



LETTER TO MY READERS

"If I wasn't a spectacle that night on the float, I was when I was folding myself into that taxicab."

Dear Friends,

Last Friday I had the responsibility to serve as the Grand Marshall for the Paseo del Rio 2013 River Parade, which kicked off the lighting of the River Walk Christmas lights, and began the holiday season with Christmas floats that really float! We were on river barges! The theme was "Once Upon a Christmas," with floats representing different books, and a city-wide book drive to sweeten the deal. Of course, I said Yes!

I wore a tremendous headdress created by San Antonio designer Veronica Prida and her staff, and my makeup was by makeup-artist-to-the-stars John McBurney, who used to work with Selena. Veronica and John had to deal with a lot of backstage drama, because the headdress seemed to heavy for me to wear on my head, and I almost didn't wear it. How do those Las Vegas showgirls do it? But eventually thanks to pipe cleaners, a pony tail, and my own scalp balancing the whole contraption, I was able to stand up, walk, dance, and wave, all while holding up something that weighed more by the minute.

It was a tremendous affair with my boat, the first, being accompanied by my book family--Dr. Norma Alarcon, founder of Third Woman Press, (see upcoming fundraiser this Dec. 5th on my calendar), wearing a purple Lucha Libre mask with a glittery purple Santa hat. Roland Mazuca, Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation Director, wore a stack-of-books hat of his own creation. We also had local book critic and literary advocate, professor Dr. Ellen Riojas Clark, who kept shouting "Read books!" throughout the entire boat ride.



And Latino Childrens' Institute Director Josie F. Garza was at my side, enduring many jabs from my headdress because I had turn from the waist whenever anyone called my name. Behind me, like Secret Service agents, stood ex-Macondo board director Bill Sanchez and Macondo writers Reggie Young and Tony Diaz, (of LibroTraficante fame) who drove in from Lafayette, Louisiana, and Houston to be with me on the barge.

Finally, to make it all magic, we had Sebastian De La Cruz and his mariachi singing all the way. Sebastian, if you recall, is the brave young boy who sang the National Anthem for the Spurs game, and got a lot of flack for wearing a mariachi suit while doing so. But he weathered that storm and continues to sing proudly and be who he

is, regardless of how others define citizens of the U.S.A. And for that, he's my hero!

If any of you have ever been to the Riverwalk parade, you know it's pretty dazzling, as it's a night parade. But seeing it from the barge itself was an experience none of us will forget.

Our boat looked like a chalupa from Xochimilco in a Gabriel Figueroa movie. It was glorious to float out under the trees glowing with colored lights, and then see the crowds above and along the river, from hotel rooms and bridges, from the River Walk and from the restaurants all waving and hollering. *Well, I could get used to this*>, I thought.

But it's only a once-in-a-lifetime job. By the time we got to the end of the route, along the old Tropicana Hotel (now under a new name I can't remember), our feet throbbed like Chinese courtesans', and my head ached as if I were I'd been a Jeopardy finalist. Then there was the business of finding a cab where I could fit -- I couldn't take off my headdress without a pair of scissors.

"Are you a showgirl?" a tourist asked when we pulled up to a stoplight.

"I am now!" I told her, and that was the truth. If I wasn't a spectacle that night on the float, I was folding myself into that taxicab. Our cabdriver even made me forget the weight of my headdress by telling fabulous stories of old San Antonio when he was a kid. I think his name was Gabriel Figueroa, and if it's not, please forgive me. You were a walking Smithsonian.

I have to say, even though my head and shoulders and back ached for three days, it was one of the most memorable evenings I've ever had in San Antonio. Everyone felt lucky to be on that barge, but none more than me, especially when I recall how I got here in 1984 with nothing but a \$25 bicycle to get me around town.

Afterward at the Liberty Bar, we were hosted to a dinner by its owner Dwight Hobart and his wife Patty Ortiz, director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Did I mention the Guadalupe is distributing the books from the Book Drive? I found Veronica Prida and John McBurney waiting, and they had scissors! They cut my headdress off at the pipe cleaners, and thankfully not my hair. I rubbed my scalp with gratitude and brought it back to life.

Well, that's my life for this weekend. I am busy writing from Mexico most other days, and I'm on my way to the Library of Congress next week for a celebration of Mexico. Meanwhile, the new paperback edition of *Have You Seen Marie?* is due out soon.

I'll be back in San Antonio in April for the San Antonio Book Fair, and at Northwest Vista College during that same visit. Please see my calendar and follow me to the Los Angeles Book Fair later that same month.

I'll write again when my schedule settles down. Trying to finish the new book of essays, *Borrowed Houses*, and that has me with my head under water. Wish I could go to New York to see *Kinky Boots*, but my book deadline looms.

Feliz Holidays to you all!

Sandra

San Antonio TX

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