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# Michele Serros

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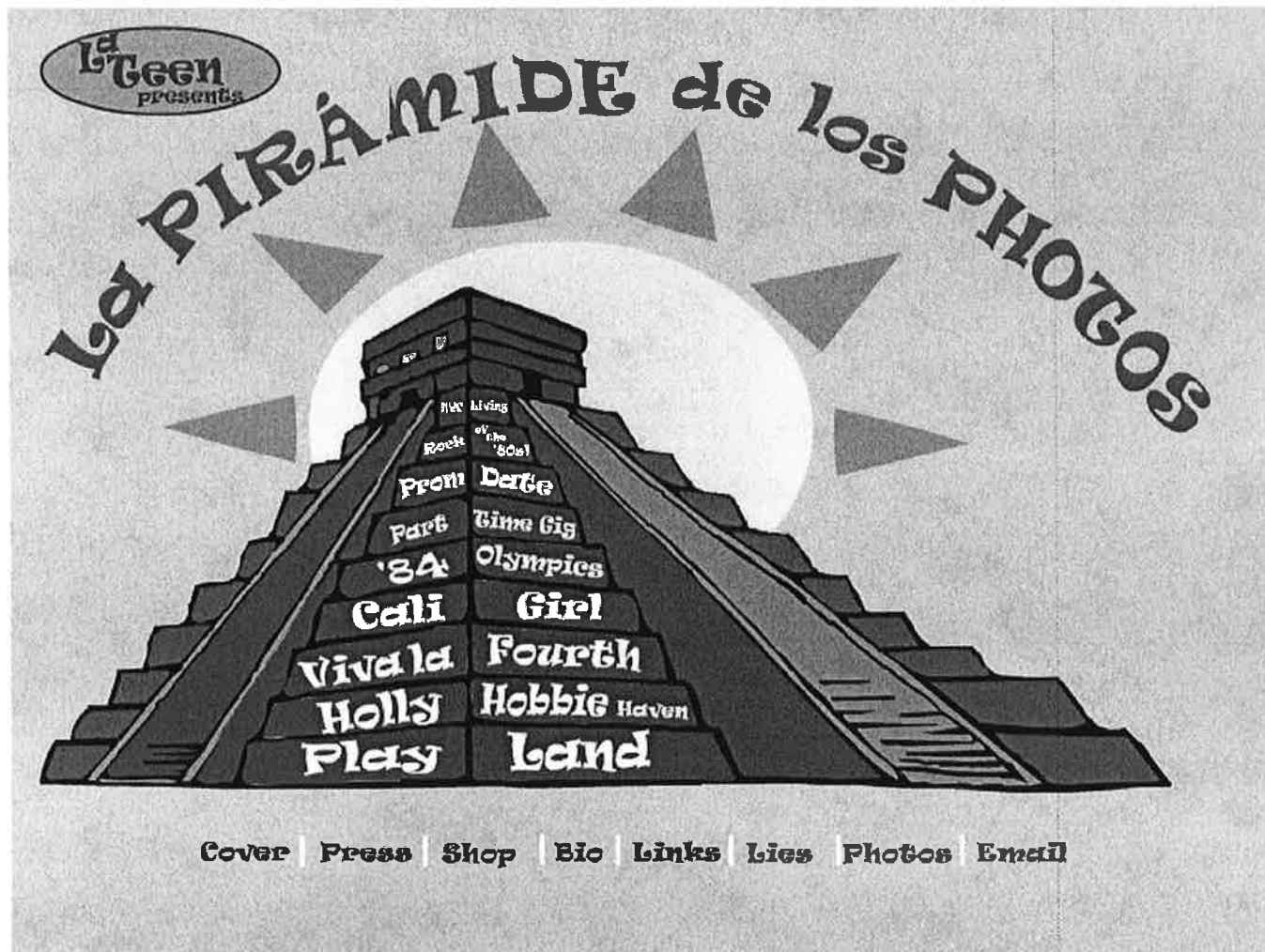
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# Michele's Books



## HONEY BLONDE CHICA

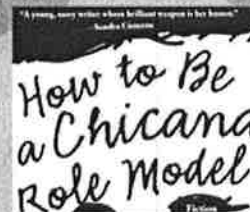
"Enjoyable coming-of-age Chicano Story (that) manages to find a tie between social classes. Serros' message is clear: cultural confusion and self identity problems cross income levels, even for U.S. Latinos."

- *Viva Monthly*

## HOW TO BE A CHICANA ROLE MODEL

"(Serros') tales of never quite fitting in are both poignant and hilarious."

- *Newsweek*



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## michele serros biography

Named by *Newsweek* as "One of the Top Young Women to Watch for in the New Century," Michele Serros is the author of *Chicana Falsa and other stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard*, *How to be a Chicana Role Model*, *Honey Blonde Chica*, and her newest young adult novel, *¡Scandalosa!*

Serros has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, *CosmoGirl*, and *The Washington Post* and contributes satirical commentaries regularly for National Public Radio (*Latino USA*, *Morning Edition*, *Weekend All Things Considered*, *Anthem*, *Along for the Ride*, and *The California Report*). An award-winning spoken word artist, she has read her poems to stadium crowds for Lollapalooza, recorded *Selected Stories from Chicana Falsa* for Mercury Records, and was selected by the Poetry Society of America to have her poetry placed on MTA buses throughout Los Angeles County.

Michele was still a student at Santa Monica City College when her first book of poetry and short stories, *Chicana Falsa and other stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard*, was published. When the original publisher of *Chicana Falsa* ceased business, Michele continued to sell copies from her garage. In 1998, Riverhead Books (Penguin/Putnam) reissued *Chicana Falsa* and as well as *How to be a Chicana Role Model*. The latter instantly became a *Los Angeles Times* Best Seller.

In 2002, Michele wrote for the ABC television sitcom, *The George Lopez Show*. "An opportunity," she says, "that hopefully with my contribution opens the door for a wider representation of Latinos in the mass media."

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# michele's Favorite Links



### Corny, but Cute

I love anything on a Stick!  
Except ca ca, of course.



### eBay

Current High Bidder is my middle name! That gently treaded, 100% chenille, MIB, NWT, Monster Magnet bath mat is mine!



### Reading's the Rage

Rage Against the Machine recommends *Chicana Falsa*.  
Teachers take note!



### Hardcore,

### Chiques...

Whatever you call it,  
my hometown is *La Bamba*!  
Check it out!



### GROOVY GERIATRIC!

But I LOVE Burt Bacharach.  
He helps me *In Between*  
*The Heartaches!*



### It's Me,

### Judy

This NYC based author  
was a big inspiration for  
me as a young girl!

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# My T Story

"Hey, those are like..."

Yes, my Ts are a response to the shopping bags used by a particular department store.

It's a big deal to own a bona fide Bloomingdales bag -- you're showing the whole world you can afford to shop at "Bloomies" and if you're given a "big brown bag" that's even better. It lets people know you've bought something big, which means it was expensive, which means, yes, you can afford it. You are one rich bad ass with that "big brown bag" of yours!

I thought it was remarkable that in today's elitist, fat phobic society something big and something brown is actually considered a status symbol. Wouldn't "Mr. Brown Buffalo" himself, Oscar Zeta Acosta, be proud?

So, now you can show off your own personally defined status...no matter what size of brown you are!







SIMON PULSE

Michele Serros acaba de publicar 'Honey Blonde Chica'.

## La 'chica' es de Oxnard

Michele Serros no tuvo que salirse de su entorno para ambientar su novela

Juan Rodríguez Flores  
jrum.rodriguez@opinion.com

Aunque todavía no es tan famosa y reconocida como otros novelistas y poetas chicanos, Michele Serros ya tiene firmado un contrato para publicar dos libros con Simon Pulse, división de Simon & Schuster, una de las editoriales más importantes del país. La primera parte de ese compromiso ya quedó cumplida con la reciente impresión de la novela *Honey Blonde Chica*.

Pero la escritora chicana nacida en Oxnard, toma las cosas con la misma calma y tranquilidad con la que se observan los hechos naturales. Es por tal razón que no parece mostrar ningún asombro cuando habla sobre las oportunidades creativas que se encuentran al alcance de sus manos.

"Todo lo que me ha pasado, hasta el momento, ha ocurrido de forma totalmente espontánea", explica Serros en conversación telefónica. "Desde que tomé la decisión de volverme escritora supe que no me sería muy difícil encontrar la forma de publicar mis libros. Aunque la literatura chicana no ocupa, todavía, un espacio muy significativo dentro de la cultura estadounidense son cada vez más numerosas las editoriales que están interesadas en nosotros. Se trata de un proceso que ha ido evolucionando lentamente, pero de forma irreversible".

Educada en el seno de una familia de origen mexicano, Michele Serros asegura que "descubrió la literatura siendo todavía muy pequeña", entre las páginas de los libros y revistas de segunda mano que acostumbraba leer: todos los fines de semana.

"Bajo la influencia de cada una de esas lecturas empecé a escribir poesía y narraciones cortas a los 11 años de edad", señala ella. "Al divorciarse mis padres, ésa fue el mejor refugio que pude encontrar

Leo SERROS, Pág. 3B

# Espectáculos

La Opinión

## Serros

Viene de la pág. 1B

mientras iba a la secundaria, aquí en Oxnard. Luego descubrí que la novela era otro género literario al que debía consagrarle buena parte de mi tiempo".

Como poeta Serros admite que una de las mejores experiencias que ha tenido fue la de poder leer sus textos en el festival Lollapalooza, frente a miles y miles de personas. Por ese motivo recuerda que "era algo muy emocionante estar sobre un escenario, rodeada por millares de hombres y mujeres, de toda clase de edades, religión e inclinaciones políticas, hablando acerca de cosas tan personales como el amor, la nostalgia y los dilemas sentimentales".

Antes de escribir *Honey Blonde Chica*, durante la época en que todavía era estudiante del Colegio de Santa Mónica, Serros publicó su primera colección de poesía y cuentos bajo el título de *Chicana falsa and Other Stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard* al que después le siguió *How To Be a Chicana Role Model*. Gracias al éxito y los reconocimientos que obtuvo con ambos libros, a los que ahora se utiliza como material de lectura obligatoria en escuelas secundarias y universidades en el ámbito nacional, recibió en 2002 una invitación para convertirse en escritora del programa *George Lopez* de la cadena ABC.

"Fue una oportunidad que no podía rechazar, porque pienso que es importante que los escritores latinos tengan una mayor presencia en los medios de comunicación masiva que hay en Estados Unidos", indica. "El éxito que ha tenido [el comediante] George López con este programa demuestra, en más de un sentido, que nosotros ya estamos suficientemente capacitados para cumplir con las responsabilidades que representa escribir para cualquiera de las grandes ca-



denas de televisión".

Interesada en seguir evolucionando, lo mismo en el ámbito humano que en el plano intelectual y creativo, Serros decidió cambiar el provinciano y apacible ambiente que la rodeaba en la ciudad de Oxnard por el clima cosmopolita e internacional de Nueva York.

"Estuve viviendo allá durante varios años y fue en Nueva York donde mi agente recibió la oferta para que escribiera este libro", señala Serros sobre *Honey Blonde Chica*. "Al principio no estaba muy segura de que era algo que me interesaba hacer, porque la editorial sólo quería publicar una versión latina [de la exitosa novela juvenil de Cecily von Ziegesar] *Gossip Girl* y no una historia original. Después de revisar cuidadosamente *Gossip Girl* decidí, junto con mi agente y varios colaboradores, desarrollar una versión muy íntima e individual del libro. Un año más tarde la pusimos a consideración de varias editoriales. Y fue Simon & Schuster, en su división juvenil [Simon Pulse] la que aceptó sacarla al mercado. Cuando el libro se puso en venta, llegué a la conclusión de que mi estancia en Nueva York había llegado a su fin. Entonces decidí volver a Oxnard, donde estoy trabajando sin ningún tipo de presión la secuela de *Honey Blonde Chica*".

En *Honey Blonde Chica* el personaje central es Evi Gómez, una chica que está empezando a cruzar el peligroso terreno que hay entre

Serros, Michele

'Honey Blonde Chica'  
Simon Pulse  
Mayo, 2006  
304 páginas

la adolescencia y la juventud.

El universo social de Evi está compuesto por Raquel, su mejor amiga, y los integrantes de la pandilla de "los Flojos", un grupo de muchachos que se dedican a pasar el tiempo practicando el saludable deporte de no hacer nada. A todos ellos se les viene a añadir, más tarde, Dee Dee, antigua compañera de Evi, quien luego de pasar algún tiempo en Ciudad de México, regresa a Oxnard transformada en una muchacha completamente distinta llamada Dela. Con su presencia Dela altera, dramáticamente, el orden y el equilibrio que había entre las cordiales relaciones de Evi Gómez y el resto de sus amigos.

"Mi libro está lleno de referencias autobiográficas, a tal punto que su historia transcurre entre las calles y vecindarios que yo he conocido durante toda mi vida", admite la autora. "No hubiera podido ubicarla en otro lugar: Oxnard es la región del mundo que conozco mejor y creo que seguirá ocupando el lugar preferencial en mis siguientes libros".

"Cuando visité por primera vez Salinas, la ciudad donde nació el famoso novelista John Steinbeck, entendí que no me hacía falta irme a vivir en Londres, Nueva York o París para poder llegar a ser una escritora chicana que cuenta historias universales. Creo que si pongo suficiente humanidad y sensibilidad en mis personajes, podré alcanzar dentro de algún tiempo esa meta. Y lo mejor de todo: sin tener que salir de Oxnard".

Michele Serros firmará copias de 'Honey Blonde Chica' el sábado 7 de octubre, de 5:00 a 8:00 p.m., en la librería Casita de Pueblo, 6738 Greenleaf Ave., Whittier. Información: 562-693-2844.

BUSH'S NEW OLD GUARD • KEN BURNS RIFFS ON JAZZ

# Newsweek

January 8, 2001 • \$5.50

WOMEN  
OF THE NEW  
CENTURY

THE  
AGE  
OF  
**Opr**



### Michele Serros, 34

The Los Angeles-based author and poet writes about growing up in a working-class Mexican-American family, and her tales of never quite fitting in are **both poignant and hilarious**. In 1998 she published her first book of poetry and short stories, "Chicana Falsa," while she was still a college student. Last year her second short-story collection, "How to Be a Chicana Role Model," quickly climbed the best-seller lists—and became required reading in many classrooms. "A lot of people have gone through the things I write about," she says. "I just happen to be Chicana."

Michele Serros



Book Review

# On Growing Up Chicana

BY CHRISTINE GRANADOS

*How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, by Michele Serros (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000). Softcover, 222 pages. \$12.95. Fiction

Michele Serros' second book is a mix of genres—stand-up comedy, advice, and short stories. It even includes a selection from her first novel, *Chicana Falsa*. Although noted as "new" fiction, the book presents real life tales and is split into thirteen sections called "role model rules." Within these sections we learn about the hard knocks of the publishing business, how difficult it can be to get paid for public poetry readings, and how important family is to an aspiring writer. But it is Serros' gift for capturing the emotion of a moment in dialogues between family members that holds this piece of work together.

Scenes like the one in her strongest story "The Big Deal" give readers a glimpse into the cross-cultural battle Serros and Latinas in general face as she tries to describe her Anglo boyfriend to her auntie Alma and cousins, who would be meeting him for the first time. She drops tidbits of important information throughout the day to her family—he has long hair, had been in jail, and was agnostic. The final straw came when she told her auntie and cousins that her new boyfriend was a vegan. It was one thing her surrogate mother couldn't overlook, nor could her cousins.

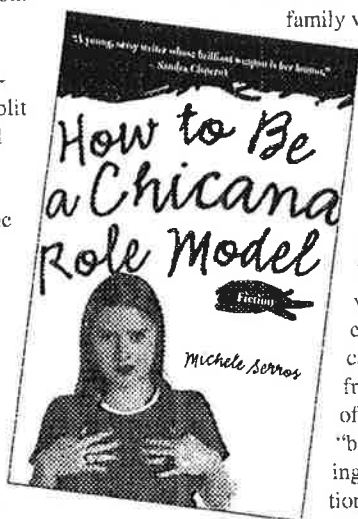
"What kind of man eats just vegetables?" Auggie repeated. "I mean, where does he get his *ganas* from?" Then he and Benny laughed together as they left for the backyard.

"They're called florets," I called out to him. "Alma, please tell him what we just talked about."

"I don't know." She hesitated. "I mean, personally, I just think it's unnatural, strange."

"Alma, what about all this talk about love, and acceptance, and how important it is to find someone you care about in life?"

"That was before you told me he and his family were vegans."



In the story "Discard Discontinued Text," Serros opens up enough to write a poignant and heartfelt tale about her mother's death, which got only a brief mention in her first book. She uses the same voice as in her previous effort and unfortunately carries over bad habits from her first try. Her use of "cuz" for the word "because" can be distracting, and some of the selections can be overly sentimental and manipulative. In

"Seek Support from the Sistas" she discusses being a page for the Fox television show

**'My panty hose were regulation style, nude-colored sheers that gathered at the ankles and lay low in the crotch. No wonder old women are always so cranky.'**

*In Living Color* and how she tried to bond with Jennifer López. After being rebuffed and then humiliated by the Fly Girl, she writes: "Once you've put on a page uniform, you're already a target of passive

contempt. You're a reminder of how detoured a career can go and what a waste a college degree could be." But a reader can overlook these peculiarities because she's just so funny. In the same story she had me laughing out loud when describing her page uniform. "My panty hose were regulation style, nude-colored sheers that gathered at the ankles and lay low in the crotch. No wonder old women are always so cranky." **H**

## ON THE SHELVES

★ *Noche Buena: Hispanic American Christmas Stories*, edited by Nicolás Kanellos (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Softcover, 384 pages, \$15.95.

Just in time for the holidays comes this collection of stories by Mexican, Colombian, Cuban, and Puerto Rican writers—all sharing heartwarming Christmas tales. A wonderful way to learn about the diverse traditions within the Latino community in stories told by writers such as Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera, Diane de Anda, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, and others.



★ *The Fat Man from La Paz: Contemporary Fiction from Bolivia*, edited by Rosario Santos (New York: Seven



Stories Press, 2000). Softcover, 315 pages, \$30. Fiction. Enjoy twenty stories by some of Bolivia's best writers. Read about a different world, a world of indigenous Quechua and Aymará Indian cultures and European culture. Become familiar with the work of Augusto Céspedes, Edmundo Paz-Soldán, Ximena Arnaiz Franck, César Verduguez, Blanca Elena Paz, and others.

★ *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería*, by Marta Moreno Vega (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000).

Hardcover, 304 pages, \$25.95. Nonfiction. This Afro-Puerto Rican writer explores the often misunderstood Santería religion. Based on her discovery that members of her family practiced the religion under the guise of Catholicism. A trip to Cuba proved revealing and inspired her to initiate into Santería as a Yoruba priestess.



★ *Martin Rivas*, by Alberto Blest Gana, translated by Tess O'Dwyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Hard-

cover, 389 pages, \$30. Fiction. Considered one of the most widely read work of Chilean literature, this novel is about a passionate love story and a look into the life of nineteenth-century Chile. The introduction by Jaime Concha places the novel in historical context and provides biographical information about the author.



Katharine A. Díaz

of dream analysis, Sigmund Freud. At their best, these short reveries center around memorable, jewellike details. In some cases, the glimpses into the dream lives of these figures are arresting: Daedalus teaches a Minotaur trapped in a maze on his Greek island how to fly; Rimbaud wanders the French countryside with his own amputated leg under his arm, wrapped in a newspaper printed with his poems. Other narratives fizzle, merely embellishing famous scenarios from the subjects' lives or works: Collodi dreams that he is swallowed by a huge shark (a whale in the original tale), as was his wooden hero; Freud imagines that he has become his own most famous patient, Dora, in an episode more farcical than epiphanic. The recreation of Pessoa's last days is a more complex and successful narrative. All of the alternate poetic personae the poet ever created—including Antonio Mora, a mad philosopher; shy accountant Bernardo Soares; and the monarchist doctor, Ricardo Reis—visit him on his deathbed. Through these conversations with his own multiple personalities, the poet at last achieves peace. Although some episodes are weaker than others, Tabucchi's rich language and his magical-realist charm tinge the volume with a visionary glow. (July)

**GOODBYE, EVIL EYE**

GLORIA DE VIDAS KIRCHHEIMER. *Holmes & Meier* (160 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10038), \$21.95 (176p) ISBN 0-8419-1404-4

"In our house, the direct statement was seldom used as a vehicle for communication," Kirchheimer (*We Were So Beloved*) recalls in the preface to her collection of stories about a New York Sephardic family. "Innuendo was the order of the day." The handling of life's tribulations without talking about them challenges an immigrant couple, their Americanized children, relatives, neighbors and friends in 11 personal fictions about love, frustration, identity and tradition. The peculiar Sephardic blend of Jewish philosophy, European culture, and mysticism that survived from medieval Spain through the Ottoman Empire to the present day informs the community's everyday life, as does the immigrant work ethic. In the title story, when a young man who wishes to carry on the work of the doctor-philosopher Maimonides seeks his grandfather's grave, he learns more about his own history than he anticipated. In "A Case of Dementia," a mother in the throes of rebellion calls upon her daughter to protect her from the evil eye through an old, oddly powerful ceremony. Kirchheimer depicts male egotism, family secrets, folk songs and meals in vivid detail, as in "Feast of Lights," the simple, affecting story of a Hanukkah dinner uniting three generations in a ritual of food, gifts and ruffled

feelings. Demonstrating an intuitive understanding of the psychocultural traits of Jewish culture, she imbues even the most frustrating moments with tenderness. She does not probe religious or philosophical depths, focusing instead on small remnants of a long, rich heritage, in stories invested with the personal honesty and emotions only one's family can inspire. (July)

**HOW TO BE A CHICANA ROLE MODEL**

MICHELE SERROS. *Riverhead*, \$12.95 paper (240p) ISBN 1-57322-824-9

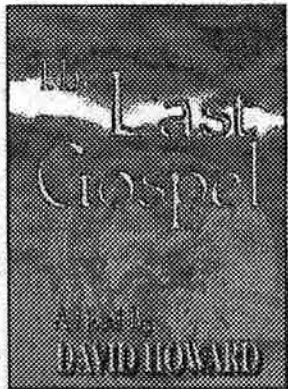
The wisecracking, bicultural/bilingual, self-deprecating, post-Valley Girl author of *Chicana Falsa* once again serves up a slice of her own life, this time focusing on the lessons she has learned about being a writer and de facto role model. Chronicling the experiences and responsibilities of semi-successful Chicana poet and writer "Michele Serros," the book is divided into a series of *The House on Mango Street*-style vignettes, each titled with a numbered "role model rule," like "Seek Support from Sistas" and "Honor Thy Late-Night Phone Calls from Abuclita." Sandwiched between these stories are thematic riffs—an ongoing debate with a conference organizer over an honorarium that was never paid, or correspondence with teacher fans who want to correct the fictional Serros's English or her Spanish. "Let's Go Mexico," one of the longer stories, is a humorous take on immersion language classes set in a tourist town outside of Mexico City. For all of Serros's wit—and she can be absolutely hilarious—there is a darker side to her humor. The fictional Serros moves from menial job to menial job. She recognizes that like her father (a "brown ghost" to his Anglo co-workers), she is too often either invisible or assumed to be a maid, and that Latinos can be as prejudiced as whites. She takes several swipes at academics and critics who assume that one Latina writer is much like another. She comes down especially hard on anyone who doubts her talent: "To my family, writing was not important. Writing was somewhat selfish. Writing was just plain rude." Though this outing lacks some of the fizz of *Chicana Falsa*, Serros turns out a funny yet poignant defense of her craft. 4-city author tour. (July)

**PHOENIX EYES: And Other Stories**

RUSSELL CHARLES LEONG. *Univ. of Washington*, \$30 (208p) ISBN 0-295-97944-5; paper \$16.95-97945-3

Leong comments ironically on the Asian-American experience in this impressionistic, uneven collection of 14 stories. In a first section, "Leaving," the effects of hybrid culture are foregrounded in five stories about new immigrants. "Bodhi Leaves," the first of the group, tells of a

Vietnamese monk relocated to a temple in Orange County, N.J., whose search for an artist capable of painting a traditional many-leaved Bodhi tree distracts him from the difficulties of adjusting to a new country. The second section, "Samsara," consists of stories with sexual themes. Notable here is "Hemispheres," which is set in the academic/avant-garde interface with which Leong, the editor of *Amerasia Journal* and a filmmaker himself, must be familiar. The narrator, Bryan, works for the Los Angeles Film Institute. The week that he decides he is sexually out of service—which, for him, means no more boyfriends—he gets messages from three different women, all of whom are looking for sperm donations. The last section, "Paradise," contains the title story, which is a long account of life in the *hung kung syan*, a trans-Pacific call boy service. Terence, who has "phoenix eyes"—eyes of "longing and lust"—goes to Taiwan after college with his lover. When he and his lover fall out, Terence is picked up by P., a handsome jet-setter with gigolo connections, and given an education in seduction. Circular in form, the story starts and ends with P.'s funeral. Some of Leong's stories are slight, but the best of them exploit the stresses of sexual desire and family rela-



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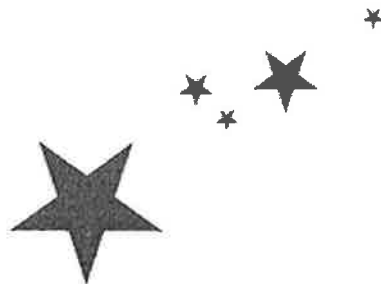
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# TU CIUDAD LOS ANGELES

## Michele Serros

**THE WRITE STUFF** Who says Mexican girls don't come in honey blonde? Just ask Serros, the author of *Chicana Falsa* and *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, who has jumped onto the Chica Lit bandwagon with her new novel, *Honey Blonde Chica*, about rich kids with dye jobs and trust funds who happen to be Latino. The 40-year-old Serros is now relishing her role as teen-pulp-fiction princess. Men dig her, too. Flea, of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, is a fan: "Michele is the great California writer who makes me proud of my state. When I read her books I cry and laugh."



HipHotNow

60 Tu Ciudad October/November 2008





# WHY ARE MALIBU VEGETABLES MORE ORDERLY THAN CHICANO STYLE?

Michelle Serros Wants To Know

By Lesley-Ann Brown  
photographed by Linda Ford

When you're Black you often feel like you're in the only group of people who have been trampled on. You forget that there's a life between black and white. Then, someone reminds you that life has been pretty fucked up for others as well.

Whether that artist is poor and white, or an immigrant from afar, or a native of this soil, they often manage to make that point, sometimes with eloquence and, maybe, humor.

Presenting Michelle Serros and her debut CD *Selected Stories from Chicana Falsa*. There's a plethora of stories here, all of which

any person of any race can relate to. From "Dead Pig's Revenge," her story about a young woman's fear of choking on chicharrons, to the funniest yet most poignant skit "Attention Shoppers," which slaps sophistication all over what could be an overly mundane situation. In the skit, Serros' friend wants to know—and quite loudly—why is it that Malibu vegetables in the frozen foods department are so much more orderly while Chicano-style vegetables are not? Pouring a little sweetness over pain never hurt anyone. It just soothes us for the miles ahead.



Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles Times  
latimes.com

## Her work 'Chicana Falsa' has the Industry buzzing.

By MICHAEL QUINTANILLA,  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

THE SUNDAY PROFILE

Michele Serros leans into a classroom podium, reading her story about discrimination in the frosty depths of a supermarket's frozen veggie section. The poet pauses, scans her audience of Venice High School seniors-attentive, waiting for the storyteller to play out the next scene. Vicariously, they are there with Serros and her activist friend Martina, on aisle 9, digging through the deep freezer for pre-cut carrots and peas that will give their Spanish rice dish some zing.

Serros lets loose:

*Seconds after she opened the glass door Martina said: "Look! Look at this." She pulled out two frosted bags from the bottom compartment. "Malibu Style Vegetables. And, check this out, Latino Style Vegetables, as if we all eat alike. I've never seen this. Man, even in the lousy freezer they divide and they discriminate."*

*"Martina," I asked her, "they're vegetables. How can they be discriminating? Get real." But she went on. - "Man, you don't even see it. You're so, so unaware. Look, look at this picture. Latino Style Vegetables, they have the vegetables cut up all small. Like, what's that supposed to mean? Like, little food for little people, little minds, little significance? And this Malibu kind, the broccoli, the carrots, are cut up large, all big and grand, like 'of great worth,' or something. The cauliflower, which is WHITE, is the biggest vegetable in the picture, overpowering all the rest!"*

*"Oh, Martina," I told her, "You're seeing something that just isn't there. You're crazy to get so worked up over vegetables. Now just grab a bag and let's go."*

A few paragraphs later, Martina waves the frozen bags over her head, calling for everyone to join her new revolution, to become liberated consumers. She flings the bags to the floor. A Korean woman stomps on *Oriental Style Vegetables*. A cowboy plays football with *Country Style Vegetables*. And a handsome dark-haired man rips open *Italian Style Vegetables*, scattering them everywhere.

From beginning to end, the story, "Attention Shoppers" is a grabber. Many of the students hang around knowing they're late for their next class. But they want to thank Serros for sharing. They want to discuss the "stereotypes in a bag."

They want to write.

Serros scores.

She has connected with the young people she says she wants to reach with her work, which is now available on a CD, "*Selected Stories From Chicana Falsa*" that is inspiring industry buzz. The spoken-word recording on Mouth Almighty/Mercury Records plays like a series of radio dramas, richly crafted stories in which Serros invites listeners into her world, her culture, her life as a hyphenated American reared on *cultura mexicana* (glitzy quinceaneras) and mainstream pop culture (Judy Blume books).

Vivid with sound effects—a piglet oinking, birds chirping, a knife chopping cilantro, onions and tomatoes—Serros' stories and poetry are about family. Her dad, George, then a janitor at the Oxnard airport (today he is court reporter), who never believed in owning a phone, eating at restaurants or paying for parking. Her sister Yvonne's bad luck as a contestant on "The Price is Right" and Serros' own dangerous appetite for the crunchy *chicharrones*, or pork cracklings, that choked her and made her pan out on the floor only to be revived by her younger cousin Amy, who just happened to have a pet pig.

Writes Joie Davidow of *Si* magazine: "Because Serros has the genius to create full-blooded characters in just a few sentences, the poems lend themselves to performances, which are part poetry reading, part stand-up comedy, part theatrical event." Elena Oumano's review in the *Village Voice*, "Chicana" encompasses more than the vagaries of Latina life in La La; the pressures and yearnings Serros describes are those of anyone anywhere in America."

And says Pedro Trino of *Latin Style* magazine, "Unlike most of the well-known Chicano writers, Serros is not a writer from academia; she writes from her life experiences, and that gives her work the added poignancy and urgency literary



intellectuals will never achieve."

Serros, 30, smiles and shrugs at such adulation, at the tags "rising new poet," "a new voice on the Chicano horizon" and "LA.'s next big thing." Her sculpted eyebrows momentarily hide under her seriously straight little-girl bangs. The ends of her shoulder-length dark hair curl into an itchy-bitsy "That Girl" flip. She welcomes the attention but says all she has ever wanted to do was make someone-anyone -- happy with her work. She writes in an office that is really a pantry because she likes to be near food when she creates.

"Intense stomach aches-and when there's nothing on TV-inspire me." And then she eats, she says, glancing- con carino, yes, lovingly-at the red fridge within arm's length of her Macintosh, fax and phone.

Her CD is based on her 1993 book of poems and short stories, "*Chicana Falsa and Other Stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard*" (Lalo Press, which is now defunct; Serros has a closet full of copies). She wrote the book while still an undergrad at UCLA, where she received a bachelor's degree in Chicana/o Studies. The title "Chicana Falsa" comes from a moniker given to her by a chola everyone called La Letty, who "had a strong definition of who "Chicana" was. And, according to La Letty, Serros was not that image. "Here I was in school thinking maybe I'd go college and become a writer. My Spanish was horrible, I wore Vans to school and La Letty was like, 'What a chicana falsa you are.'"

Serros admits she doesn't speak Spanish fluently (she wrote a poem about it called "Mi Problema" after a Latina dissed her about it). She is addicted to *chicharrones* (thus the poem "Dead Pig's Revenge") but is crazy for Cocoa Puffs ("Haiku For Cocoa Puffs"). She uses a tortilla maker because really, who has time to roll out the masa? Sometimes she rolls the double r's in her surname and sometimes she just forgets. She collects snow globes (more than 200 are kept in a lighted Timex watch glass case she bought at a thrift store). She's a regular at Hot-Dog-on-a-Stick, loves TV (but not all that cable stuff), '40s fashion, 1950's furniture and has an amazing collection of vintage vinyl albums in the living room of the cozy home she shares with husband Gene Trautmann, a drummer for the band Dig.

At 17 she developed a crush on Trautmann after seeing his picture on a poster, which she bought. As fate would have it, the two met several years later-in Belgium, of all places-and last year they wed. Serros made snow globes for all the wedding guests, painting the hair on the plastic brides and grooms to match their own.

As a child her heroine was author Judy Blume-"and she's Jewish," Serros says, yanking a letter from Blume off a wall in her cubbyhole office. Blume's book "Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret" helped Serros, at age 11.

"I didn't know what to do with all these emotions, anger and fear." Her parents discouraged her from revealing them at home or in public. She says she was taught not to be opinionated because her parents kept their feelings bottled up, a cultural characteristic of their generation. So she wrote to Blume, who responded: "Divorce can be painful. You may want to keep a journal and write down what you are thinking and feeling." Serros has been doing that ever since.

Born in the La Colonia neighborhood of Oxnard and reared in nearby El Rio, Serros says relatives gave her a quarter for every story-always funny and always about private family matters, like her mom spending too much money-she told at her great-grandma Pete's backyard barbecues. Her mother would give her 50 cents to zip her lips.

She also made books from cardboard and paper, drawing and coloring her own stories, gluing flowers and grass on the pages in the fashion of scratch and sniff books. She was barely 6 then. she says, turning the pages of one of her many childhood books kept in a cabinet with her Blume collection.

Serros signed her real name on each one, but Yvonne, now 36, told Michele that to be a serious writer she would have to change her name because that was what writers did. So the two came upon Michael Hill: Michael for Michele and Hill for Serros because cerros in English means hills. As a youngster Serros practiced the name over and over again as she turned to writing in her diaries. Intact with a lock and key, she spilled her feelings onto the pages. She also started experimenting with poetry without even knowing it. She broke up sentences, turned phrases into fragments, making them look like poems. "I had no idea what I was doing but it looked like a poem and I'd have one word way over here and then a few words on a separate line."

Still, poetry was the great unknown to her because in school "the poetry I was reading was about life In New York or Europe," not about her worldview. "So I thought I can't be a poet. I don't write like that. That's not my world." After high school she took journalism courses at Ventura College, thinking maybe her father was right. "A writer is a reporter." But instructors told her she had too much emotion in her stories and that was a no-no. "I was so confused. I didn't know what I was writing."

She switched to Santa Monica College, where a Mexican American literature course provided some answers. She began to read the works of Latino writers and poets she never knew existed. She also took workshops outside academia at Beyond Baroque, a literary center, which gave her the boost she needed to pursue writing her way: no rules, no fear of dissected poems and, best of all, she dumped Michael Hill.

These days, Serros is an award-winning and often-anthologized poet. Last month the Greater Los Angeles Press Club honored her work with a first place award for radio commentary for a story how her family ditched her for Madonna on Christmas Day. Serros refused to see "Evita," paying homage to Uncle Charlie, who never supported a film in which a non-Latino played a Latino.

Three years ago she toured as a Road Poet with Lollapalooza, inspiring Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins to play behind her during one of her shows. She teaches poetry to students through PEN Center USA West's high school program and to teenage girls at the California Youth Authority prison in Camarillo. Nike is interested in her for commercial, Mother Jones named her "Hellraiser of the Month" and "Mi Gente," a New York-based variety and talk show, wants to book her.

Tonight, Serros will launch her CD at a party at a performance venue in Hollywood where Cocoa Puff treats, cheese bologna rolls, Latino and Malibu style vegetables and, of course, chicharrones, will be dished out in true Serros form. Still, not everyone "understands my work, they don't 'get' me," she says. "Some people get on their pedestal and say their way is the real Chicano way." And sometimes non-Latinos just aren't interested.

Take her recent appearance at a mostly white Kern County college campus. When she stopped a student for directions, he said, "I'm skipping class today because your book caused a lot of controversy." Her reception was hostile. Several other students bailed. Many made disruptive noises-turning magazine pages, opening backpacks and several more never made eye contact with Serros. When the class ended, one student wrote, "I don't like poetry, especially that of a Chicana's." When she left, no one, except for the teacher who apologized, said thank you.

At another engagement, Serros read her heart out to a Montecito writer's group, again, mostly white. Later as she reached for corn chips at a buffet table, a man quipped: "Oh, didn't you get your fill of tortillas this week?" Serros kept her cool as the man repeated the question. "I don't get it," she told the man, who responded, "Never mind."

At the same reading, a woman shared a joke with Serros: "What's the first thing Mexican kids learn in English?" I said I didn't know. She goes: "Attention Kmart shoppers" and started laughing." Again, Serros was dumbfounded and bluntly told the woman, "I don't get it."

Serros knows other Latino poets who have refused such hoity-toity invitations they say reek of tokenism. She is often asked why she accepts them. "I do it because I think many people have this certain idea of what a Latino, of what a Chicano is and I just think 'God, they really need to be educated. They're defining who I am" and only Serros can do that.

Solid in her identity and grounded in her writing, she says she will continue to push her fresh, cutting-edge poetry until she's gone. And when she dies she wants to be remembered as a poet.

She recalls writing her mother's obituary. Beatrice Serros died in 1991 of kidney and liver failure. She was a draftsman who designed the home Michele grew up in. But her passion was painting. "In the obituary I wrote that my mother was an artist, because she was," she says. Some in her family scoffed.

"And it made me think. 'God. I don't want people saying in my obituary. "Well, you know, Michele really wasn't a writer."

She wants her readers to say they were inspired "to document their stories." Especially young girls. "I want them to say, 'I could do that,' and then do it." I want bookshelves and libraries filled with their stories. I just want that so badly."

--MICHAEL  
QUINTANILLA

## SUNDAY PROFILE - Michele Serros

### Claim to Fame:

Poet and storyteller who just signed a five-year contract with spoken-word recording label Mouth Almighty/Mercury Records

### Back story:

Born in La Colonia neighborhood of Oxnard. Today: She lives in Culver City.

Family: Married to Gene Trautmann, drummer for the band Dig.

**Passions:**

Collecting snow globes, vinyl records, bowling, couples-only skating at the roller rink, girls-only pajama parties and devouring corn dogs from Hot-Dog-on-a-Stick as well as her beloved chicharrones.

**On her definition of a Poet:**

"There's the stereotype, someone who is just incredibly deep and intelligent and so intense. An icon. But I don't see myself as a poet. No. No. No. I feel like I'm this counter girl who got lucky. I worked the counters at Sizzler, Aaron Brothers and Michael's Arts & Crafts. So I was always witnessing life from the other side of the counter and on the back of order forms I would just jot down funny things I would see."

**On reading her work in public:**

"I still get real nervous performing. But then I think about what I'm going to eat afterward and I'm OK."

**Advice to young people about writing:**

"Through writing, young people can break down negative and demeaning stereotypes of their own community. But the majority of the students I speak to haven't read anything that's similar to their world. So, if I were them, I'd challenge a teacher about that or pick one person who is supportive about my writing, my voice. It's not always going to be your teacher, your parent or even your best friend."

