

Latinidad - Fall 2018: Tony Piedra

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“After talking to Marcela for an hour, I was impressed by her positive attitude and in-depth knowledge of the publishing world. Part marketing guru, part psychologist, she helped me immensely to better understand the book industry . . . and myself. She suggested concrete marketing strategies, resources, and ideas that can be applied to the promotion of my existing and future novels. I will recommend Marcela Landres to everyone I know. Maravillosa and very inspiring!”

—Teresa Dovalpage, author of *Death Comes in through the Kitchen*, <https://teredovalpage.com/about/>

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1. Saludos

Many authors approach storytelling through words, but some—especially in the realm of children’s picture books—narrate through images. If you find your joy more through a crayon than a pen, you will find a kindred spirit in Tony Piedra, author and illustrator of *The Greatest Adventure*. Read the Q&A with him below to learn: the importance of iteration; how entering competitions can be a great way to meet agents; and what separates published writers from the unpublished.

Helping Latinos get published,
Marcela Landres
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<https://marcelalandres.com>

2. Q&A

Tony Piedra lives, works, and plays in the beautiful San Francisco Bay Area, and he grew up in Texas where he spent most of his childhood drawing monsters and looking for bugs in hot and humid Houston.

In a previous chapter of his life, he was a Sets Technical Director at Pixar Animation Studios. For nine years, he collaborated with some of the most talented artists and storytellers in the world to help realize the environments in films such as *Up*, *Cars 2*, *The Good Dinosaur*, *Inside Out*, and *Coco*, as well as several of Pixar's short films, including *The Blue Umbrella*.

Now he is taking the skills and experiences from his time working in the film industry and putting them to use as an author and illustrator of children's books. His debut picture book, *The Greatest Adventure*, is now out in the wild! It's published by Arthur A. Levine Books, an Imprint of Scholastic Inc. Visit him online at <http://www.tonypiedrastudio.com>.

Q: Which books—fiction or nonfiction, for adults or for children—have most influenced you?

A: For me it always comes back to one book, *Album of Sharks*, written by Tom McGowen and illustrated by Rod Ruth. This is a children's, non-fiction book series published by Rand McNally that was popular in the 80's when I was a kid. I remember discovering this book in the red public library building near our home in Houston and being completely captivated by the illustrations in a way that photographs have never been able to replicate. To this day I've never lost that original fascination and awe for sharks I experienced as a child when I first opened this book. One day, I hope to inspire children with that same fascination and awe, not just for sharks but for all sorts of apex predators and their relationship to mankind. I think this is why my work is filled with crocodiles and sharks and a general longing for adventure to see the wild and the unknown.

Q: Filmmaking, such as the work you did for Pixar, is a very collaborative process. In contrast, authoring a book can be a solitary endeavor. How does your experience at Pixar inform your work as a children's book author? Which aspects did you most enjoy and which parts represented a learning curve?

A: While I was at Pixar I gleaned a few lessons, two of which I carried with me into picture book making: story requires lots of iteration (especially when you don't know your ending) and visually, light and camera placement are some of the most powerful tools for influencing emotion. From a story standpoint, I ended up creating over fifteen dummies, or mockups, of *The Greatest Adventure* before landing on my final version. I was searching for my ending. I was searching for how to simply articulate the meaning of my book, and I was not able to find my ending until I had done so. Thankfully, my experience at Pixar allowed me to trust the process of iteration, and eventually I was able to articulate what I wanted my book to express: an adventure with

someone you love can take place anywhere. From an illustration standpoint, I incorporated a strong sense of lighting and a conscience decision to create compositions as though I were looking through a camera into my work. I was always in search of the best way to visually tell a story moment with my illustrations, and light and perspective were my tools. In these two ways, my experience at Pixar informed my debut picture book, *The Greatest Adventure*. I think what I've most enjoyed from this process is that for the first time I am getting to share my thoughts, my art with the public. I am not in service of someone else's vision like when I was at Pixar. But with this new found independence has come a new found responsibility to make sure I put in the work every day to help ensure my success in an industry which promises none.

Q: What inspired you to write *The Greatest Adventure*?

A: The seed for my debut picture book, *The Greatest Adventure*, came from a meeting in New York I had with editor and publisher Arthur Levine of Arthur A. Levine Books back in February 2015. On that cold, winter day I presented Arthur a "sneak peek" of a story I had been developing. Although he didn't care for the project I shared with him, he ended up asking me a very poignant question: "Why did you choose to write that story?" In response I told Arthur about my childhood in Houston. I told him how my notion of adventure was shaped by stories my father told me about his childhood in the Bahamas. Stories filled with gliding manta rays and schools of flashing, silver fish, stories which made me long, even at that early age, to have a great adventure of my own. This childhood sentiment, drawn out from me by the probing of a thoughtful editor, became the seed for *The Greatest Adventure*.

Q: Who is your agent and how did you meet her?

A: My agent is Adriana Dominguez of Full Circle Literary, and we met at the summer 2014 Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Conference in Los Angeles. This chance meeting occurred because I had entered to compete in the conference's annual Portfolio Showcase Competition. I was still at Pixar at the time, but I was secretly pining to enter the children's book industry. And I wanted to know how my personal work stacked up to others trying to break into the field. This competition turns out to be a great venue for new artists to have their work seen by industry agents, editors, and art directors looking for new talent, and I was fortunate enough for Adriana to find my work here. I signed with her shortly after my portfolio was selected for an Honor Award that year, and it's been a great relationship ever since.

Q: Other than honing their craft, what advice would you give to Latino writers looking to publish a children’s picture book?

A: This advice is for anyone trying to break into a coveted, creative industry: The difference between those who make it and those who don’t is not talent; it’s making the choice to not give up. However, I don’t think you can make this choice without support. I leaned on my family, my close friends, and later my agent, Adriana, throughout this process. It was never easy and sometimes I doubted myself and my book, but at the end of the day I made a choice to continue, and I think this choice to not give up separates the published from the unpublished.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: Nothing official yet, but last summer I found myself standing alone, in the rain, on Admiralty Island, Alaska, a 1,500 square mile rock covered in a swath of temperate rainforest and home to the greatest concentration of coastal brown bears (a.k.a. grizzly bears) in the world. This island—and one bear in particular on it—may have become the centerpiece of my next story for children.

3. Resources

HOW EDITORS THINK

“I read How Editors Think in one sitting and was engaged from beginning to end. It is well written, highly informative, and humorous—I found myself laughing out-loud in a few spots! Thanks for sharing the secrets of the trade.”
—Mayra Lazara Dole, author of Down to the Bone

Inspired by my experience as a former Simon & Schuster editor, How Editors Think: The Real Reason They Rejected You reveals what it really takes to get published. For more information, visit: <https://marcelalandres.com>

A PUBLIC SPACE FELLOWSHIPS

Deadline: October 15

A Public Space, an independent nonprofit publisher, offers: \$1000; six months of editorial support from A Public Space editors to prepare a piece for publication in the magazine; the opportunity to meet with members of the publishing community, including agents, editors, and published writers; and the opportunity to participate in a public reading and conversation in New York City with A Public Space editors and contributors. International

applicants are encouraged to apply. For more information, visit <https://apublicspace.org/news/detail/the-2019-a-public-space-fellowships>

\$2000 POETRY COLLECTION PRIZE

Deadline: October 15

Copper Nickel Journal's Jake Adam York Prize offers \$2000 and publication by Milkweed Editions for a first or second poetry collection. For more information, visit <http://copper-nickel.org/bookprize/>

ART OMI WRITER RESIDENCY

Deadline: October 15

Art Omi's strong international emphasis provides exposure for global literary voices. Residencies of one week to two months are offered to poets, fiction writers, creative nonfiction writers, and translators. Private lodgings, meals, and opportunities to meet with New York City publishing professionals are included. For more information, visit <http://www.artomi.org/residencies/writers>

LOVE AND ROMANCE WRITING CONTEST

Deadline: November 1

A prize of \$1000 and publication in the 2 Elizabeths anthology will be given for a poem or short story that features themes of love and/or romance. For more information, visit <https://2elizabeths.submittable.com/submit/114730/love-romance-writing-contest-grand-prize-1-000>

MFA OF THE AMERICAS

Application Deadline: November 1st

Stetson University's MFA, a low-residency program in creative writing with degrees in prose and poetry, seeks to draw upon Florida's multicultural heritage by rotating summer residencies throughout the Americas, employing writers working cross-culturally, and establishing ties with local and indigenous writers. For more information, visit <http://stetson.edu/other/academics/programs/creative-writing-mfa.php>

SEEKING ESSAYS ABOUT GAMES

Deadline: November 19

Creative Nonfiction Journal, in partnership with the Center for Games & Impact at Arizona State University, is looking for new work about the role of games and play in our everyday lives. They're looking for true stories that illuminate the great variety of ways in which games have affected the lives of diverse individuals and communities—offering opportunities to fail forward within a safe context, play with possible selves and futures, collaborate with people from different backgrounds, develop professional or other skills,

become protagonists in simulated worlds, or collaborate with others on solutions to real-world problems. For more information, visit <https://creativenonfiction.submittable.com/submit/119733/games>

SEEKING FICTION BY DEAF AND/OR DISABLED WOMEN

Deadline: November 30

Shade Mountain Press—founded by Rosalie Morales Kearns—is seeking literary fiction, either novels or short story collections, only by deaf and/or disabled women. For more information, visit <http://www.shademountainpress.com/contact.php>

\$3500 SHORT STORY AWARD

Deadline: December 15

The Virginia Woolf Award for Short Fiction offers \$3500, publication in Litmag and review by a literary agency for a short story. For more information, visit <https://litmag.submittable.com/submit/89584/litmags-virginia-woolf-award-for-short-fiction-2017-first-prize-3-500-pub>

LEIBY CHAPBOOK AWARD

Deadline: December 30

A prize of \$1000 and publication by Florida Review in cooperation with Burrow Press is given for a chapbook of long or short stories, essays, flash fiction or nonfiction, as well as graphic narrative. For more information, visit <http://floridareview.cah.ucf.edu/submit/chapbook-contest/>

POETRY MAGAZINE

Poetry magazine regularly presents new work by the most recognized poets, but its primary commitment is to discover new voices; more than a third of the poets published in recent years have been new to the magazine. Translations are published throughout the year. They offer competitive pay rates and seek work by poets of color and women. For more information, visit <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/submit>

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“All really good picture books are written to be read five hundred times”
—Rosemary Wells

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