

POETRY

Yes Virginia, There Are Latino Cheeseheads

BY TIM FORKES

i didn't know there were latinos in wisconsin
an anthology of hispanic poetry

Here is a welcome addition to the local poetry scene. On long lonely flights or quiet evenings at home, this collection of poetry is a warm companion. Poetry has been touted as a cure for whatever ails us emotionally, and the traditions of Hispanic poetry are rich with this healing power. Nicaragua has been called a Nation of Poets and Chile's Pablo Neruda has left a body of work which will influence generations long after this one disappears. *i didn't know there were latinos in wisconsin* acknowledges the migration of this heritage to our northern state.

Representing a cross-section of the Hispanic community, readers can find comfort, as in "Mi Abuelito" by Francisco Rios, a short story of one man's father that speaks for many people and their relationships, sadness of a war-torn homeland in Daisy Cubias' "My Motherland" and love gone bad in "Weekend Lover" by Margarita Dumit.

Other poems and stories in this book speak of our imperfections as humans, like "The Family Curse," by Andrea Teresa Arenas. The first offering in the book recalls a family's difficulties dealing with an emotionally disturbed brother. The third stanza in particular brings back pained memories of the torture inflicted on others in childhood:

"their guilty memories of their teasing
him as a child
suck the moisture from their mouths"

Who among us doesn't have a skeleton in our closet eating away at our morality? It's a

telling moment for Arenas, as she digs deep into her own soul hoping and praying she will one day be forgiven for these transgressions.

Many of the poems speak of hardship, the wars in Central America and the trials of being a minority in White America. But there are lighter moments too in the lives of Wisconsin's Latinos. Take Jackie Dettloff's "Southside Post Office Poem"

there is no high fashion here
these are people
in vinyl boots
winter jackets
zipped up to the chin
men in navy and K-Mart maroon
women in babushkas
and thrift store coats

Rudy Sutschek, Manager
of the Southside Postal Station,
smiles in bureaucratic benevolence
from a frame of imitation wood
hung on a panelled door

we stand in line with letters
or pick up packages
from California Mexico San Juan
we are patient folk
we are Milwaukee in March
we know how to wait

Milwaukeeans love to make fun of themselves and their environment and this poem pins the tail right on the donkey's behind with one accurate shot.

Malcolm Martinez takes a poke at religion and the media farce we call "The News." In "Fondling God (the crucifixion will be televised live)," Martinez attacks the capitalist

ways of our country with abstract images so rhythmic they could be lyrics for a song.

Other authors in this collection include Yolanda Martinez, Christina Herrera, Gladys Benavidas, Victor L. Centeno, Margarita Dumit, Martin Espada, Pedro Fernandez-Gimenez, Antonio Guajardo, Jr., Gabriela Molina-Borda, Anthony Morales, William Robert Rodriguez, Maria Minerva Rivera Rojas, Raymundo Saudia, Jr. and Pedro Villarreal.

The character of Wisconsin's Latino community is multi-faceted to be sure and the credits for this recently published volume reflect that diversity. But at the top of the credits rests the name of the editor, Oscar Mireles, who also contributed four poems.

For the unfortunate people who don't know of Mireles, he is a tireless worker in the Latino community. As Assistant to the Director of the Centro de la Comunidad Unida, Mireles is easily the most influential role model kids of any ethnic background can look up to. The serious nature of his work has always been tempered with a quick and easy wit and accompanied with wide smiles.

This compilation then stands not only as a picture of Wisconsin's Hispanic community, but also the latest of Mireles' many contributions to our society as a whole. He didn't make this project a reality alone, but gut feelings say Mireles was the fire in the oven.

Published by Friends of the Hispanic Community, this volume is a bargain at \$7. For more information on this book, write to the Friends at:

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