

Latinidad - Summer 2021: Finding Home

Contents:

1. Saludos
2. Q&A: Estelí Meza
3. Resources: Pank Seeks Writers and Artists 18 and Younger

BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“Marcela’s advice provides practical action steps for someone like me who is a novice when it comes to the process of getting a first book published with real world understanding of how the book industry works. During our one-hour talk, I clung to every word and afterward left our conversation reinvigorated and hopeful that if I do my homework I will indeed find the right agent, publish my book, and embark on a second career as a writer.

Thank you, Marcela!”

—Zita Arocha

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1. Saludos

Journeying towards home is a trope as eternal as The Odyssey, yet Estelí Meza, author of the picture book Finding Home, offers a modern twist that echoes current events such as climate change. Warm colors and comforting images render what could be a scary topic for children into a soothing story. Learn more from the Q&A below with Estelí Meza.

Helping Latinos get published,

Marcela Landres

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2. Q&A

Estelí Meza grew up surrounded by books, and her love for illustration began when she attended la Feria del Libro Infantil y Juvenil with her father. In 2018, Estelí was awarded A la Orilla del Viento, the premier picture book award in Mexico. Finding Home is her author-illustrator debut in the United States, published by Scholastic. She has also illustrated books published in Mexico, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates. Estelí spends her days drawing in her neighborhood in Mexico City and is always happiest with her notebook and pencil, and a chocolate pastry and cafecito. Visit her at estelimeza.com.

Q: Which specific authors inspired you to publish your own children's picture books?

A: Arnold Lobel, Maurice Sendak, and Isol inspired me to write and illustrate my own picture books.

I love Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad series! The characters and illustrations have so much personality. I have always identified with the stories, as a child and today. *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak is also one of my favorites—the connection between the text and illustrations is so brilliant. The color and texture of the illustrations are beautiful. I also love all the Isol books, an author-illustrator from Argentina. Her stories are so funny and witty. And her drawings are dynamic and experimental. My favorite book by Isol is *Secreto de familia* (Family Secret).

Q: *Finding Home* is your author-illustrator debut in the US. What aspects of being an author (as opposed to being solely the illustrator) did you most enjoy? What, if any, aspects were surprising?

A: I really enjoyed creating both the art and text of picture books. My process is very particular since I first draw the whole story. Then when I finish all the images, I start writing the words to go with the images. I have an idea in my head about the concept, and I have to decode it to put it into words. Sometimes it is a great challenge to find the correct word to between the image and the storyline. For *Finding Home*, I wrote the text in Spanish and Scholastic translated into English. I am thrilled the book is available in both an English edition as well as an e-book bilingual edition.

Q: I love how the endpapers offer a sort of prequel and sequel to *Finding Home*. Was this intentional or was this a gift from your subconscious?

A: This was a suggestion from my amazing editor Kait Feldman at Scholastic. It's a great idea because a book starts as soon as the book is opened, everything matters. I think this idea allows the book to show the passage of time. First we see Conejo in his house very calm enjoying a meal, yet in the window in background we see the wind of a storm coming. On the next page we see the house flying and on the next page the text of the storyline begins. And the same thing happens at the end, the story continues in the Author's Note and in the endpapers when we see Conejo with his friends enjoying music, cake and cafecito with his friends in his new home.

Q: How does your work for magazines inform your children's picture books? And vice versa?

A: I think all my work influences each other. When creating illustrations for magazines, for an audience of adults I draw with fewer colors in an abstract style. Yet at the same time, I work with textures from my children's books work. When I work on my picture books, I use a lot of colors and textures and I focus on the concept, the strong idea of the story. And this focus on the conceptual comes from my work in magazines. The most important part, and what I try to do in all my work, is to enjoy the process of creating. I think I have the most incredible profession!

Q: Your agent is Stefanie Sanchez Von Borstel of Full Circle Literary. How did you meet her? And how did you come to be published by Orchard Books/Scholastic?

A: My agent Stefanie Sanchez Von Borstel was browsing in a bookstore with her son in Lima, Peru. Her son picked up *Cuentos y leyendas de América Latina*, a book I had published with Grupo Anaya, because he loved the colorful artwork. Stefanie bought the book for her son and they enjoyed reading it together. She reached out to me by email. I had published books in Mexico and South America, and Stefanie thought my illustrations would be welcomed by editors at US publishers. Full Circle Literary now represents my work in the US, and I had previously met Mariel Lopez-Mota from Scholastic at FIL Guadalajara Book Fair. Once Mariel heard that Stefanie represents me, together they introduced *Finding Home* to editor Kait Feldman. With this team, *Finding Home* found the perfect home at Scholastic.

Q: Imagine someone reads *Finding Home* and is inspired to write/illustrate her own book. What advice do you have for her?

A: First, I would be very honored and happy. The best advice I can share is to be patient. The process of creating a book takes a long time. Sometimes we want to finish quickly and have it published. But every story has its time, and we have to be sensitive to each step it take. It's important to listen to our editors and agents. Their point of view is critical to helping to create the best book. Another recommendation is not to compare yourself to others. Sometimes we believe that others are better than us, or that they have better stories. But really, each one has a voice, each one has a way of illustrating and a unique story to tell. Each book is unique. That's the beauty of picture books.

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

A: Yes, I am working on a board book series by Tessa Strickland for Barefoot Books. There will be four books for very young children about yoga, Calm Bunny and Strong Puppy just released. I also illustrated Peace (and Paz) written by Miranda and Baptiste Paul with NorthSouth Books, which is a poetic picture book about bringing peace to our world. It has a beautiful gatefold. Now, I'm currently working on developing my next author-illustrator picture books, and hope to continue to publish many more books.

3. Resources

SEWANEE REVIEW CONTEST

Submission Period: July 1 - July 31

The Sewanee Review is America's oldest continuously published literary quarterly. Two prizes of \$1000 each and publication in Sewanee Review is given for a short story and an essay. For more information, visit <https://thesewanee.com>

FICTION CONTEST

Deadline: July 31

A prize of \$2500 and publication by Howling Bird Press is given for a book of fiction. Novellas, novels, or short story collections will be considered. For more information, visit <https://engage.augsburg.edu/howlingbird/>

SHORT SHORT FICTION PRIZE

Submission Period: August 1 - September 1

First prize is \$500, second prize is \$300, and third prize is \$200. Winning stories will be published in The Southampton Review. For more information, visit <https://www.thesouthamptonreview.com/short-short-fiction-contest/>

POETRY COLLECTION PRIZE

Submission Period: August 1 - October 31

The Minds on Fire Open Book Prize recognizes that the best books aren't always first books. Conduit Books & Ephemera offers \$1500 and publication for a poetry collection. For more information, visit <https://www.conduit.org/>

AMERICAN SOUTH NOVEL PRIZE

Deadline: September 1

The Lee Smith Novel Prize offers \$1000 and publication by Blair for a novel by an author from, living in, or writing about the American South. Blair is an independent press interested in publishing underrepresented writers such as women, people of color, authors with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ authors. For more information, visit <https://www.blairpub.com/>

THE YALE REVIEW

Submission Period: September - October

The Yale Review aims to discover a new generation of writers and thinkers.

They accept submissions of poetry, fiction, essays, review essays, and translations. For more information, visit <https://yalereview.org/>

CREATIVE NONFICTION PRIZE

Reading Period: September 1 - November 15

The Harpur Palate Prize in Creative Nonfiction offers \$500 and publication in the Harpur Palate for an essay. For more information, visit <https://harpurpalate.binghamton.edu/>

WAXWING JOURNAL

Waxwing is a literary journal promoting the tremendous cultural diversity of contemporary American literature, alongside international voices in translation. Their mission is to include writers from all cultural identities, in terms of race, ethnicity, indigenous tribe, gender, class, sexuality, age, education, ability, language, religion, and region. For more information, visit <https://waxwingmag.org/>

PANK SEEKS WRITERS AND ARTISTS 18 AND YOUNGER

Co-founded by Roxane Gay, PANK Magazine is a literary magazine fostering access to innovative poetry and prose, publishing the brightest and most promising writers for the most adventurous readers. They seek submissions for Future Fridays from writers and artists who are 18 years old or younger. Submit 3-5 poems, flash pieces, art pieces, comic pages, up to 3500 words of prose, or up to 2 minutes of spoken word recording. For more information, visit <https://pankmagazine.com/>

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Holy Cow! Press publishes poetry, short fiction, novels, biographies, memoirs, and anthologies centered on specific themes. They are one of the few small publishers that routinely publishes books by Native American authors. For more information, visit <https://www.holycowpress.org/>

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“This tip might at first seem obvious, but people frequently tell me they want to write a picture book for children, without having read a picture book for 20 years. Follow this simple rule: Whatever you love reading is what you should be writing.”

—Simon Van Booy

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