

# On the eve of a new year, 2003...

VIRGINIA GRISE

I was staying at the Centro Cultural Dr. Margil in Apodaca, México, 20 minutes from la estación central in Monterrey. Monterrey is the home of my ancestors... my grandmother Doña María de Jesús Cortez, curandera life healer with broken heart my grandfather Manuel Yee and his companion Andres Wah, Cantonese refugees who owned a puesto en el Mercado Colón. My mother says that Apodaca used to be campo and that Marilú's father, a Chinese paisano, worked the land not far from there. Monterrey has grown so much as a city that Apodaca is now more like a suburb. In an outdoor patio I share food with other fellow travelers, turkey and fruit salad. At midnight, you can hear the celebration in the streets firecrackers and gun shots. Our back door neighbors hire a live mariachi band when the musicians grow tired, our vecinos play the records themselves all night long. I wake up at 7 in the morning first to the roosters and then to the cumbias remembering the night before. Our celebration at the centro was much quieter than everyone else's no firecrackers, or gunshots, or 12 grapes eaten at midnight no music except for a Zapatista marimba band. I danced with Ramiro an old queen brown nail polish stained his fingernails and later he danced with the dog to el Moño Colorado. My first hours of 2003 were spent with activists from Chihuahua, México City, Monterrey and Chiapas and with my friend and ally Michael Marínez. I left San Antonio with only a copy of my driver's license and my voter registration card. Unsure if they would even let me cross the border – I prayed to the Santos of border crossers because I knew I had to be in Monterrey on the eve of a new year. Michael tells me that one of the women from the Frente de Liberación Nacional looks like Marsha Gómez a Native American/Chicana lesbian activist who was killed by her son. I look at the young woman and I remember that day at Alma de Mujer when my friend Jennifer and I helped clear the land before the National Indigenous Women's Network Conference. Marsha sent us home early because a storm was coming. We raced out of there but just as we were leaving Alma we saw a tornado the one that killed several people in North Austin.

I remember  
the remolino/see  
Marsha  
in the young woman's face  
and think about something my father once told me,  
Energy doesn't disappear. It can change forms but it never just vanishes. So I don't  
know what happens to our souls and spirits when we die but I do know that our  
energy doesn't go away.  
I see this young woman/  
the wind pick up her hair/  
Marsha/  
the remolino/  
the indigenous women of Chiapas/Mayan/  
they don't look like my people/  
we're much taller/  
but I see/  
I feel/  
the energy of a history interconnected.  
The marimba band stops playing and one of the men thanks us for being present  
for sharing New Year's at the Centro  
on the eve of the ninth anniversary  
of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, México.  
He repeats what he says in Tzotzil.  
Nine years since January 1, 1994  
when the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican Army...  
Twenty years since 1983  
when a group of revolutionaries entered the jungles of Chiapas  
to organize/  
to teach/  
to lead  
only to find out  
la selva/  
los indigenas/  
los ancianos  
would lead them  
mandar/obedeciendo...  
34 years since 1969  
when the Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN) was founded in Monterrey...  
93 years since the Revolution of 1910.  
The man from the highlands of Chiapas wears a paliacate.  
He lifts it up to speak and explains,  
had it not been for January 1, 1994, we would not have met but had it not been for  
April 6, 1969 (founding of the FLN) there would not have been a January 1, 1994  
and without the Revolution of 1910 (a promise unfulfilled) there would not have  
been an April 6, 1969  
I understand clearly as I stare at  
Marsha  
in the young woman's face.  
Our history returns full circle

and we are asked to remember  
 or forced to forget.  
 Our struggle must be to fight against forgetting because  
 “memory is the mirror that helps us understand the present and promises the future.”  
 I stare at my window in San Antonio, T exas, remembering...  
 sitting on my window sill  
 right leg hanging off the edge  
 I can see  
 The Hedrick Building/603 North St. Mary’s Street  
 My roommate Phillip and I have always admired the building for its modernist  
 architecture, imagining how we would break in, look at our apartment from across  
 the street. Now abandoned, the eleven story building has an orange and white metal  
 face. Just recently I found out that the modernist building was actually built in 1927  
 in a neoclassical tradition. Underneath the metal fa ade the building is actually  
 limestone, ornate in its design, like our own apartment. According to “Perla”  
 magazine the modernist re-design happened in the early 60s in response to Hemisfair  
 68. “The World’s Fair brought with it new aspirations for San Antonio’s identity.  
 Whole blocks were razed to accommodate ‘a modern commercial artistic  
 renaissance,’” a renaissance that the people of San Antonio have yet to see, I think, as  
 I watch the homeless man (1 of 22,000 in this city) prepare his bed in the doorway of  
 Bill Miller’s.  
 San Antonio has a “history” of razing neighborhoods  
 Hemisfair 68/  
 Alamo Dome/  
 Victoria Courts/  
 La Gloria  
 in order “to accommodate,”  
 a history of erasing culture in order to make way for “new aspirations,”  
 in order to forget San Antonio’s true “identity.”  
 Our first campo santo was located in the same plaza we now know as Milam Park  
 On the site of the first campo santo in this city  
 on the spirit/  
 soul/  
 energy  
 of our ancestors  
 literally at the resting place of their bones  
 a revolution was born.  
 Our first campo santo was also the  
 Plaza del Zacate  
 meeting place of Mexicans/  
 boleros/  
 bajo sexto/  
 food merchants/  
 carpa theatre/  
 Lydia Mendoza/  
 Regeneraci n/  
 Ricardo Flores Magon/  
 Emma Tenayuca.  
 During the Depression

day laborers and men out of work  
rested under trees facing the Spanish arches of el Mercado  
now torn down to make way for a  
museum  
Campo Santo/Plaza del Zacate/now Milam Park  
San Antonio is built on a history of forgetting.  
Our first ancestors were removed from their original campo santo and moved to San  
Fernando I, where Adela Navarro was buried. She filed a lawsuit against the city in  
1976, demanding that the graves of our ancestors be respected and honored. Her  
own grave has no marker or headstone like many of the other graves in San  
Fernando I. San Fernando is on higher ground. During the floods of the 1920s, West  
Siders created a temporary refugee camp on the grounds  
and during Día de los Muertos people lined the streets  
buying cempaxuchitl flowers for the dead.  
I remember my father's words again,  
I don't know what happens to our souls and spirits  
when we die  
but I do know that our energy doesn't go away.  
Today, because of the shifting of the earth  
many headstones,  
markers and statues  
are literally  
buried under grass and dirt  
Our dead/  
our history/  
our culture  
are buried  
We struggle to excavate the remains as we live the  
conquest  
On top of ancestral lands  
a "new culture" is built,  
a culture of money,  
a culture that demands we forget.  
A year after the fall of La Gloria (a historic roof top  
dance hall) – the owner Limon erects a building of  
corrugated metal that shakes in the wind & places a sign  
by Frost Bank in the front reading "Helping to Build in  
Our Community."  
Progress  
After a referendum campaign, collecting over 107,000  
signatures our city decides to build a golf course on top  
of the aquifer anyway. Some say those lands were  
ancient sites of ceremony and I wonder why  
Land and Land Rights  
hasn't been at the center of this  
debate.  
Several years ago, in Tepoztlan, Mexico developers  
planned on building a half-billion dollar golf course  
condominium development. Similar to San Antonio,

despite public protests and local assemblies the government decided they would move forward on the project. Instead of accepting it, however, campesina/os and the pueblo set up road blocks and eventually the Justice Department was forced to suspend permission for the golf course. The people re-took their city and stopped the development in its tracks.

Phillip walks into the apartment.

Look what I found in the trash.

He shows me an old jewelry box. Its outside is covered in black leather, etched with the flowers of a huipil. Its inside is lined with red leather.

And this,

he adds as he shows me a large piece of clear plastic with white raised letters that say,

Don't Forget.

Our resistance must be creative/constant/radical.

We must be willing to take risks that might get us attacked/jailed/or put us in danger.

We must know what we are prepared to give.

Imagine how we dream this world.

Live that way now.

Our struggle must be to fight against forgetting.  
because our history returns full circle.

*Gracias a Grace Rosales y la familia Patiño who researched and shared with me the history of San Fernando I.*