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SMALL TOWN NEWS

People

San Marcos Cultural Center Embraces Lives Simple Things

BY JORDAN GASS-POORE

The Hays Free Press of Buda, Texas

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Drawing inspiration from characters and experiences in her self-described "erratic" life, San Marcos resident Mary Santoyo, joined by her artist father, Luis Santoyo, read from her latest poetry collection, "Simple Things," and introduced an accompanying art exhibit Sunday at Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos.

The Santoyos collaborated on this 66-page collection that spans decades, providing readers a glimpse into their multicultural and multilingual lives.

"I saw this response and how it had kind of gone through generations and I thought it was so interesting...", said Rebecca Bowman, Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos volunteer. "(T)he paintings are from Mexico, but she's writing poetry in English. So there's this melding of generations that was just wonderful."

Luis Santoyo was born and raised in Mexico City, moving to the U.S. to attend The Art Institute of Chicago.

In his more than 75 years of painting, Luis Santoyo's work has reflected the world's changing political, social and cultural climates, a passion he has shared with his daughter since she was a child.

Bowman told audience members that although she is friends with Mary Santoyo, she found out about the self-publication of "Simple Things" only recently.

"As soon as I saw this book I said, 'I think this is something that should be shared with the people here in San Marcos,'" said Bowman, a Texas State University Spanish lecturer.

Varied emotions and interpretations of each other's work are reflected in "Simple Things," with Luis Santoyo sometimes providing an artistic rendering of his daughter's poetry and vice versa. Luis Santoyo credited his daughter and the book's publication for bringing him out of retirement.

"She lit the fire under me," Santoyo said.

A stroke of the brush here and a smudge there, Luis Santoyo's artwork, which Bowman described as encompassing aspects of many famous Hispanic painters, inspired Mary Santoyo to write one of her father's favorite poems by her called "Massacres and Brotherhood."

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About 15 people, including Mary Santoyo's sister and three children, gathered around her in Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos' music room as she read some of her poems, including "Autumn," which she wrote as a University of Texas at Austin undergraduate.

"(I was) missing home very much and it was kind of a dreary day," Santoyo said.

Family plays an important role in Santoyo's work, whether it is commemorating members' absence or celebrating their presence, like the poem "El Grabador."

Santoyo said she was inspired to write "El Grabador" by her father's large painting of the same name.

"This one is very special," she said. "It was written for him and (his) 75th birthday... (He) really struck a cord in me."

Santoyo said her father requested that she write a poem in honor of the event.

"There's this melding of generations that was just wonderful."

-Rebecca Bowman, Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos volunteer. "That was a long time ago," Luis Santoyo told the audience at the poetry reading. "Mucho gusto."

Mary Santoyo said she aims to "capture passion's fickle nature" with her poetry.

But there was a time when the Austin native worked professionally to capture the fickle nature of humanity's truths.

After graduating from college in 1988 with a bachelor's of journalism, Santoyo worked various freelance mass communication jobs, from magazines to research publications and city newspapers, like the Waco Tribune-Herald.

Santoyo said she majored in journalism because she believed it would provide a stable income for her to write creatively.

The move to San Marcos, after briefly living in Kyle and Buda, brought about a positive physical and mental change for Santoyo, who expressed her appreciation for Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos.

"I really love this community center, I'm so glad it's here in our town," Santoyo said.

Her current favorite poem that she wrote called "Chairs" was reflective of her anticipation of the poetry reading and exhibition, as well as her current state of mind, she said.

"I've been here for some time now and never a moment passes that I don't wish the chairs were filled..." read Santoyo from her poem "Chairs." "I feel like this a lot."

"I've been here for some time now and never a moment passes that I don't wish the chairs were filled...I feel like this a lot."

-Mary Santoya, in reference to a line in her poem called "Chairs"

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