 1814 N. Paulina to write a substantial portion of *The House on Mango Street*. Chicago had gotten her so far, but she felt the need to leave the city in order to finish what would come to be considered one of the single most cherished coming-of-age stories ever written.

Ironically, Sandra would come to understand, after witnessing the way other girls in other places grew up, that she had needed Chicago to become, truly, a writer. “I don’t live in Chicago, but Chicago still lives in me,” she said. “I haven’t finished half the things I want to say about Chicago.”

The road to Sandra’s current home in San Miguel de Allende was long and winding. Along the way, she created literature as diverse as her landscapes. Chicago was the time of *Bad Boys*, and in part *The House on Mango Street*. Nine books were to follow: more poetry, more stories, children’s books, essays, and the big, glorious novel, *Caramelo*. The latest is *Puro Amor*, which Sandra not only wrote but illustrated.

Now, in addition to a collection of poetry, Sandra is at work on a Paris story with a Chicago protagonist. It will be called, “I Remember You, Martita.”

“I draw on things from my past, as well as gather stories from others who still live in Chicago,” Sandra said. “People I care about still live there. People I love and didn’t know I love. I still have Chicago stories.”

She has captured a great number of literature’s most prestigious awards: NEA fellowships in both poetry and fiction. The Texas Medal of the Arts. A MacArthur Fellowship. Several honorary doctorates. Chicago’s Fifth Star Award. The PEN Center USA Literary Award. The Fairfax Prize. The Ford Foundation’s Art of Change Fellowship. The PEN/Nabokov Award for international literature. Such is Sandra’s stature in the world of letters that President Barack Obama awarded her the National Medal of the Arts.

This does not mention her greater contributions to society, as a feminist, activist, teacher, mentor, and leading light to young adults throughout the world, praising her in many languages but more so being struck, inside her pages and words, with the notion that they, too, will find a path.

Sandra might have broken the mold, but she didn’t create it. Gwendolyn Brooks—the poet and the person—inspired Sandra, as did Carl Sandburg and a host of other Chicago luminaries. In fact, Sandra claims that early on the whole game, for her, was to make literature that her heroes—Brooks, but also Studs Terkel and Dorothy Allison--would blurb. She put a big check next to that goal long ago.

But the electrified rail of Chicago literary masters did not end for Sandra with those ancestors. She names as “siblings” Lawndale poet Reggie S. Young, Ana

Castillo, Tony Diaz, and Luis Rodriguez. Her descendants include Jasmon Drain (“who writes exquisitely about the Cabrini Green projects”), Erika L. Sanchez, and Randy Santiago. “It’s exciting to see these new Chicago writers coming up that are telling tales about their neighborhoods, and in doing so, inviting us in,” Sandra said.

Sandra left Chicago as a woman seeking something, to become a woman others seek. All of her tremendous books place her securely in the great tradition of Chicago storytelling, even as the 10th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street* blurs into the 25th anniversary edition, and the 25th anniversary waits for the next milestone edition to replace it. There is a lot of Esperanza in Sandra Cisneros, but then again there is a lot of Esperanza in a great many others.

“I feel at 66 I can look back at my Chicago time and see what the city gave me,” Sandra said. “When you have the long view, you can give thanks for everything your life has given you. **Though I didn’t make Chicago my destination, it was certainly my destiny.**”



Photo Credit: Al Rendon

# Circling Back: Chicago, Stories, and Remembrance

By Donna Seaman

As proud as Chicago is of Sandra Cisneros, and as jubilant as Chicagoans are to honor Cisneros with the Fuller Award for her clarion voice, transforming vision, artistry, candor, wit, and compassion, Chicago wasn't always a welcoming or nurturing place for young Cisneros or her family. Instead the city was a catalyst, the source and the setting for *The House on Mango Street*, her world-altering, forever fresh and galvanizing first book. This concentrated, vital coming-of-age tale centers on the indelible Esperanza Cordero and performs an eviscerating take on the injustices of a fractured city and the lives of immigrants. Cisneros bridges the divide between girlhood and womanhood in *Woman Hollering Creek*, a collection of funny, candid, and provocative stories about American Mexican girls and women. By turns ironic and angry, romantic and critical, Cisneros links the everyday with the cosmic as her characters play Barbie and ask saints for help and she spins stories that explore family bonds, cultural imperialism, romance, and sexism. Bracingly forthright and critical, Cisneros explores mythic dimensions and archetypal figures of femininity. In her bold and caustic, erotic and shrewd poetry, collected in *My Wicked Wicked Ways* and *Loose Woman*, she also illuminates the conflict between the pressure to be a good girl and the desire to be a sexy woman. The fluidly creative and revealing novel *Caramelo* recounts the adventures and discoveries of young Celaya "Lala" Reyes in a many-faceted, multigenerational family saga that weaves back and forth between Chicago and Mexico and between the complications of one's private life and the profound influence of revered cultural icons.

As a self-described working-class writer and a teacher, Cisneros encourages aspiring writers to walk with her, to share their thoughts, feelings, stories, poems, concerns, and hopes. This generosity, this call to mentor, reflects Cisneros' own path to writing through reading. Reading carried Cisneros to college and graduate school and to a life devoted to listening, looking, reading, and writing—an improvised, creative, and independent life courageously undertaken, especially by a woman of color raised in a world in which young people are often cautioned by their elders to be practical, to avoid risk and pipe dreams, to seek security. Guided by her gift and

her convictions, Cisneros lived an itinerant artist's life, attuned to the writer's inner voice while searching for a true home, a quest she chronicles resplendently and wryly in *A House of My Own*. Along the way, she pays homage to the writers who sustained her.

Many books and many years ago, when I first met Sandra, I had recently read *Camellia Street* by Mercé Rodoreda, a Catalan writer forced to flee Barcelona, the setting for this 1966 novel, during Franco's dictatorship. In her foreword to David H. Rosenthal's 1993 translation into English, Sandra tells the story of how a parking lot attendant in Texas told her about Rodoreda, a writer, he explained, greatly admired by Gabriel García Márquez. Cisneros then recounts her pilgrimage to Barcelona's Camellia Street in search of Rodoreda's footprints. Back in Chicago in 1993 for a birthday and Christmas visit, Sandra shared her admiration for Rodoreda, a writer she read to help her write with more clarity.

Writers appear throughout *A House of My Own*, a redolent essay collection and mosaic memoir. Cisneros shares memories of going to hear Jorge Luis Borges speak and of meeting Joy Harjo when they were both attending the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She pays insightful and personal homage to Gwendolyn Brooks, Marguerite Duras, Eduardo Galeano, Elena Poniatowska, and Luis Omar Salinas.

Ten years after our first meeting, Sandra generously accepted my invitation to appear on *Open Books*, an author interview show I hosted on Loyola University's radio station, WLUW. Loyola was Sandra's alma mater, and she was working there when she met our mutual friend, Raúl Niño, who had, in turn, introduced us. Cocooned in the quiet oasis of the studio where only the station manager, Craig Kois, another cherished friend, was our witness, Sandra and I spoke ardently about reading, writing, and her work. Two years later, in March 2005, I spoke to Sandra in front of an audience of hundreds, including many young people. This event was part of Story Week, the vibrant and encompassing weeklong literary festival founded by Randall Albers, the dynamic longtime chair of Columbia College Chicago's widely influential Fiction Writing Department. Story Week thrived for 19 years. This was my first Story Week appearance and I was nervous until we took the stage in the Winter Garden at the Harold Washington Library Center before that great lake of faces. Their excitement stirred the air. As we talked, I could feel the press of their attention and adulation for Sandra, and I felt the

reciprocal radiance of her appreciation and affection for them. Their applause reverberated within the large, high-ceiled glass atrium, followed by clamor and hubbub as people formed a long, serpentine line, giddy at the chance to express their admiration, have a book signed, take a photo, and bask in Sandra's bright presence.

Cisneros has won many, many prestigious awards, so it is an honor for us to be able to add the Fuller Award to her list. I'm thrilled to be holding another public conversation with Sandra. We cannot be together as we were before, but online events offer their own sort of intimacy and magnetism in compensation. In preparation, I reread the *Open Books* interview, which is included in *Writers on the Air: Conversations about Books*. I was struck all over again by the grace and sensitivity of Sandra's thoughtful reflections, and I'm happy to be able to share some excerpts here. *Caramelo* had just come out in paperback.

SEAMAN: *Caramelo* begins with a road trip as the Reyes family drives from Chicago to Mexico City. It's wonderfully frenetic, and showcases one of the literary techniques you use so avidly, which is to make lists, to catalogue everything in a household, everything in a suitcase. And you make the objects you name meaningful and significant.

CISNEROS: I like to name things because naming tells you so much. When I meet people, I pay attention to what we call trivia, all the little things everyone notices. When we step into an elevator we check someone out for three seconds, then we turn around. But if you had to write a little sketch of that person, there's lots of things you could say. This usually doesn't come across in writing. For me, because I was trained as a poet, writing is about naming things and itemizing. So I got in the habit of making lists--I did it in the stories in *Woman Hollering Creek*--and there is a certain pleasure in doing so. You know, naming all the things that are in your mother's living room, naming them all, and when you talk about homes like my mom's, it's jammed-packed with things. So sometimes when I was depressed and in a funk and I couldn't write, I would find myself complaining in my journal about how crowded my old bedroom was with stuff. One day, I wrote down everything that was in my bedroom, and that's what I borrowed from later when I wanted to write about what kind of a house Lala lived in and the things that were in there. I just went to my journal and there it was.

SEAMAN: Speaking of meaningful objects, the reigning metaphor for the novel is a caramelo rebozo, an intricately woven shawl.

CISNEROS: Yes, a rebozo is a Mexican shawl. You sometimes see Frida Kahlo wearing one. They were created in Mexico from a mix of many different cultures. The fringe work, we think, comes from the macramé of Spanish shawls, and long textiles were created during the time of the conquest because Indian women weren't allowed to wear Indian clothes. They were mandated to wear non-Indian clothes so, I guess, they could be assimilated into Spanish culture. But they didn't have money to buy Spanish clothes, so what they did was make, on a back-strap loom, long strips of cloth. At first the fringe was very short, but over the years it became longer and more and more elaborate. Originally the embroidery came from the Manila galleons which carried Chinese embroidery, then the macramé came from the Spanish mantillas, and they include Arabic knotting, so it's a little bit of this and that.

I love collecting these shawls, but I never put them into my writing before. This time I thought, "I'm going to throw in my love of shawls because people are losing regard for the shawls, and so many young people don't even know the history of the shawls. So I'll make the grandmother the daughter of makers of Mexican shawls. And I will weave into the story the shawl's history and importance. This way another generation will be introduced to them."

In a way, I'm preserving the shawls. That's why I wrote about them, but what I didn't realize was that the rebozo was going to become a very important metaphor for the many strands of stories that get woven together. I think that's the magical thing about why we write. We put something in because we love it, and if you trust your heart, and if you trust the thing you love and include it in your work because it is one of your passions, it will find a way of making a pattern and tying itself to all the other elements.



Photo Credit: Family Archives

SEAMAN: The caramelo rebozo is made from a blend of tones.

CISNEROS: Right. The shawls have different names depending on what they look like. The caramelo, for example, means caramel, but it also could mean candy. So the striped shawls that look like candy, peppermint or taffy with licorice stripes, browns and white, those are called caramelos.

SEAMAN: I couldn't help but picture those colors as skin colors because of how vividly you describe each character's eyes, hair, and skin, and how beautifully you evoke the great multiplicity of backgrounds that Mexican culture embraces.

CISNEROS: People don't realize that about Mexico. Most people think that all Mexicans have dark hair and dark skin, but that's not true. If you go to Mexico, you will see that we have people of all ranges as in the United States. We have African Mexicans, who were enslaved, then settled there and intermarried. We have Irish Mexicans, who were in the Mexican-American War and defected, and because they were Catholics, they intermarried. We have French Mexicans, who were part of the occupation when the French crown was dominating Mexico. Then you have green-eyed German Mexicans, and Lebanese Mexicans like Salma Hayek. Jewish Mexicans, freckle-faced Mexicans. And you have to remember that Mexico is comprised of many Indian cultures.

SEAMAN: Most Americans have a simplistic view of our neighbor to the south and don't know how very entwined our histories are.

CISNEROS: When I began the book, I was upset over the fact that my father's life would dissolve with his memory, that his history and his contribution to the United States, and the contribution of all the people of my father's generation who immigrated to America, who live and die here, will be forgotten. When we talk about Americans in American history we don't talk about them. In order to write about my father, and about others like him, I had to write about one hundred years of history, although the chronology I provide goes all the way back to 1519. I didn't intend to write a history book, but that's what it turned into, a history of the two countries and the way that they look at each other.

SEAMAN: *Caramelo* covers over a century of one large family's complex

history in great and vivid detail. You conjure scenes on the streets of Mexico City in 1910 and 1911, for instance, in which you detail every smell, every sight, every sound. You must have done a phenomenal amount of research.

CISNEROS: Many people helped me to write *Caramelo* by allowing me to interview them and by loaning me their memories. Every single person is a walking Smithsonian or a walking library, an incredible trove of treasures. And when each person dies all those stories die with them. We felt that after September 11 when we read all those obituaries that tried to sum up the incredible richness of a life in one paragraph. So my kind of research is almost like that of an anthropologist since it involves so much personal contact. One person just died who helped me a great deal was my father's cousin, Enrique Arteaga Cisneros. He was the family archivist, and he was instrumental in helping me to shape the Mexican part of the book.

SEAMAN: Another subtle theme in *Caramelo* involves the importance of storytelling and the curious truth that no one person owns a story, even that of their own life. Lala and her grandmother frequently debate about the way the novel is progressing. The Awful Grandmother says, "I thought you were telling my story." And Lala replies, "I am, but it's my story too." There is no separation. You're suggesting that each person is comprised of all who went before them.

CISNEROS: That's right. It's a very Buddhist point of view that we're all interconnected and that we're all connected to every single thing in the universe, whether it's a pebble or a feather or the sky. The grandmother wants the novel to be about her, but Lala understands that we're all interwoven like the threads in the shawl, so in order to tell the grandmother's story she is going to have to tell her own story, too.

SEAMAN: They argue about details and time frames, and their arguments inspire the reader to consider the vagaries of memory, the elusiveness of truth. Within any household, every family member has a different version of what goes on in there.

CISNEROS: And then there is so much we don't know about our families and each other's stories. I'm interested in what doesn't get told; that's where the real stories are. That was the wonderful thing about having the

grandmother's intrusive voice come in and correct things. I think when we are writing about families we can't help but hear our family members, living or dead, saying, "That's not how it was." So I let her speak and bicker.

Somebody said my book was postmodern, but that's just the way we speak. You know, it's oral storytelling. When we tell stories, we often tell the ending first. "I'm going to tell you about when I almost died," he says, then tells the story even though he's already given you the punch line and the plot. Then he interrupts and says, "Oh, but first I have to tell you . . . and then I forgot to say. . ." The good storytellers can take you on these side detours and bring you right back. They give you just enough, and you keep listening. To me, that's a key to a good story. Do you want to hear it? Are you quiet? Do you listen because you can't wait to hear the next sentence?

SEAMAN: I believe making art can be part of a person's spiritual growth, and that can put a great deal of pressure on the creative process.

CISNEROS: I really feel I was given this gift to walk a path. Even if in real life I'm not that sort--or I'm not that wise, or I'm not that generous--when I write, I have to be. So people confuse the book with me. Me, I struggle with things like anybody else, but when I'm writing, I'm doing a sitting meditation. If I'm patient enough, then that wisdom will come through the writing, but you really have to sit there for a long time and be very, very humble for it to come. I think if you muddy it for reasons of creating art for ego, for money, or for fame, then you may get money or fame, but I don't think you'll get happiness. I really believe that. Maybe somebody can prove me wrong because I only know my own life, but I feel as if you will get a lot of grace if you do the work you are meant to be doing in this lifetime on this planet. And we get guidance every single day of what that work is, but people aren't quiet long enough to hear what they are supposed to do. They don't ask either. If you ask it will be given to you.

I don't feel that the light I write from comes from me. I really feel that it comes from some higher energy. People think I have the gift, but everybody has the gift, every single one of us. That's the most wonderful thing, and I tell young people this all the time. Think of service work for your community, whatever your community may be. Just say, "I have

some work to do for the specific community I come from. What is the most important work I could be doing? How can I give of myself, of my own time?” I think when we volunteer and give our time, which is the most expensive thing we have, then we get that light. I see that happening now with the stories I wrote for my father. I’ve been reading them to immigrants, and when immigrant readers come up to talk to me, when you see that your writing makes a difference to people, that’s more rewarding than a positive book review. These are people who work really hard. They don’t have a lot of money, yet they bring me flowers, earrings, a little necklace. It is so touching to get gifts from people who don’t have money, who work with their hands, who are so moved by stories about their lives.

It always circles back to stories. I’m so struck by Sandra’s mention of 9/11. At the time of this conversation, the shock and loss of the attacks were still fresh. Now Sandra’s thoughts about how difficult it is to sum up a life in a few words echoes with renewed poignancy as we struggle to fathom the pandemic deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans. There are so many stories to tell and to read and contemplate. Let us find inspiration and light in Sandra’s empathy and eloquence, her gift for divining the essence of a life.



Photo Credit: Family Archives

# The House on Campbell Avenue

By Angela Raney and Donald G. Evans

In 1965, an eleven-year-old Sandra Cisneros and her family moved into the residence at 1525 N. Campbell Avenue. This address was one of Cisneros' multiple childhood residences and the real-life inspiration for the house on Mango Street, from which the book receives its title. The house is nestled within a Humboldt Park neighborhood that today still reflects the diversity explored in *The House on Mango Street*, which is set around the 1960s.

Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans, comprise more than half the neighborhood's population. Unfortunately, the original house at 1525 North Campbell Ave. was demolished around 2004; a modern three-flat apartment building now stands in its place.

However, Cisneros has said that the house that stands directly across from 1525 is very similar to her childhood home. This house is "small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath," just as it is described in the title story of *The House on Mango Street*. That story goes on to say, "Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb." A later story observes the house "with its feet tucked under like a cat."

The fictional Mango Street, especially narrator Esperanza's own house, is described in intricate detail throughout the 46 vignettes that comprise the collection. The story, "Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps," pins down an address. "You live right here 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of." There is no actual Mango Street in Chicago, but there is a Mango Avenue. It is between Central and Austin, and 4006 would be just off Irving Park Road.

Cisneros writes in *A House of My Own*, that while the Mango Street house was actually modeled after one specific past Chicago residence, the fictional neighborhood is a potpourri of details based on other places she'd lived. She writes, "I pick up parts of Bucktown, like the monkey garden next door, and plop it down in the Humboldt Park block where I lived during my middle and high school years—1525 N. Campbell Street."

The fictional Mango Street is a poor neighborhood populated with

immigrant families and colorful characters, a neighborhood that Cathy Queen of Cats warns is changing for the worse, prompting Esperanza to comment, "...they'll just have to move a little farther north from Mango Street, a little farther away every time people like us keep moving in." It is not a transient neighborhood, exactly, but more a neighborhood of last resort in which residents, including Esperanza's family, move in with the intention of moving out. Friends and neighbors come and go—for example, Cathy, whose father built her wooden house with slanty floors and no closets, is replaced by Meme Ortiz. Esperanza and friends stage the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest in Meme's dirt backyard, amidst its collapsed remnants of an old garage and a big tree.



Photo Credit: Family Archives

The neighborhood is densely populated, as lots of people cram into the street's houses and apartment buildings, like the Puerto Rican family who lives in Meme's basement apartment, and Rose Vargas' wild kids who are described as "too many and too much." Edna owns the big six-flat next door, with daughter Ruthie as one tenant and jukebox repairman Earl and his two dogs staying in the basement. Benny and Bianca own the corner candy store. Elenita, the "witch woman," reads fortunes in a kitchen somewhere nearby. Mamacita lives across the street, third-floor front.

The narrator, though barely an adolescent, understands that her neighborhood is considered undesirable. She writes, in "Those Who Don't," about that reputation. "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives." Among the Mango Street denizens, there are unwed mothers, petty thieves, drug abusers, and a garden variety of mischief-makers.

Esperanza does wander off Mango Street from time to time, especially to "the avenue which is dangerous. Laundromat, junk store, drugstore, windows and cars, and more cars..." This likely refers to North Avenue, which would have been the busiest street in the neighborhood on which the house is modeled. Gil, "a black man who doesn't talk much," owns the junk shop. Esperanza's school is just south of "the boulevard."

Cisneros was born in Chicago on December 20, 1954. Her family—mother,

father, herself, and six brothers--moved between Chicago and Mexico City all through her pre-school years. Because of this nomadic upbringing, Cisneros began to view the idea of home not necessarily as the place one is born, but where someone comes into their own—a concept that would be prevalent in her future literary endeavors.

Cisneros found comfort and stability in the pages of the books she read at her local Chicago Public Libraries. Shy and introverted, Cisneros was an active and talented writer from a young age. However, in interviews, as well as her memoir, Cisneros states that it was not until her first-ever creative writing class at Loyola University in her junior year that she found her inspirational spark for creative writing. In 1973, Cisneros graduated from Josephinum High School in Wicker Park and further studied English at Loyola University. In 1978, Cisneros obtained her M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop.

At that time, men had written nearly all the stories of her community; Cisneros wanted to add a perspective she knew was unique. In an interview with writer Martha Satz, Cisneros says, “I have lived in the barrio, but I discovered later on in looking at works by my contemporaries that they write about the barrio as a colorful, Sesame Street-like, funky neighborhood. To me, the barrio was a repressive community. I found it frightening and very terrifying for a woman. The future for women in the barrio is not a wonderful one. You don't wander around these ‘mean streets.’ You stay at home. If you have to get somewhere, you take your life into your hands. So I wanted to counter those colorful viewpoints, which I'm sure are true to an extent but were not true for me.”

Cisneros was inspired by writers such as Carl Sandburg and Gwendolyn Brooks, whose poems show the beautiful, troubling, realistic, and rewarding lives of the Chicago people. Referring to Brooks's 1960 poem, “The Bean Eaters,” Cisneros wrote in her memoir, “I knew plenty of bean eaters too, but they lived in the Mexican communities of Pilsen, Humboldt Park, Little Village or Logan Square.”

*“How many artists and thinkers and writers and scientists are we losing from the poorest neighborhoods because there is not a free weekend day at the museum?”*

# TRIBUTES

## *How the road to world fame began with one poetry chapbook*

Once upon a snowy winter's eve in Chicago, I had just enjoyed a Puerto Rican restaurant meal with my blond Anglo-Saxon boyfriend at the time, Dade. He then invited me to a poetry chapbook release reading, which was taking place down the street for a new Mexican-American writer. "It's a funky little bookstore, and this new poet is really good," said Dade. "Her name is Sandra Cisneros."

Dade spoke perfect Spanish from spending time in the Peace Corps in Colombia, and had heard about the reading through friends. It was taking place on Chicago's North Side, at a small Latino bookstore on Division Street called "Libreria Yuquiyu." I'd never heard of the bookstore, or the writer.

The snow was as high as the crankcase of a snowplow and the endless onslaught of white stuff wasn't scheduled to stop anytime soon. If we hadn't just eaten at the little restaurant beforehand and could merely walk down the street to the bookstore, we might have turned back and gone home because of the storm.

Nevertheless, by the time we arrived at the poetry reading, every seat was filled in the tiny space. Copies of the black, white and pink chapbook *Bad Boys* were stacked on a table. The eight-page chapbook holds a mere seven poems, devoted largely to Cisneros' early memories of growing up Latina in Chicago. It was the first published collection by this local author, whose parents lived just a mile or two from the bookstore.

Sandra was utterly petite. Her cropped hair dark as night. Her voice childlike. I wasn't sure what to expect. But over the course of her reading, I found Sandra Cisneros to be one of the most engaging, funny and talented poets imaginable, warming the room and, even with her demure size, commanding attention with each poem from her unique collection. The poetry in *Bad Boys* was Sandra's first step in her literary path that was soon to include her novella and most well-known work, *The House on Mango Street*. Later came subsequent volumes of poetry, her collection of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek*, and the novel, *Caramelo*.

At the *Bad Boys* event, I not only witnessed the launch of Sandra's first

published book, but also laid eyes on my future husband, Carlos Cumpián, who charmingly served as the VSOP of M.C.s for the reading. As he made the evening's introductions and helped promote the chapbook, his deep, modulated voice served as counterpoint to Sandra's smaller soprano one. She focused on setting off her images to air, letting him take care of the business end of the event. As I sat in the audience next to this other man, the current boyfriend, and listened to these first poems from a fresh voice on that icy night, little did I know what we were destined for: Sandra for literary fame, Carlos and I ultimately to be married, and the three of us to remain friends over the years.

Of course, the *Bad Boys* chapbook itself is not what launched Sandra Cisneros. Within the woman herself lay the tremendous talent, wherewithal and voice to go forth into the world successfully one way or another. This was a path similar to what Native American E. Donald Two-Rivers had taken with his first poetry chapbook *A Dozen Cold Ones* (March/Abrazo Press, 1992), followed by an award-winning collection of short stories and published and performed stage plays. Sandra, however, expanded her trajectory to an even greater, more far-reaching degree.

The chapbook served as an initial vehicle for her talents. It made her visible to the audiences around her, sped up how quickly others would take notice of her, and gave bookstores, centers and schools *raison d'être* to invite her to give readings, where she expanded her influence. *Bad Boys* also served as a sample and calling card to those who would embrace her in the future, be it audience, agent or publisher. It is a great idea for any beginning poet to try to pursue a chapbook (from a thin volume like *Bad Boys* up to one 32 pages or so in length) as a first published initiative, beyond single poem publications in magazines and anthologies.

According to Sandra, finding a publishing home for the *Bad Boys* chapbook as an unknown writer had been a bit of an arduous path. She had just graduated with an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers Workshop in Iowa City. While still there, she learned that the Iowa City-based small-press publisher Toothpaste Press was looking for diverse voices outside the realm of the workshop experience for its series of chapbooks. She felt that the Latino, urban themes she wrote about in *Bad Boys* might be a good fit with press' profile, even though she had in fact been part of the "academic" Iowa workshops. However, after considering her manuscript, Toothpaste Press

graciously returned it to her.

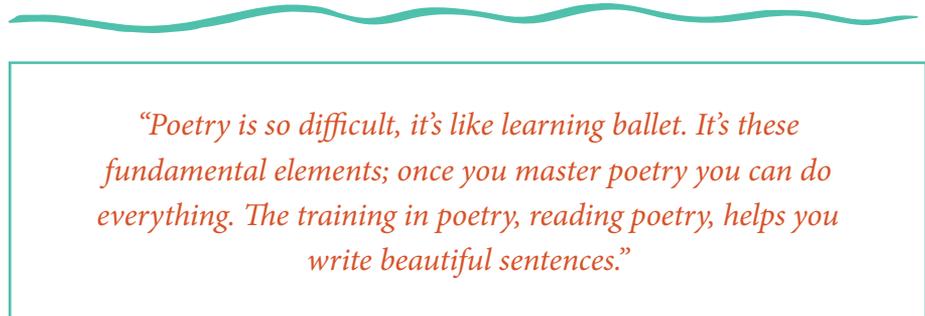
Next step, Sandra sent the *Bad Boys* manuscript to Mango Press, a small Latino publisher located in San Francisco and run by writer Lorna Dee Cervantes. Years passed. No word came from Mango on the decision, much less any clue as to the whereabouts of the manuscript itself.

Nevertheless, Sandra continued writing in a drafty apartment on Paulina Street, working on her book *The House on Mango Street*. As to another location where she lived, she recalled, “I had only a single light bulb, so I walked from room to room screwing it into one fixture or another, depending on what I was doing.” A frugal poet indeed!

One day, Cisneros received a phone call from writer Gary Soto. She nearly fell off her office chair. He told her that Lorna Dee had misplaced the *Bad Boys* manuscript but that he had pulled it from the bottom of a slush pile in the Mango Press offices, read it and wanted to publish it. Thus, her chapbook would now finally trip the light fantastic of the printing press. And the rest is history!

Who can say to what degree of influence *Bad Boys* had in transforming Sandra from an unknown to an internationally regarded author. Many factors and people come into play to make someone a literary success, perhaps most strongly if you have the attributes of talent and motivation. But without that first published step forward with her chapbook *Bad Boys*, who knows how long it may have taken for so many to pay the due attention that Sandra Cisneros has now gained.

**Excerpt (with a few additions) from the nonfiction/memoir/creativity guide *Frugal Poets’ Guide to Life: How to Live a Poetic Life, Even If You Aren’t a Poet* by Cynthia Gallaher.**



*“Poetry is so difficult, it’s like learning ballet. It’s these fundamental elements; once you master poetry you can do everything. The training in poetry, reading poetry, helps you write beautiful sentences.”*

## *Spirit Healing*

Memory is a sieve, separating the fine from the thick, and I cannot separate Sandra Cisneros from the first time I read *The House on Mango Street* or *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, and the way those books echoed my own history and all that I love in poetry and story. For me Sandra is a bright blue sky and a hot pink rebozo, the one she wore pulled tight over her shoulders. More than twenty-five years ago we sat in her garden near the creek with the sound of chickens and people's voices almost, but not quite, distracting me. I was exhausted and she was comforting, offering me cold water and a warm smile. We talked books and poetry and people. She did not know she was healing my spirit as her books and poetry always had—or perhaps she did. She put me down for a nap and I dreamed her poetry and woke up refreshed. This is what I believe we all come to when we take Sandra's books in hand—a deep satisfying sense of meaning and purpose. An honest woman is a provocation to the meanness of the world. Sandra's words are balm, the kind that first burns, then heals. Sandra Cisneros is a wonder. Honoring her is honoring the spirit of story itself.

## **Dorothy Allison**



Photo Credit: Al Rendon

## *Hermanas en las Palabras*

Sandra and I have been on a long path together—and I feel profoundly lucky to have traveled it with a compañera of so much corazón, compassion, generosity and talent.

In fact, I could date my writing life as S. S. (sin Sandra: all those years before we first met on paper and then in person) and C. S. (con Sandra—all the years since we have been together as hermanas en las palabras).

Back in 1985 I got a love note via a colleague who had attended a conference in Chicago where Sandra was reading. Sandra wrote that she had read my book of poems, *Homecoming*, and was sending me its birthday “twin” *The House on Mango Street*, published the same year. However, she omitted to put a return address on the note. I tried contacting her through her then publisher, Arte Público, only to find out years later she never received the letter. But our twin books had made us storytelling comadres, and so we began our journey, abriendo caminos, with the help of Susan Bergholz, the woman-warrior agent we shared for years and now, Stuart Bernstein, Susan’s dear friend and mentee, who has taken on some of her clients.

Without Sandra, I would probably have pulled an Emily Dickinson, writing my poems and stories to the world that never wrote to me in seclusion and disconnection. Sandra connected me to a wider Latina/o writing community, a way she has of gathering the tribes, eager to be in the presence of her luminous and generous spirit—a skill she formalized by founding her groundbreaking MACONDO workshops. Her courage, her plucky irreverence, her sassy and fun and funny presence gave us all animo and led the way. So many times in my writing life and in my life, Sandra has stepped in: one time, it was when I happened through San Antonio on a book tour, and she showed up with a bag of on-the-road gifts: a bottle of hand sanitizer, another of lotion, teas for my voice, PowerBars for missed meals, and once, even a tin of Panic Mints! When I ran into family censure for my writing, Sandra sent me a kick-ass letter with an excerpt from bell hooks which I taped above my writing desk, magic words I read and reread when the demons of self-doubt came forward.

Sandra is a trailblazer, a woman of heart and compassion and solidarity and courage. And these qualities in the woman abound in her work: a precise and exquisite wordsmith (a form of love to give only the best), a storyteller like no

other, writing that is generous, insightful and unabashed in claiming ground for all of us as women, Latinas, human(e) beings.

When I wrote to congratulate her on this award, Sandra was philosophical. We both know by now that the work is about the work; attention, acclaim, awards come and go. But she was also profoundly touched that her hometown, Chicago, was welcoming her proudly as one of its premier storytellers. In her characteristically community-minded way, she hoped this attention might encourage other writers like the young Sandra Cisneros when she first set out. I couldn't help recalling the end of *The House On Mango Street*: "I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out."

However, wordsmith that she is, she acknowledged that the phrase, "lifetime award," has an uncomfortable ring of finality, like handfuls of soil being thrown on a grave. "I'm not done yet!" she asserted. She better not be! We all need her presence: her nurturing of community and of younger writers, her advocacy, her generosity and kindness which set the right tone for an inclusive and beloved style of activism, and most of all we need her stories and her poems. In fact, as this award acknowledges, Sandra Cisneros will never be "done." No, there will never be a D. E. S. (después de Sandra) Even when she is gone, her words will live on and on.

With profound gratitude, admiration, and amor, amor, amor!

**Julia Alvarez**



*"Writing allows me to hear things going on inside my heart.  
I never know what I'm feeling until I write about it.  
Writing makes me feel better when life overwhelms me."*

## *Stories Without End*

I first met Sandra Cisneros when we were graduate students at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. We took the class together that engendered the first chapters of her ground-breaking *The House on Mango Street*. There were many houses on that street, many doorways, and so many stories. The stories are without end. As Cisneros continued to write, the stories led to Texas, to Mexico and back and forth through the spiritual presence of many towns and cities, many old and new relatives, many ancestors. There at the heart, warming each house of memory, of story making, is that infectious voice, that brilliant perception, that laugh that draws the listener closer, and the tears that feed the earth though kept in private, sing their own songs. Her lyrical and witty poetry winds through our lives to feed our spirits. We were brought into the storytelling circle with *Caramelo*, *Woman Hollering Creek* and then here we are at *A House of My Own*, *Stories of My Life*. I don't mind hanging out here for a while. And this is only the beginning of what I could say, what Sandra has to say. She grows more brilliant, more insightful and more absolutely herself with each breath. I am sharing my breath here to say, muchas gracias mi amiga, mvto, thank you, for the gift of you, your stories, your poetry, your you.

**Joy Harjo**



### *Writers Read*

Sandra was the first person to say these words to me: "You're a poet!" That was in 1981. She was working at Loyola University's Equal Opportunity Program, and she was interviewing me for possible acceptance into the school that year. During the interview, after asking me all the official questions, she asked me more personal questions. She asked me what I really like doing for fun. I shyly answered, "I write poems." That's when she threw her arms up enthusiastically, then stretched them out over her desk towards me and identified me for the first time. A poet. She asked me if I had ever read this writer, or that writer. She asked me who I liked to read. When she responded to my mumbled answers, I heard her say something that I have never forgotten: "Well Raúl, you know that writers read? Poets should read everything. Reading is the most important work that a writer does." She asked me if I had ever read Jorge Luis Borges or Gabriel García Márquez. I told her

that I had never heard of them. Her response was to immediately reach into a satchel and hand me her copies of Borges's *Dream Tigers*, and Márquez's *Leaf Storm*.

I was accepted into the university, and I did finish and return those books. More importantly, Sandra and I became lifelong friends. She took me to my first poetry reading: Simon Ortiz reading from his just published collection, *From Sand Creek*. Sandra introduced me to other poets who would also become lifelong friends, Carlos Cumpián, Carlos Cortez and Beatriz Badikian. These poets in turn introduced me to a cornucopia of writers and artists. My first public reading was with Sandra and these dear friends. I was first published alongside them in *Emergency Tacos*.

One afternoon Sandra introduced me to gin and tonics, and we sat in her apartment looking out the windows and talking for hours about poetry and literature. She showed me her writing desk where she was in the last stages of editing her new book, *The House on Mango Street*. She told me what it was about, and that she hoped to get it published soon. She gave me a copy of her first collection, *Bad Boys*. We finished the whole pitcher of gin and tonics that afternoon. A couple of years later, in 1983, I went to Guild Books for the release of *The House on Mango Street*. Over the years I would spend time with Sandra in Provincetown and San Antonio, as well as hanging out in Chicago whenever she would pass through, giving readings or visiting her family. She would send me letters and postcards during her world travels. Our correspondence continues to this day.

How does one measure love and friendship? This year will mark 40 years since I met Sandra. Like a patient muse, she taught me over time how to be a writer. She led by example, demonstrating that to be any good at one's craft one must work very hard, accept criticism and read everything. My library has expanded since that first meeting. I read more than I write, or publish. Sandra continues to teach me in person, and by texting. "Don't worry about getting published, Raúl. Write because you have to!" I gush with gratitude at this astonishing woman; my teacher, my sister, my friend who identified me as a fellow writer, and introduced me to my future.

**raúl niño**



## *Chicanas from Chicago*

I am a Chicana from Chicago, born on the West Side at the Old St. Luke's in 1967. My parents migrated from Texas to the Second City in the 1950s to a neighborhood like the one Cisneros writes about in her classic book *The House on Mango Street*. Growing up, I didn't see many books, movies, or media that reflected my family's story. Cisneros showed the world that Mexicans are living and thriving beyond the border. Our story is an American story. It is a Chicago story. Our community is integral to Chicago and today Latinos make up a third of the city population. This is the community that Cisneros brought alive to the public. If it were not for writers like Cisneros, who I discovered in college, I wouldn't have seen a path to my own journalistic writing. I've worked at both Chicago newspapers, the *Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. I've lived in and reported extensively on the people and places in Chicago neighborhoods such as Our Lady of Guadalupe on the Southeast Side, the city's first Mexican church; the history of the Young Lords in Humboldt Park; Mexican migration to Chicago as early as 1897; and in 2001, I became one of the first journalists to write about Dreamers. Today, I am based in Southern California, working as a journalism professor and training the next generation of Latinx journalists. My story wouldn't be possible if not for the Latina writers like Cisneros who came before me. She is a "madrina" or godmother to all Latinx writers who humbly follow in her footsteps. I see myself in her character of Esperanza Cordero in *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros beautifully wrote, "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing." Cisneros wrote about the idea of home in her book, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*. Her writer's life has taken her around the world but her best known homes are the one-bedroom house her family proudly owned in Chicago, her purple house in San Antonio, and now the home she has created in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. She has gone back to her ancestral homeland and connected to that community. Cisneros wrote, "Where is there a country where a woman can feel safe? Is there such a country? When I was living in Europe I often cited Virginia Woolf 'As a woman I have no country, as a woman my country is the whole world.' I would amend that to the current times: 'As a woman I have no country, as a woman I'm an immigrant in the whole world.'"

Congratulations to Cisneros, la gran escritora, a woman and writer of the world, for this honor in the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame and the Fuller Award for lifetime achievement. Our lives are richer because of her words. *Felicidades y adelante.*

## Teresa Puente

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### *Word Hunting—Le Mot Juste*

I've known Sandra for almost 35 years, when she landed in Texas, and we've been friends ever since. I'm also very lucky to be the translator into Spanish of all her books except for one, so I know her linguistic and imaginative universe very well. Some of my favorite passages to translate have been from her detailed depictions of the Maxwell St. flea market. She saw and found countless treasures there, and sometimes I had to do a lot of research to figure out just what kind of object she was describing. This was pre-Internet time, so Sandra would sometimes snail mail me pictures from the paper to illustrate what she meant, like when I didn't know what a wing-tip shoe was. When I saw the picture, I recognized it immediately. I still had to ask my father what those shoes were called in Mexico. She also described in hilarious detail the cramped apartment of her auntie, with miss-matched furniture that made it difficult to close the door. The sheer amount and variety of objects in her aunt's home also made for a fun research expedition. That, and her multiple references to the sound the expressway makes, like the sea, when you happen to live close by. Chicago is also now part of my imagination.



## Liliana Valenzuela

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*"I'm interested in what doesn't get told;  
that's where the real stories are."*

## *Sandra Cisneros: The Dreamer and the Weaver*

Sandra Cisneros represents literary Chicago at its best, and at its broadest. Sandra emerged from among the working poor of this once powerful industrial citadel, not expected to have writing or anything important to say. A place most working-class persons in any great city are relegated to—obscure, silence. Sandra nonetheless became one of the most important voices of our generation. A MacArthur Genius, a National Medal of Arts honoree, a stalwart of Chicano/Latino letters, Sandra also left an indelible mark on the wondrous and diverse country that is the United States.

*The House on Mango Street* became the literary water for thirsty young brown girls—and in the process, for girls of all skins, cultures, and tongues. Sandra dared to express the perplexed emotions of a Mexican migrant girl in a big-city Chicago barrio known as Humboldt Park. She thus voiced the same for anyone who, in a divided world of hierarchies and dominances, didn't belong regardless of urban or rural setting.

A sense of *not* belonging is an underlying theme of the character Esperanza's story on Mango Street. So is the potency of being, writing, and loving, which means she belongs anywhere, anytime.

I remember such girls in the elementary or middle school classes where I lectured or did poetry by invitation. They were generally the quiet ones, who tried to be “small” so they wouldn't be seen. Whose minds had complex “gears” that grinded day and night, but who kept their mouths shut for fear someone might realize they were actually there. The world, fraught with peril and mysteries, was to be deciphered, however clumsily. With rich imaginative lives, these girls—and often boys—meandered their way through shadowy corridors and misshapen roads that make up relationships. Friends aren't always friends; lovers aren't always loving. People like her had books as their truest companions, since books never berated them, judged them, or looked askance at them. In inner core communities, you see these pushed out and forgotten, the ones super protected at home, imprisoned by patriarchy, too often suffering sexual assault, and kept blind from the fractures and fissures of family and community. Yet if navigated successfully, truly amazing interactions can unfold.

*The House on Mango Street* is as much about Esperanza as it is about the neighborhood. I know Humboldt Park intimately, as well as Wicker Park

and Logan Square, neighborhoods I lived in for 15 years. The residents, mostly Puerto Rican, also included Mexicans, African Americans, Jamaicans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, immigrant whites, such as Poles and Ukrainians, but also increasing numbers of gentrifying suburban whites. Yes, there was poverty. There were clashes. But there was also community: block parties, people looking out for each other, activists for badly needed change, and much family.

Sandra gave these people “eyes” to see—and faces to be seen. Esperanza is such a face; she has such eyes. Sandra continued to explore these rarely seen or felt people—as well as places and things—in her short stories, a novel, children’s books, essays, poetry, and more.

Sandra Cisneros is a master storyteller, but above all she’s a poet.

Sandra’s poems are filled with wonders of simple things, where every detail is a universe. Finding the poetically large in the mundane is an art. Poets see further and feel deeper. Her poems are close to breaking like a heart, or exuberant in the passions they ignite.

Sandra is also a builder. She’s founded or cofounded a number of important writers’ organizations, prominent among these is the Macondo Writers Workshops in San Antonio, Texas. Open to any aspiring writer, all races, all genders, all voices, these workshops have also propelled the Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Queer stories and poems to the fore. I was honored one summer to be a Macondo teacher. A teacher who learned as much as could give.

In my early writing life, Sandra embraced me, similar to other established Chicano writers of the time—Denise Chavez, Ana Castillo, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Gary Soto, Victor Villasenor, Jose Montoya. Also, by the renowned Puerto Rican writers Martin Espada and Piri Thomas. I never felt the competitive nature of writers holding back up-and-coming struggling voices. Black writers like Gwendolyn Brooks and Amiri Baraka connected with me. And revolutionary voices such as San Francisco’s Jack Hirschman helped bring me to a world stage. The generosity of these writers is beyond measure.

Still, Sandra Cisneros’ particular care and critique of my work proved invaluable. She always tried to get me to do more, do better, be bolder. I’ve tried to do the same with others. Her writing is her practice, and her love of

the art, the people, and the world is her cause.

She's brought more joy, truth, and beauty to the world than she will ever be fully recognized for. That's the way it is. Nonetheless, whatever comes her way is richly deserved. Her place In U.S.—and world—literature is indelible. Her place in the human quest for decency and wholeness is significant.

To Sandra I say, in the Nahuatl language, *tlazohkamati*. Thank you from an often stumbling, once unsure and unstable writer. I am a better artist and human being for having your friendship, guidance, and support.

My wife Trini once sang a song she learned from Mexican indigenous elders when she visited Mexico just before the corona virus Pandemic lockdowns in early 2020. This song had the words: "I am the weave and the weaver; I am the dream and the dreamer."

When I think of those words, I think of Sandra Cisneros.

### **Luis J. Rodriguez**



The exemplary works of Sandra Cisneros, helped to initiate permission for me to tell my story, to enlist memory of the houses, the homes, the locations I was born into, came of age in, and to delight in the divergence of life as it appeared to me as a child and young person. This permission stays with me to this day and her presence in letters made the field of letters more available to many writers who come from origins steeped in a richness perhaps untold before their entry.

I am grateful to her works, always.

In the end, our actions and inactions are our measure and our grace.

### **Allison Hedge Coke**



*“How many artists and thinkers and writers and scientists are we losing from the poorest neighborhoods because there is not a free weekend day at the museum?”*

### *Poemita for Sandra*

Querida Sandra,  
you changed the idea  
of what a writer should be—  
Where there was pretentiousness,  
you offered amabilidad.  
Where there was selfishness,  
you offered generosidad.  
Where there was aloofness,  
you offered agradecimiento.  
Where there was endless winter,  
you offered esperanza.  
Sandra, did you know you are Persephone,  
bringing sunshine, rosas mexicanas, and love  
from the underworld?  
Gracias for all you've done  
and please don't stop now.  
More than ever, en estos tiempos,  
we need your luz.

**Ruth Behar**



Photo Credit:  
Diana Solis

## *She Turned Her Home into a Homeland for Writers*

I first met Sandra in the early '90s, soon after moving from South Texas to New York City. I was there to become a writer. She was on a book tour with her poetry collection *Loose Woman*. And when I went up to get my book signed and told her where I was from and why I had moved, she waved off my romantic notions about the literary life.

Sure, it stung to hear that I didn't have to move to New York. All that effort: riding a Greyhound bus from McAllen, Texas, to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Times Square, suffering that first brutal winter that broke records, making do with little money and even fewer friends.

Ultimately, she led me back to my Texas homeland, welcoming me into Macondo, the collective she established (and which she named after the fictional town in Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) of socially-engaged fellow writers committed to writing for and about underserved communities as a form of non-violent social change.

The group started with about a dozen writers Sandra had met on past book tours and writing students from a class she'd taught one summer at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. We discussed each other's work for a week in Sandra's kitchen on Guenther Street. That first home-grown workshop grew into a nonprofit that supported over one hundred members from around the country. The one-of-a-kind program, an alternative to the traditional MFA, is currently run by a team of dedicated volunteers and hosted by Texas A&M San Antonio.

It was Sandra who helped me see my writing as a form of service, which led me to a longtime career as a freelance journalist covering the New York Latino and immigrant communities for the New York *Daily News*, with stints at *Gay City News*, *AARP*, and *Cosmopolitan for Latinas* magazine, where I was the research editor and part of the team committed to ensuring the fair representation and celebration of Latinas in the U.S.

Thank you, Sandra, for being an incredibly generous literary madrina to so many of us. You connected us to one another, and provided a home for writers and a path that illuminated a way, not just for our careers but to carry and move our beloved communities forward, too.

**Erasmus Guerra**

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## Remembering Sandra

It was a hard journey for me to get from a public school on the Northwest Side of Chicago to the Loyola University campus by the lake in 1977, but I did it, jumping the hurdles imposed by being the first in our family to attend university. My Mexican-American father was proud; he had immigrated as a young adult, learned English, got a good job with Olson Rugs, became a U.S. citizen, and raised his two children speaking English only, which changed our status as first-generation kids to something else entirely. My cousins were raised in traditional Mexican households, and I loved the rhythms and smells, the security of a shared language other than English, and the notion that we came from somewhere special, and had survived a lot to be there, in our new city. And so while I did not exactly live the life, I knew it.

In the late Fall of 1977, I was invited out with a few others by my poetry professor at the time, Ross Talarico. He was young, charismatic, and funny. It was like being invited to be in the cool club; I knew no one on campus, and this was an invitation to remedy that. Other poets would be there, real adults who drank beer and knew things! I was in. That warm October night changed many things for me, although nothing out of the ordinary happened. We sat at an outdoor table, there were people I didn't know, but there was one person who seemed to personify something intangible, something actually seeming impossible up until that point: A hip Mexican woman who was funny, sassy, irreverent, and beautiful. I just sat and listened, not saying much. She was wearing—or at least as I remember it—a butterscotch-colored leather jacket, a long, flowy skirt, and cowboy boots. Her hair was in perfect curls framing her face. It was love at first sight, at least in terms of literary loves, the kinds of crushes writers get on other writers. “This is my friend Sandra,” Professor Talarico said, “she’s taken the class a couple of times. Doesn’t need it anymore.” Then they both burst out laughing, at what I wasn’t sure.

Later, I got the joke. There must be a point when a professor *knows* his student is about to surpass him, when he understands that there is talent there that he will never equal. But that night, I just thought to myself, “Well, she must be good.” She *was* good. *My Wicked Wicked Ways* came out in 1987, after I had transferred to Columbia College as a poet, and it was one of the books that some of us looked to in terms of freshness, honesty and depth. Her book was

displayed in the window at the old Guild Books on Lincoln Avenue. She was doing readings and telling the world that she was a proud, Mexican woman. By simply being herself, she had provided a tiny blueprint for those who might want to follow.

But it was the publication of *The House on Mango Street* in 1983—128 pages, over two million copies sold worldwide since then—that blew it all out of the water. A slim, truth-telling book that was a lyrical bridge between poetry and fiction and that revealed to the world the secrets—*our* secrets—of real Mexican life as it was lived in our beloved city. That anyone would dare to share them, that a person would have the audacity to believe that people wanted to know and would actually care about how we lived our lives was simply unimaginable for me up until then. The dual life I had been living, the confusion I felt about why we spoke only English, and the embarrassment of not feeling as Latina as others because I was raised differently and in neighborhoods that were sometimes only White, sometimes mixed, suddenly all washed away. I had been given a gift, a jeweled box with a tiny magic wand inside that said I too was a part of this, no matter how much or little I felt it, I could be a part of the crew because I knew what this author was talking about when she described the technique for making mice disappear: “Close your eyes and they’ll go away, her father says, or You’re just imagining.” And she describes what our houses and apartments look like, with “swollen



Photo Credit: Al Rendon

floorboards nobody fixes.” And she is not embarrassed. She is not afraid. *And* she becomes famous for doing so. *Damn*.

Just as important, though, was the way that *Mango Street* broke ranks with standard storytelling by using some of the writer’s expertise as a poet to bring short—often just a paragraph or a page—stories to life. The delivery system of her method not only provided the perfect stylistic tool, but also a sort of sugar-coated spoon, a way to get content in with a wink and a nod, a flourish of language both vivid and poignant but nonetheless filled with names, terminology, places, that the average reader had never heard of. How did she do that? It was the thing that many of us pondered as we tentatively decided to follow her footsteps, once again. Cisneros went on to write many other books, some of them, like *Caramelo*, are not slim at all, but rather quite substantial. The fact that she has garnered the acclaim that she has while simultaneously continuing to take risks is just as astonishing as that vision of hers was so many years ago. It is as if someone put on a pair of homemade wings and said, “Yes, I can fly!” And she did. To this day, I thank her for her work, for giving us the space to be cool, for opening the door for women so wide it almost flew off the hinges as it ushered in generations of other writers who wanted to emulate what she had done, expand upon it, make it their own. This is beyond cool, it is a service, and a gift.

## Deborah Pintonelli



### *In the beginning...*

It was January 1981 when I met Sandra at the City Songs poetry workshop at the Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center in Wicker Park. I’d been writing poetry for over ten years by then but I was eager to work with other poets and learn and share. She led the class along with Reggie Young, also a poet. During those three months I met a myriad of poets who introduced me (and the other participants in the class) to different styles, traditions, and genres of poetry. We met on Saturday afternoons for a few hours and then would usually go out to eat and often would continue on to a bar or another. During all that time conversations about writing, literature, and our lives were the highlight of my week. Most of the teachers as well as the participants were Latino, Black, and Native American. We shared more than just a love of poetry and a passion for writing. We shared past experiences. We understood each other’s difficulties

in navigating our lives in Chicago, in the United States. And we spilled all our concerns and fears and joys onto our poems.

We forged our friendship during those winter months of poetry and fun-loving days. In that way we worked together on numerous public readings and performances and planned our trip to Greece in 1982. Sandra joined me in Athens that September where we stayed at my parent's home for a while and then travelled to the island of Hydra where we lived for two months. That's where and when Sandra finished her first book *The House on Mango Street*. I felt and still feel privileged to have been witness to its creation. I remember the day she finished it and came back to the harbor from her house in the mountains to celebrate. Those were the heady days of writing and living fully!

After Hydra we travelled: took a ship to Brindisi in Italy and then trains to Venice, Florence, Siena, Rome. This was our first time in Italy and we made the most of it. Adventures and experiences documented in poems and stories. Finally in December we arrived in Paris. After a while Sandra went her own way to an artists' colony and I slowly returned to Athens. I will always remember our travels and have written about them extensively just like she has.

I came back to Chicago in the winter of 1983. Sandra returned sometime later. And since then we have collaborated in numerous projects: readings, publications, performances. There have been long periods of time when I don't hear from her and then, she reappears, to ask something or to share some work or to get a cup of coffee. We've had our ups and downs. We are still here.

### **Beatriz Badikian-Gartler**



Sandra Cisneros founded the Macondo writers program 25 years ago and helped hundreds of under and disregarded writers grow, develop, and push themselves to find their true stories. She is an inspiration to many, is a fabulous writer, and possesses a generous heart!

### **Carla Trujillo**



*“What do I know that no other writer knows? I write from that place.”*

## *Rainbow-Colored Lipstick Kisses*

... We say nosotros los mexicanos

(by mexicanos we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between mexicanos del otro lado and mexicanos de este lado ... being Mexican is a state of soul — not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both.

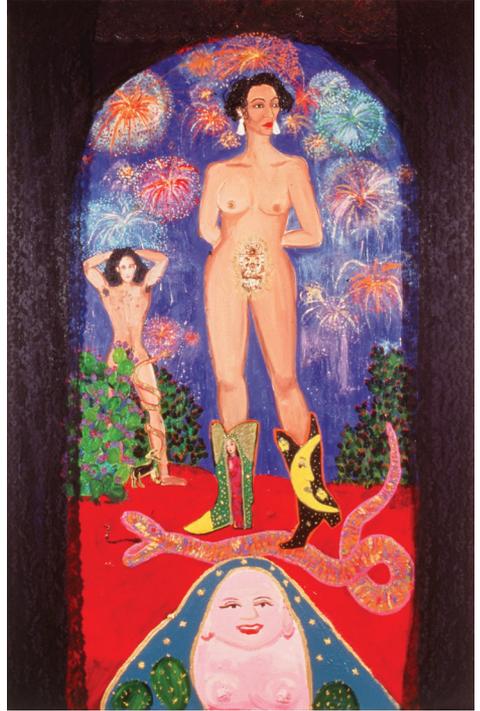
Gloria Anzaldúa

As a maricón American Mexican “penniless painter,” I have been inspired, sometimes delightfully shocked, and happy to know Sandra Cisneros since first reading *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*. I was blessed to watch her fly high like a lechuza magically from *Mango Street* through the romantic eyes of Zapata and the tearful eyes of La Llorona from *Woman Hollering Creek*.

Early on, I observed La Sandra editing my very first artist statement, and became aware of the importance of telling our multifaceted stories con orgullo y sin vergüenza. My shameless pride was ignited.

Her actions fueled my strong impulse to honestly explore my personal sexual identity as well as that of la Virgen de Guadalupe. It is embedded in a surreal memory of La Sandra reaching the sublime.

The San Antonio Main Library’s audience was enthralled as if listening to a Maria Callas aria or mesmerized watching the exotic movements of a Tongolele dance. Archbishop Flores and the rest of us were equally stunned when La Sandra spoke with words straight from a scandalous telenovela. And I paraphrase her story: Does la Virgen have brown nipples and black hair



“Coatlicue Cisneros” 1995

down there like me? Or pink nipples and shaven like in the books my father has?

From the point of view of my generation, a Chicana / Latina speaking about sex was brave. That strength infiltrated my paintings and installations, validating my feeling that communities need to talk openly and honestly about sex.

During the dark days of AIDS, this was particularly important to me as a Catholic Latino gay man navigating the fearful time of the pandemic.

As the words of one of her poems beautifully contextualized it for me, “Fear is not so thrilling when you’re the one who is afraid.”

I am grateful for what she personally told me one night. “Hazlo para que se te quite el miedo. Do it. Once you do it, the fear will leave you.”

Agredesco sus regalos: for the gift of inspiration, for the books she gave me, the barracuda nipple clamps and every shade of lipstick in the gay rainbow you can imagine including Coco Chanel red and a plastic lipstick container that was secretly a writing pen. When you give a queer every shade of lipstick, it’s over the top endearing.

La Sandra es muy especial.

The day I read her words, “Lipstick on a penis,” I thought, “You bring out the queer in me, you bring out the Truth in me. You bring out the caballero in me. You bring out the gentle man in me. You bring out the pierce-my-cock-with-an-obsidian-knife in me, you bring out the gender fluid in me.”

The dear gays supported La Sandra and La Sandra supported nosotros los maricones, las mariposas y las monfloras de San Antonio. She has often said that she’s nobody’s mother and nobody’s wife. I lovingly add that SHE IS her father’s princesa.

When asked if she was a lesbian, she replied, “No, but thank you for the compliment.”

I am blessed by knowing many genius, young, veterano and sometimes tragic writers. In my queer Tejano soul, there is one and only one preeminent La Sandra.

Neither eagle nor serpent, diosa santa nor puta pecadora, but una mujer poderosa with complexities, contradictions, and a commitment to introspection.

La Sandra has influenced my art practice, affirming my Rasquache self through her life as a woman of letters, and the many contributions she gives in abundance.

She has said Tejanos and Mexicanos historically come from a place of having our things such as our land and language taken away from us. My life's quest is to contribute to our collective healing. Mi arte es mi vida, and La Sandra has supported my life.

Sending La Sandra love, rainbow-colored lipstick kisses, virtual whistles, and a non-stop shower of red rose petals y one more whistle for pilón.

**David Zamora Casas**



Photo Credit: Diana Solis

## *A Writer's Apartment*

Sandra and I first met in 1980. It was at a woman's organization, *Mujeres Latinas en Acción*, where I had been working in Pilsen. The following year we both were working at Latino Youth Alternative High school, a school for high school dropouts also in Pilsen, where we actually got to know one another better.

She was an English and writing teacher and I was the arts and photography instructor. What struck me first about Sandra was her voice. Not just in her physical presence, but in her writing and in the passion she brought for teaching her students. Sandra and I became good friends and she asked me to photograph her for an upcoming article in the *Chicago Tribune* that would feature her. I remember going for the first time to her apartment in Bucktown on the North Side to take the photographs. She had a very cool apartment—not overcrowded with furniture, art materials or stacks of stuff to be later used like a visual artist's place would have it. It was what I called a writer's apartment. Is there such a thing? It definitely was a place of her own.

As we conversed, I looked around and thought of where and how I was going to photograph her. She had a room with a desk, an old underwood typewriter and children's alphabet blocks on a shelf. On the wall a photograph of her and her grandfather. In another room was an oversized chair that when she sat in it made her appear smaller, even vulnerable, but with an expression of absolute comfort. She had a Raggedy Ann doll and a sort of weaving made of flower shapes, a large chest, her kitchen table. A classic North Side apartment, up on the second floor, with a big cat called Mr. Tibbs. Upon seeing her in her space I knew immediately how and where I was going to photograph her.

Photographing Sandra was easy. We had a good rapport. She trusted me with my camera and I trusted her to let me know what she was comfortable with. It was implicit. We really didn't have to say much. A rare thing. It turned out to be a really nice photo shoot that afternoon, choosing three locations and favorite items around the house. As I recall the photograph appeared in the *Tribune's* living section.

Over the years, I kept in touch with Sandra and photographed her many times. In those early days while she still lived in Chicago, and when we were hanging out with friends and other writers and at different cultural events, I always had my camera with me. In 1981, we traveled with her friend Yasna

to West Lafayette, Indiana to meet Norma Alarcón who was a professor at Indiana University Bloomington and was just beginning *Third Woman Press*, a women's literary journal. It was at the Chicago Women's Writers Conference at the then Chicago Public Library, now the Chicago Cultural Center, where Sandra and I first met Norma. More specifically at the Latina Writers Workshop that I had organized and was part of the conference. For some of us, long lasting and great friendships were forged there among a small group of Latina writers, artists and cultural workers all too painfully aware that there was not a network, let alone a journal, by and for Latina writers and other women of color in the Midwest. Norma made that possibility a reality with producing, publishing and printing the first issue of *Third Woman* the following year. As I recall, Sandra and I traveled together to Norma's at least twice. We both contributed to the first issue of *Third Woman Press*. I had a circle of Latina friends who were artists, musicians, writers and poets, carpenters and soon to be prominent Latina journalists. We belonged to a group of Latinas who were movers and shakers in the city and in our communities. As my mother used to say "están dando lata." We were stirring things up.

I continued to photograph Sandra even after she left Chicago to live in Texas. One year she flew me out to Texas to photograph her in her new home. Even when I moved to Mexico City in 1985, Sandra, Norma and Cherrie Moraga came to visit and upon my invitation read poetry at a women's coffee house that I helped co-found. The coffee house was smack in the middle of downtown Mexico City, a stone's throw away from the National Palace and around the corner from the Posada's original printshop and the main cathedral. I photographed that reading and remember feeling especially proud that Latinas born in the US were being listened to in Mexico surrounded by other Mexican writers and women in the Mexican women's feminist movement.

Sandra and I's friendship has been one of mutual trust, good honest conversations and the occasional Campari. We used to hang out and sit and talk and now we talk on the phone. I came back from Mexico to stay in Chicago and Sandra now lives in Mexico. We agree that when it is safe to do so, Sandra would return for a visit to Chicago and I would photograph her once again. I am sure it will not be the last time.

**Diana Solis**

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“Go deeper to the place that frightens you”

Dear Sandra,

I didn't know you during the eighties when I was in graduate school in Austin, Texas and when you swung by to offer readings or eat breakfast at Las Manitas on Congress Street. I got my education about Tejas and the US-Mexico border through the family that I adopted after marrying my husband, René. They taught me the meaning of Chicana and introduced me to your work. And for a Pakistani woman born in Karachi with family roots in India, your work resonated with me. The details you offer are about a Chicana growing up in one corner of Chicago, but I, born on the other side of world, could relate. Your text is specific—something you always advise writers to do: name the street, describe the block—but the text you create is universal. That's something everyone says about your work.



Photo Credit: Sehba Sarwar

So I'll tell you something that perhaps I've never told you. In the nineties, when I began offering writing workshops at elementary schools in Houston, I started and ended my residencies with your text as writing prompts: “The House on Mango Street,” the opening chapter from your book with the same title to teach about setting; “Hairs” to show love through sensory details and figurative language; “Edna's Ruthie” to illustrate complicated characters; “Eleven” from *Woman Hollering Creek* as a model of a compressed vignette. The list goes on. I went on to teach high school, college, and community workshops, and I continue to offer your writings as models of prose that read like poetry. The text you create can be felt by ten-year-olds and simultaneously speaks to adults. That is the magic of your work.

In 2009, I was accepted in Macondo Writing Workshop, an experience that

changed my life. By then, I was already familiar with your work. Several times over the last decade, I had the luck to enroll in your writing workshops. Your feedback transformed my text, and your writing advice pushes me through my blocks when I'm stuck:

- go to the deepest part of the pool
- the biggest censor we have is ourselves
- write as if it will never be published
- 10 x 10 x 10—go deep
- go deeper to the place that frightens you
- imagine that this is the only time you have to write – what would you do with that moment?

I am grateful for the community I joined because of your vision to support and nourish writers. The friends I made in 2009 are scattered around the US, but we stay connected; we workshop each other's writings, and we remind each other of your words.

I am grateful that for six years, I could drive three hours on Interstate-10 from Houston to San Antonio to attend Macondo in the summer and celebrate your birthdays with you in the winter and dip into your world of dancers, artists, and writers.

And now, though I am in Los Angeles and you are in San Miguel de Allende, I still teach your work, I still remain connected to Macondo. And I work with a school district to revise curriculum, and I add in your work as required reading for all.

Mil gracias,  
**Sehba Sarwar**



*“When I’m writing, I’m doing a sitting meditation. If I’m patient enough, then that wisdom will come through the writing, but you really have to sit there for a long time and be very, very humble for it to come.”*

## *Sandra's Mexican Chicago*

I first heard Sandra Cisneros read from *The House on Mango Street* in 1991 at DePaul University. The reading left me dumbstruck. I had never seen my world represented in literature before, despite having just graduated with a degree in English literature. Growing up in Chicago's Little Village, I knew people like Lucy and Rachel, Edna's Ruthie, the Earl of Tennessee, and Cathy Queen of Cats. In the 1970s, Little Village, like Cisneros' childhood neighborhood of Humboldt Park, was home to older Eastern European residents, migrants from Texas and the South, and new Mexican immigrants.

While Cisneros has not lived in the city for decades, she is still a Chicago author, and her 2016 essay in *Chicago Magazine*, "Notes from a Native Daughter," shows that she is still compelled to write about Chicago. No city booster, in this essay Cisneros skewers the blind eye that the city's power brokers turn towards poverty in the city. In the novel *Caramelo*, Lala Reyes points to an ugly reality behind the picture-perfect city, directing readers to take a good look at the Buckingham Fountain: "Those furry shapes scampering around the base aren't kittens." Like other Chicago authors before her, Cisneros writes with a clear eye about the difficulties the city holds for the poor and working class.

But when she writes about the quotidian pleasures of Chicago, she really nails it. The yellow mustard and onions on your hot dog special with the fries piled on top, in the poem "Good Hot Dogs." The sensory assault of Maxwell Street back in its heyday, with the twang of blues guitar and the smell of barbecue, in *Caramelo*. The thrill of finding a great deal on brand new but slightly damaged goods at the Maxwell Street flea market, in the short story "Barbie-Q."

And no one else comes closer than Cisneros to evoking Mexican Chicago. In her work, being Mexican in Chicago means that your cousins growing up on Taylor Street are half-Italian and half-Mexican, that you crave both a pork chop sandwich from Jim's Original Hot Dogs and a *barbacoa taquito* from a nearby *taqueria*, and that your dearest wish is to be in the Mexican Independence Day parade in the Loop on a September weekend. In *Caramelo*, the Reyes family does just that, as "Uncle tags along in his big Caddy, thrilled to be driving down State Street, the top rolled down, the kids sitting in the back dressed in charro suits and waving. ¡Que viva México! ¡Que viva Chicago!"

**Olga L. Herrera**

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Sandra Cisneros is an iconic treasure.

To know her is to revel in her wisdom, zen tranquility and joyous, playful glee

I am blessed to call her my friend for over 25 years.

**Nely Galan**



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### *A Patron of Poets*

At 42, I am fast approaching a milestone: I will have known Sandra Cisneros half my life. I met her in the year 2001, at the tail-end of my first year as an MFA student in poetry, at a quaint restaurant in Tempe, Arizona, where I was filling in for someone else's spot for lunch. I expected to be less visible than the table centerpiece. How surprised was I when my classmate and I became the focus of her attention most of the hour. That would turn out to be a recurring theme during the twenty-odd years of knowing Sandra; it's never about her, but about other people.

In the time that I've known her, Sandra Cisneros has given herself to the nurturing and development of emerging writers. This is evident in her founding of the Macondo Writers' Workshop, of which one pillar of membership is the spirit of community giving. But on the micro-level (me), she volunteered to blurb my first chapbook just after we met. (Sandra has been more generous with providing "blurbazos" to first-time writers than anyone I know). Later, she would send me scholarship money in the form of personal checks so that I could attend Macondo. Over the years, she set me up with paying gigs, because God knows a poet lives through a lot of lean years. I later came to find out that I was not the sole beneficiary. Sandra is not someone who needs to take credit for her kindness, nor does she get enough credit for it either. Over the years of our friendship, I've come to think of Sandra not as the literary titan, but as the quiet benefactor, whose spirit of generosity toward emerging writers is unmatched.

**John Olivares Espinoza**

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## *Hold the door open*

Although I might sometimes call her a mentor, Sandra--to me--is more like a literary big sister. She has known about me and my own literary and performance work for several decades, and has always regarded me with kindness and generosity. I'll never forget the time she walked towards me and



Photo credit: Stacy Campbell

my bandmates, in an alley behind the venue where we had just performed. I didn't recognize her at first, because of her dark sunglasses and lengthy scarf obscuring her face. Why was this person approaching us--was she going to ask for spare change? Haha, it was Sandra Cisneros, "incognito," as she put it. She had been working feverishly on her first novel, *Caramelo*, and was trying very hard to avoid her San Antonio friends, but she had made a special exception because she wanted to hear me perform my spoken word (with musical accompaniment) set. We all had a huge laugh about this, and I accepted her warm hug and compliments, but she also made me promise that I would not tell anyone that I had seen her. And then she turned on her heels and dashed back home to her writing table to resume her novel writing. Sandra is that kind of caring person; she works hard and accomplishes much with her schedule of production, but she also makes many efforts to connect with others and offer a nudge, a compliment, an opportunity. One of the most important things I have heard her say, which she uttered back in the early 1990s, was this (and it's paraphrased here): "When you make a big breakthrough and kick open a door for yourself to achieve accolades/success/goals, you must make sure that the door stays open so others can go through too." As a fellow Latina literary writer, I not only aspire to make it through that open door, but also--by Sandra's example--to make sure I mentor, encourage, and nudge others to do so with and after me. Sandra's legacy and gift to us includes her wonderful literary accomplishments but also her open-hearted generosity and caring concern. I am thrilled that the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame will be honoring Sandra Cisneros this year.

**Tammy Melody Gomez**

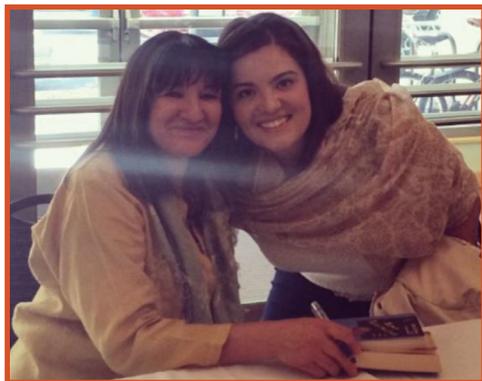
## *A Queen Like Sandra*

I'm grateful to Mexico and Chicago for bringing up Sandra Cisneros. I'm grateful that Sandra's five senses were on overdrive as a little girl—that gray Chicago or resplendent Mexico made Sandra feel deeply, all the way to the inside of her heart. I'm grateful Sandra felt these things, these emotions that left her full but also empty and with questions. I'm grateful Sandra left Chicago and that it was her purple house in San Antonio that would take me to her and solidify our friendship. I'm grateful Sandra told me to write as if I'm in the kitchen in my pyjamas. I'm glad Sandra left and found her home in San Miguel where we ate mangoes on a rooftop with perritos everywhere. I'm glad Sandra told me to write about not only what I remember but what I want to forget. I'm glad Chicago gave birth to my friend Sandra and that she was born a citizen of the world and then she truly became one. I'm grateful for the woman and writer I've become because Sandra told me I could. I'm grateful for Sandra teaching me to meditate to the moon and so glad she read me my dreams in a Piggly Wiggly on a hot Texas night. The writers in this world are grateful for a queen like Sandra. I'm grateful she's my maestra and mi amiguita. Gracias Sandra. Por todo.

## **Maria Hinojosa**

### *big books tell lies*

When I was ten, my fifth-grade teacher walked up to my desk, opened my social studies textbook, tapped on the page and said: read. I began confidently, “The Conquest of California.” I said California how my parents said it, how I had always heard the word of the place near the ocean where más familia lived.



She stopped me abruptly, “Why are you saying it like that?”

I shrank into my desk embarrassed, “Oh, that’s how we say it.”

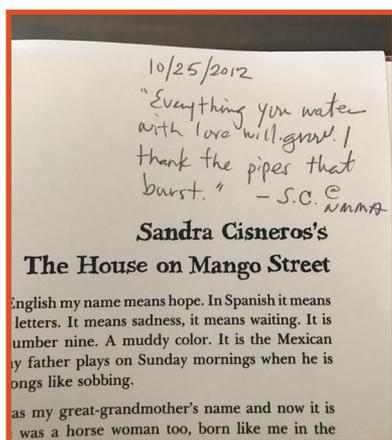
She pressed, “We, who?”

Small and quiet I said the words: “My family. That’s how we say it. I’m Mexican American.”

She walked to my desk, towered over me like the Washington Monument, and said it. She said it to me and the whole class that said California the same way I did: “There’s no such thing as Mexican American. That doesn’t exist.” Her fingers tapped the textbook. “There’s Mexican, there’s American. And we don’t say California like that.” She tapped the textbook again and said: “Read.” With a red face, I said California again, how we say it, and when my salty eyes wet the page, she made the boy behind me read.

*The House on Mango Street* was not on the bookshelves in my elementary school, my junior high school, or my high school. In fact, I was nearly twenty years old when I first opened *The House on Mango Street*. Primero, I turned to the author page: she came from Chicago; I came from Chicago. That made me smile a lot. I continued reading and for the first time in my life, the words on the soft pages felt and sounded like home. I felt wrapped in them, abrazada. They spoke to me and about me. And most importantly, the words in her stories did not lie. I had read so many lies my whole life, from tiny books to big fat books – no matter what I had read, it all seemed to insist that I didn’t exist. Finally, at age twenty, I had the profound experience of reading Cisneros’ slender and at once expansive novel and wondering how can one hundred and ten pages contain so much truth? I fantasized that I could go back in time with my newfound boldness, stand up on my desk and shout to the class: “¡Miren! ¡Aquí estamos! We do exist! The teacher is wrong!”

Ten years later, when I was nearly thirty years old and taking the leap to write my first stories and plays, I attended a presentation of *Have You Seen Marie?* at the National Museum of Mexican Art. At the time, I was grieving the loss of both my abuelitas and Cisneros’ new offering spoke to my wounds. I walked up as nervous as a kid on yearbook day. I was hoping to have my copy of *The House on Mango Street* signed. I approached the table, there she was, smiling and radiating.



She signed “Para La Nancy!” Her handwriting swirled and danced all over the page. When she handed it back to me, I didn’t know what to say, what do you say to the woman that saved you? Cisneros’ words had given me breath, given me life, and saved me from believing the lie of my smallness, from shrinking into invisibility. I reached for truth and said it, pure and simple: gracias.

Mira, I know ‘gracias’ is a short word, it’s not very fancy pues, pero there’s an ocean beneath it. So again, to our maestra: “Gracias, Sandra.”

## Nancy García Loza

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Photo Credit: Family Archives

## *On Becoming an Editor*

Dear Sandra,

I was a new editor—not even an editor; an associate editor—when *The House on Mango Street*, already a sensation in its original publication, came to Random House to be reissued. I was invited to ride shotgun on its publication and then I was given the opportunity to edit the stories of *Women Hollering Creek*. What did I know about lovers and revolutionaries and Chicana feminists? I was a girl from the suburbs of New Jersey, just a few years out of college, the product of an all-girls yeshiva high school—*oy vey*—whereas the women of these stories were passionate, vengeful, tragic, heroic, mythic. They existed in a parallel universe to my own. But they danced and laughed, wept and mourned, dreamed and loved. I recognized them. Their yearnings transcended time, culture, place.

Dear Sandra, I never told you this, but you taught me how to listen. As I read your pages, I looked for an opening—what could I possibly have to contribute—and learned that before anything else, before I could offer up one comment, I had to tune in to the poetry and rhythm, pay attention to your choices, respect your truth. I had to enter the world of your story stealthily, unobtrusively, and have a look around. Maybe there was a tiny adjustment to make; maybe a little clarification was needed to make sure that what you wanted to convey was crystalline. In that formative moment in my life, you made me an editor.

Many years ago, you gave me an *ex voto*—a mother’s prayer for her child. It has followed me from office to office over the years, hanging above my desk, an editor’s talisman, a blessing. You have never been far from me and my work, though thousands of miles and decades have come between us.

Thank you for your many timeless gifts that have seen me through the years.

Love,

**Julie Grau**



*“Sometimes we need permission, encouragement, someone to fill our heart with desire, because without desire you can’t invent anything.”*

## **Sandra Cisneros: *La Mera Mera***

Sandra Cisneros' tremendous talent is matched by her heart, her corazon. In 1995 she invited writers to her kitchen table, and thus began the genesis of the Macondo Writers Workshop. During the following twenty five years, she seeded fertile ground for writers from all walks of life to flower and blossom. I am one of many who have strengthened through her generous gifts. I have nothing but love, respect and admiration for Ms. Cisneros. I am beyond grateful.

## **Pat Alderete aka Pata**

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### ***We will always have Paris 'en San Anto'***

I cannot associate Sandra with hot dogs, just doesn't fit our image of her here in San Anto. She can devour homemade fried chicken by the pound, as documented by one of her birthday parties at Craig Pennel's home. I fried 30 pounds of chicken for one of her birthdays, never that quantity before or since. All washed down with champagne. Just like she can polish off bags of Cheetos as long as she has her bubbles to wash them down. Have never seen her eating a hot dog in San Anto.

Just being around her, there were always people we didn't know existed, plus luminaries that showed up who later we found out were household names in literary, TV, music, and film circles! It was always a hotbed of intellectual discourse and commitment to the "cause," whichever cause we were addressing at the time. And the creativity of the cast of characters was so talented, sometimes like Second City Televisio doing improv and other times just staging an "event" where everybody showed up in costume to have fun, improvise, and PARTY. One of the all-time best fandangos was the *Loving Pedro Infante* fundraiser for the SA library. Sandra as Maria Felix browbeating Ito Romo as Agustin Lara as she departs from an elegant purple lowrider car flipping her fur as she waltzes in, dragging Agustin by the arm.

We celebrated everything from Día de Muertos parades led by Terry Ybañez with wild costuming, fancy and unfancy dinner parties, Rolando Briseño, Angel Rodriguez Díaz, Fiesta brunches on front porch of the Purple House with Danny Lozano and Craig Pennel, riding in the King William Parade or the River Parade, the MacArturos gatherings, celebrating Cesar Chavez day,

Alejandro Díaz, Rose Arriaga, Luna parties with moon hats by Ito Romo, Sandra's Silver Quinceañera at Franco Mondini Ruiz, and just because parties. All of our events included drama by Gertrude Baker, Paul Rodriguez, operatic thrills, lots of food, soulful songs like *Farolito* or *Jurame* with Celso Guzman's guitar with the doggies, Zelda, Beto, Violeta howling alongside.

I would say that her gatherings or parties, as well as other more intimate gatherings, reflected her large capacity for generosity, affection, and love of life. All celebrations with Sandra turn into performances whether at the Acapulco Drive In, Tienda Guadalupe, JumpStart, Esperanza Center, Infinito Botanica, Danny & Craig's left bank apartment, gravesite El Carmen Cemetery, her apartment on Adams, my house, *Starpatch*, the Liberty Bar, and countless other places.

All in all, as Joan Frederick says it was MAGIC, that went on for 25 years. Sandra left indelible memories. So yes, tacos, champagne, barbeque, tequila, Cheetos, and chili con queso but no hot dogs with Sandra in San Anto.

### Ellen Riojas Clark



Photo Credit: Joan Frederick

# CO-PRESENTER TRIBUTES



AMERICAN  
WRITERS  
MUSEUM

## American Writers Museum

<https://americanwritersmuseum.org>

*The American Writers Museum is proud to celebrate Cisneros' groundbreaking contributions to American literature, her influential community activism, as well as her support of young writers and scholars to inspire the future of great writing.*

*American Writers Museum se enorgullece de celebrar las innovadoras contribuciones de Sandra Cisneros a la literatura estadounidense, su influyente activismo comunitario, y su apoyo a los jóvenes escritores y académicos para inspirar el futuro de la gran escritura.*

## CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Chicago Public Library

<https://www.chipublib.org>

*Chicago Public Library presented The House on Mango Street as its spring 2009 One Book, One Chicago selection. We are honored to further celebrate the work of Sandra Cisneros with the Fuller Award.*

*La Biblioteca Pública de Chicago presentó La casa en Mango Street como su selección de primavera de 2009, One Book, One Chicago. Nos sentimos honrados de celebrar aún más el trabajo de Sandra Cisneros con el Fuller Award.*



## National Museum of Mexican Art

<https://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org>

*The National Museum of Mexican Art salutes our dear friend Sandra Cisneros on her induction into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. Querida Sandra, thank you for bringing out the Mexican in all of us through literature, and for inspiring future generations of Mexican-American and Latino authors. Not only are you a true artist, but you also believe in the importance of keeping art accessible for all. Eres Puro Amor.*

*El Museo Nacional de Arte Mexicano saluda a nuestra querida amiga Sandra Cisneros por su inducción al Salón de la Fama Literaria de Chicago. Querida Sandra, gracias por motivar lo mexicano que todos llevamos dentro a través de la literatura y por inspirar a las futuras generaciones de autores mexicano-americanos y latinos. No solo eres una verdadera artista, sino que también crees en la importancia de mantener el arte accesible para todos. Eres Puro Amor.*



GAYLORD AND  
DOROTHY DONNELLEY  
FOUNDATION

The Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation provides ongoing support to the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame.

# SPONSOR TRIBUTES

## Literature for Us All

<https://www.literatureforallofus.org>

*Literature for All of Us is honored to celebrate the bestowing of the Fuller Award on Sandra Cisneros, whose artful words continue to inspire generation after generation of our Book Group participants. We will continue to amplify your voice, Sandra! Adelante!!*



## Guild Literary Complex

<https://guildcomplex.org>

The Guild Complex congratulates Sandra Cisneros on her lifetime achievement award from the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. *The House on Mango Street* and *Woman Hollering Creek* are classics that opened the door to Latino culture for so many of us. Thank you for being a friend in the early years of the Guild's organizational growth and for showing us that though the door is different, the challenges of familial love are still the same.



## The Chicago History Museum

<https://www.chicagohistory.org>

*The Chicago History Museum thanks Sandra Cisneros for sharing her stories with Chicago and with the world. She richly deserves this year's Fuller Award.*



## Loyola University Chicago Creative Writing Program

*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives.*

<https://www.luc.edu/english/creativewriting/>

*Sandra, we admire you for your candor, your wit, your craft, and your heart. You remind us of all that literature can do.*



## Loyola University Chicago Women's Studies/Gender Studies

<https://www.luc.edu/wsgs/index.shtml>

Sandra Cisneros mil, millón de gracias. From your early days of *Loose Woman* and *Woman Hollering Creek* and most recently *Caramelo* we have fully enjoyed your *chispa feminista mexicana*. Queremos más de tus centellas literarias para que alumbres nuestras noches de lectura en Chicagolandia.



## Stories Matter Foundation

<https://www.storystudiochicago.org>

Stories Matter Foundation; the logo that is there now should be swapped for the logo I've attached. Website address stays the same.



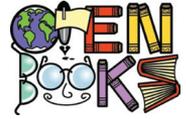
## Open Books

<https://www.open-books.org>

“The book is full of similes, vivid imagery, figurative language, vernacular (which could give students permission to write that way in their own stories), and a mix of different styles. The writing itself is beautiful and poetic.”

- Review of *The House on Mango Street*, Open Books youth program participant

*Open Books thanks Sandra Cisneros for inspiring generations of youth and adults alike with her breathtaking body of work. There are few Chicago natives as worthy as Sandra for this year’s Fuller Award.*



## Sarabande Books

[www.sarabandebooks.org](http://www.sarabandebooks.org)

*Sarabande toasts the decades-long career of Sandra Cisneros! She is, and always has been a generous, irrepressible force in literature, a writer extraordinaire who paved the way for so many others.*



## Make Literary Productions

<https://www.makelit.org>

MAKE Literary Productions joins in the celebration! Thank you Sandra Cisneros for helping to put Chicagolandia’s vibrant art scene on the map. While your literary voice transcends time, space, and cultures your literary journeys to and from México continue to empower and inspire our Latinx community.



*“Sometimes we need permission, encouragement, someone to fill our heart with desire, because without desire you can’t invent anything.”*



Photo Credit: Al Rendon

## The Chicago Poetry Center

<https://www.poetrycenter.org>

The Chicago Poetry Center is honored to celebrate Sandra Cisneros's exceptional career as a writer, educator, and community builder.



## Greater Reach Consulting

[www.GreaterReachConsulting.com](http://www.GreaterReachConsulting.com)



*We are delighted to see the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame grow and thrive as an organization, reminding us of the great incubator and gathering place this city is for literary talent. Congratulations to you and to 2021 Fuller Award recipient Sandra Cisneros.*

## DePaul University English Department

<https://las.depaul.edu/academics/english/Pages/default.aspx>



*Congratulations, Sandra Cisneros! Your work is transformative for readers, writers, and students. We're honored to celebrate your lifetime achievements along with the CLHOF.*

## Hawkins Project

<https://daveeggers.net/hawkins>

The Hawkins Project is proud to celebrate Sandra Cisneros and her magnificent achievements. We are ever grateful for her vision, her words, and the paths she's carved for others.

## Josephinum Academy of the Sacred Heart

<https://www.josephinum.org>

Josephinum Academy of the Sacred Heart is honored to call Sandra Cisneros an alumna of the longest standing all-girls Catholic high school in Chicago. Ms. Cisneros walked the halls of "The Jo" during a time of great upheaval in America and abroad. As a young student, Sandra discovered poetry and through encouragement of her Josephinum teachers, she found an outlet to express her thoughts and feelings. We are so proud of how Ms. Cisneros has been able to share her talents and gifts with the world through her writing.



Ms. Cisneros serves as a wonderful role model for our students, many of whom share her heritage and can relate so well to her stories and experiences. She is a shining example of how one person can have an impact and make a difference in the world. As we work to instill in our students what it means to be a Josephinum graduate - to be confident, compassionate, fearless leaders that our city, and our world, needs now more than ever - Ms. Cisneros sets a wonderful example for our young women to follow.

We offer our hearty congratulations on this well deserved recognition!

## 826CHI

<https://www.826chi.org>

826CHI is honored to witness Sandra Cisneros' achievements and influence be honored through this year's Fuller Award. Our students and community stand in awe and look forward to carrying on this work of helping to make stories heard and celebrated.



## Vintage & Anchor Books

<http://knopfdoubleday.com/category/vintage-anchor/>

Sandra Cisneros' career has been simply extraordinary. For the past three decades, her work and her life have left all of us at Vintage Books in awe. Is there anything she can't do? As a teacher, a mentor of emerging writers, and as an activist, she has been an inspiration. As a brilliant writer of novels, poetry, short stories, and essays, she has demonstrated such amazing versatility and abundance of talent that we feel truly blessed to have had the honor of publishing her. Millions of readers have been changed by her words. We thank her with all our hearts for contributions to literature and to our lives.



## Kaye Publicity

<https://kayepublicity.com/>

*Kaye Publicity is honored to join in this celebration of Sandra Cisneros, who has opened the hearts and minds of countless readers with her essential and unforgettable body of work.*



## Women & Children First

<https://www.womenandchildrenfirst.com/event/fuller-award-ceremony-honoring-sandra-cisneros-presented-chicago-literary-hall-fame>

*One of Women & Children First's greatest honors is having hosted Sandra Cisneros early in her career, with notable events throughout the 80s and 90s up until today. Through her books, her iconic voice echoes in nearly every section of our store--from fiction to poetry to memoir and even the children's area. Chicago is richer for having been a home to Sandra Cisneros.*



## The Cliff Dwellers

<https://cliff-chicago.org>

*The Cliff Dwellers join in celebrating the powerful and outstanding voice of Sandra Cisneros that has universally inspired generations.*



# CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME

The Chicago Literary Hall of Fame (CLHOF) honors, celebrates, preserves, and promotes the development of Chicago's great literary heritage—past, present, and future. CLHOF seeks to realize this purpose by annual inductions of selected great writers from the past; ceremonies honoring living writers whose lifetime contributions to the literary arts warrant the highest recognition; literary awards to young people; classes, panels, and other literary endeavors designed to encourage the development of writers at all ages. CLHOF also creates written materials that record the lives and works of Chicago's most important literary figures and presents these and other materials on its website, in exhibits, author events, public art installations, literary tours, and programming relevant to the organization's goal of promoting Chicago's vibrant literary tradition and culture. CLHOF formed as a project of the Chicago Writers Association in 2010, and splintered into its own nonprofit 501 c(3) entity in 2014.



## **Board of Directors**

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**Visit us at [chicagoliteraryhof.org](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org)**

# SELECTION COMMITTEE

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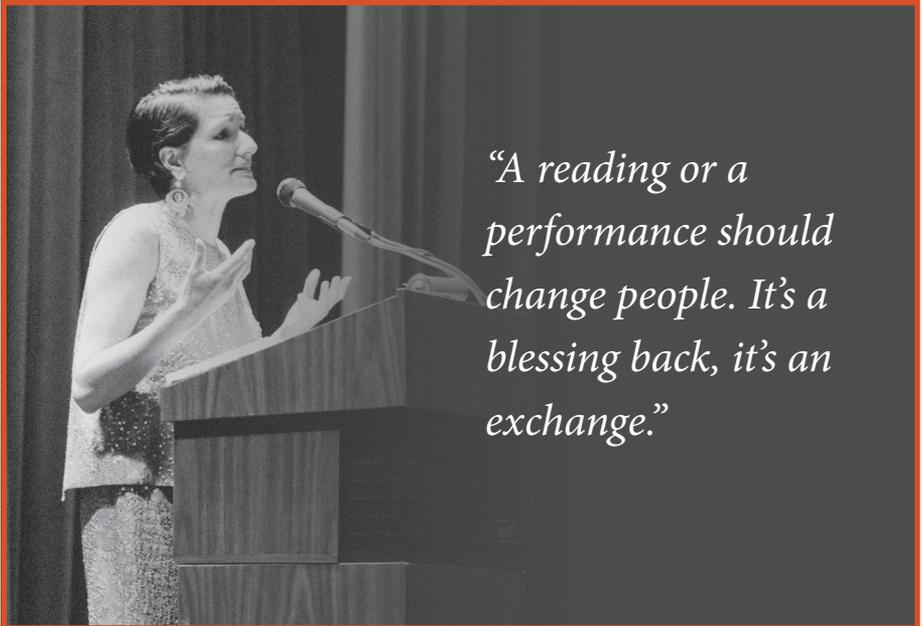


Photo Credit: Al Rendon

# SPECIAL THANKS

So many people and organizations pitched in to make this ceremony to honor Sandra Cisneros a success. Many, but not all, are listed in some way throughout this program. The selection committee, led by Donna Seaman, took special care and considerable time in debating the merits of all candidates and articulating the reasons for choosing Sandra. The CLHOF board, led by Randy Albers, and the associate board—Allison Manley, Emily Winkler, and Kelci Dean--put this ceremony on its back and carried it to this evening. Amy Danzer worked tirelessly on all aspects of planning to make sure we maximized every opportunity. A trinity of fine artists--Mary Livoni, Hannah Jennings, and Jeff Waggoner--imbued this program, our social media outreach, and our website with incredible visual panache. Our partners provided support, monetary and otherwise, to ensure that this ceremony was truly a first-class *community* celebration. Carey Cranston and Christopher Burrows of the American Writers Museum worked overtime to make sure that tonight's proceedings would be broadcast in such a way to optimize every guest's enjoyment. The National Museum of Mexican Art's Jorge Valdivia patiently offered his guidance and support in extending the reach of this event. Chicago Public Library's Craig Davis and Jennifer Lizak worked hard to spread the word, as did Melanie Weiss, Roberta Rubin, and Barry Benson. Intern Angie Raney lent her considerable skills to research and writing that went into making this program. Printer Rich Lewendowski, of Breaker Press, as always turned out a beautiful booklet that we can now all enjoy. Floyd Sullivan went above and beyond the call to help our promotional efforts and in proofing the program. Barry Jung also loaned us his eagle eye in the proofing process. Sandra's agents Susan Bergholz and Stuart Bernstein, as well as Yvette DeChavez and Macarena Hernández, made all the connections and supplied all the resources we needed to puzzle together tonight's lineup and this program. The writers and artists that wrote the tributes you see here also took the time to help solicit other touching contributions. The speakers not only accepted the responsibility to take the stage, but put extraordinary thought into making their words count. Emcee Carlos Cumpián offered much needed wisdom and help. Videographer Ray Santisteban and actress Angela Giron burrowed deep into their reservoir of talents to create the stunning opening video. Rich Kono capably oversaw technical aspects of the website posts. There are a great many other individuals scattered throughout this program whose generosity enabled this whole affair to work. Thanks to all.



*“I don’t like writing as much as I did when I was younger. Now it’s harder than ever and gets harder every year. But I do write, must write, and enjoy having written. Having written is more fun than writing.”*

Photo Credit: Family Archives



Chicago Classics is an ongoing CLHOF series that features readings of our most cherished Chicago writers and their books.

In addition to several themed virtual events scheduled this year, we frequently add new videos online. We welcome your submission.

**Contact Don Evans at [dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org](mailto:dgevens@chicagoliteraryhof.org)** with your idea and details on how to submit.

**[chicagoliteraryhof.org/chicago\\_classics](http://chicagoliteraryhof.org/chicago_classics)**



*“When I think of how I see myself, it would have to be at age eleven...I’m the girl in the picture with skinny arms and a crumpled skirt and crooked hair.” from “Straw into Gold”*

## CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME 2021 EVENTS

### **Chicago (Baseball) Classics**

Thursday, April 1, 2021

7-8 p.m.

Zoom

Free and Open to the Public  
Advanced Registration Required

### **Inside for Indies: Live on Independent Bookstore Day**

Saturday, April 24, 2021

7 p.m.

via Zoom

### **Summer (2021) Fit/Lit**

Friday, June 4 through Saturday,  
September 4

Evenings and Weekends, Mostly  
Registration is free and open to the  
public; donations to help fund the  
program are welcome.  
Open to all ages

### **“The Lookout”**

Saturday, June 12, 2021

7 p.m.

via Zoom

Registration Link to come

### **Nighthawks**

Saturday, July 31, 2021

7 p.m.

Oak Park Brewing Company  
155 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Oak Park, IL 60302

### **Chicago Writers of the Federal Writers’ Project**

Saturday, August 14, 2021

7 p.m.

Online; ongoing.

### **Induction Ceremony (Class of 2019 & 20)**

Sunday, September 19, 2021

6:30-7:45 p.m.

City Lit Theater

1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60660

### **Fuller Award: Reginald Gibbons**

Thursday, September 30, 2021

5-7:30 p.m.

Newberry Library  
60 W. Walton Street  
Chicago, IL 60610

### **Fuller Award: Luis Alberto Urrea**

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

6-8:30 p.m.

National Museum of Mexican Art  
1852 W. 19th Street  
Chicago, IL 60608

### **2021 Online Auction Fundraiser**

Friday, December 10, 2021

7 p.m.

via Zoom