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A Critical Bricoleur Assumes Positive Intent: *Pablito's Problem*

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A CRITICAL BRICOLEUR ASSUMES
POSITIVE INTENT: PABLITO'S
PROBLEM

A Dissertation

by

PAUL PÉREZ-JIMÉNEZ

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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POSITIVE INTENT: PABLITO'S
PROBLEM

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December 2019

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation serves to further critical theory research through bricolage autoethnography of a Latinx English teacher from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The bricolage functions to unify reflective constructs that expose an emancipatory catharsis and painful reacquaintance with individual and cultural identity. This project offers the concept of a *happening* as a construct embedded with the ongoing, reflective, and liberating critical consciousness process. Four happenings are offered and establish that the dichotomies of oppression and liberation, how they happened, are happening or may happen are not easily recognizable unless critical introspection is involved. The leading *happening* titled *Pablito's Problem* chronicles the first recollection of oppression as a prepubescent. Followed by the second happening titled *The Monkey* — set during the '70s and '80 through secondary education, *Jesús Mil Veces* — looks at family traditions, and followed by *fear* — which narrates the occasions as an adult that challenge the tendency towards positive intent. Ultimately, the analysis of the four *happenings* identifies four critical consciousness moments as serendipitous results that, while struggling to maintain the fundamental notion of compassion, follow the critical pedagogy mantra.

Keywords: autoethnography, bricolage, critical pedagogy, critical consciousness (CC), *happening*, counter-narrative

DEDICATION

This accomplishment is not mine alone. I dedicate my dissertation work to my beautiful wife, Flor Neréyda Pérez-González, the person who continues to inspire me to use what I have instead of wasting what I do not have. You continue to be both the thorn and the rose in my life; I hope you always will. I cannot imagine life any other way.

This work is further dedicated to my girls... Flor Wendelyn, Samantha Paola, Amy Emilyn, and Katalina Destiny (Wendy, Sammy, Amy and KD) for understanding and forgiving me for the times I was tied up in the attic - writing.

Special thanks to my parents Pablo Pérez-Ramírez and Esperanza Jiménez de Pérez along with María de Lourdes - Lou, Ignacio -Nacho, and Concepción - Connie. I know I missed much.

I wish I could mention all my family members and friends; all of you make me who I am. And, ultimately, I dedicate this inspiration for the greater glory of God.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam - AMDG.

“¡Dios mío! ¡Dame fuerzas!”

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I consciously acknowledge my oppressions & oppressors as part of the liberating process. In spite of your hurdles and thorns in my side, I finished strong!

And, just as important, I thank all my teachers and professors. Dr. Myriam- thank you for your example and courage, Dr. Morgan- your Cooperative Learning (CL) style impacted me forever, and Dr. Karin, your encouraging insights remain invaluable. The andragogy you all modeled will forever be part of my teaching philosophy.

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Special thanks to Ms. Annabelle Olivarez for her invaluable help in the editing of this document.

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“¡Mil gracias!”

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

There are people out there trying to rewrite our history.

These are a dangerous people. They'll say anything to be legitimized.

Someday, some little Latina with a big mouth is gonna read a few books

And convince themselves they contributed to our country.

Now, pray that those falsehoods do not seep into the fabric of this fine nation.

Because if they do, God help us all.

John Leguizamo from *Latin History for Morons* (2018)

Much like the epigraph which reveals a self-proclaimed "ghetto scholar," who uses his identity crisis as a personal narrative that echoes Latinx culture to deliver a harsh lesson about the happenings of oppression, this autoethnography endeavors to build upon critical cultural research by reflecting, "arbitrating [my] own presence in the world," and offering a unique "storied performance of life experiences" intent on analyzing the emancipatory process (Denzin, 2014, p. 4; Leguizamo, 2018). Leguizamo takes on the persona of a teacher and mixes in personal anecdotes to impart a history of tyrannical atrocities that have kept Latinxs subjugated. He attempts liberating us by shedding light on historical events of which most of us were not aware. Through an appealing narrative, Leguizamo reveals his unique character; he uncovers our cultural identity; and, he confronts what is happening. As a renown comedian, he "take[s] arms against a sea of troubles," and proselytizes Latinx history to an audience expecting comedic entertainment (Shakespeare, 2012, p 688). While surpassing our expectations, he offers a bonus

of highlighted inequalities and direct callouts against the racism that plagues society---we get an emotional call to arms for liberation from oppression. Although Leguizamo's attempt at teaching is nothing short of spectacular, I was further impressed that he provides, like any excellent instructor, a syllabus with references to support his claims. Leguizamo's comedy routine had me in stitches, and just as impressive, it has gone from Broadway to the Netflix screen. However, Shakespeare's "sea of troubles" quotation has an adjacent line, "...and by opposing end them?" which questions the effectiveness of affective testimonials on oppression and insinuates there should be more.

Statement of the Problem

The underlying perception is that we, Latinxs, are not all fully aware of our history, and by extension, our oppression, thus we have lost our freedom, agency, and identity (Jaksic, 2015; Llorente, 2015; Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2016). The ethnonym debate among Latino, Latina, Latin@ and Latinx not to mention Hispanic and the term's connotations incite our Latinx passions and make get together controversial. This underlying perception led me to reflect on my positionality and what I understood about liberation. More precisely, the problem centers on Freirean "conscientização," consciousness-raising or critical consciousness (CC), what Mustakova-Possardt calls

the ability of individuals to take perspective on their immediate cultural, social, and political environment, to engage in critical dialogue with it, bringing to bear fundamental moral commitments including concerns for justice and equity, and to define their own place with respect to surrounding reality (Freire, 2005, 2011; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998).

Gutek explains that the issue is complex, for even if Latinxs are aware of the situation, interest is based on what Freire calls a "magical or naïve understanding" that is not based on

"critical understanding," or critical consciousness defined as the type of emancipation that propels towards changing reality and ultimately influences culture (Freire, 2005; Gutek, 2005; Mustakova-Possardt et al., 2014). Liberation and oppression, hint of a subtle polarized dichotomy, that is not easily recognizable unless critical introspection is involved. Reflection involves how it happened, is happening, or may happen. Thus, the word '*happening*' is a constant that is appropriate to use as a representation of the holistic process proposed in conscientization narratives. The topic proposed is further narrowed to the autoethnographic *happenings* as a bricolage or constructs of liberation from oppression seen in the narratives of a Latinx English teacher from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Therefore, in as much as this dissertation is an academic endeavor, it also represents a lifelong commitment to understanding how writing about the significant aspects of my life or *happenings* has formed who I am. My narratives form four *happenings* that were chosen to illustrate a lifelong progression towards emancipatory awareness.

Key Concepts

Defining critical terms used before elaborating on the purpose and significance of the study is necessary to understanding this autoethnography. The significant characteristics include an unconventional exemplification of bricolage and its critical consciousness narratives involved in the autoethnography. The distinction refers to the *happening*, which calls for a unique amplification as derived from the bricolage, autoethnography, and critical consciousness; the latter will be further addressed in the Literature Review.

Bricolage

While the dictionary defines bricolage as a "construction or creation from a diverse range of available things, something constructed or created from a diverse range of things," Spencer

Kornhaber, a contemporary pop-culture writer, compares it to "Instagram's nostalgic filters and the bricolage identity-curation platform like Pinterest," both of which allude to the formation of structure from a range of ideas. (Bricolage Definition of Bricolage by Lexico, n.d.; Kornhaber, 2019). Autoethnography gurus point out the bricolage as "seek[ing] insight from the margins and implies the fictive and imaginative elements of presentation" that empowers the marginalized autoethnographer "to produce new forms of knowledge" (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 246). Kincheloe et al., further claim that "research knowledge described as dramatic ways of observing and making meaning constitutes the methodological bricolage" and thus allows autoethnographers creative license (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 246). Orbe further defines bricolage by stating that it is "theorizing as capturing the essence of something alive, fluid, and current" and hooks claims it is also an autoethnographer's attempt at "looking at the world differently, using theory as intervention, as a way to challenge the status quo" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; hooks, 1992; Orbe, 2005, p 66). Theorizing in the bricolage is contrasted with "social theory in the modernist empiricist mode of understanding that operates without variation in every context (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p.245).

The Happening

Therefore, the *happening* is theorizing that becomes part of the bricolage as an "eclectic process that demands a new level of research self-consciousness and awareness of 'complexities' [that] highlights the relationship between a researcher's way of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history" (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p.244). In basic terms, the *happening* is my method of conveying the world as an autoethnography. Furthermore, I take a cue from Adams, Jones & Ellis when they explain autoethnography in the following manner.

Conceptualist artists are innovators who create new and often unexpected ideas, perspectives, and experiences. In conceptualist autoethnography, personal stories become the mechanism for conveying and critiquing cultural experiences, breaking silences, and reclaiming voices. Conceptualist autoethnographies use first-, second-, and third-person narration and are highly reflexive. Conceptualist texts question the role and purpose of research and writing, the formality of research texts, the role of the author as an artist, and the lessons that autoethnography can offer writers and readers. In conceptualist texts, interpretation and analysis are the inspiration for story; showing and interpreting are tightly coupled (2014, p. 125).

While the genesis of the proposed *happening* concept traces its roots to the bricolage, history recalls a *happening* as avant-garde performance art that was in vogue in the 1960s. They were notorious for being extreme. According to Sanford, they were "engaged in a struggle to force a complete re-examination of the cultural and historical situation," but because of their radical nature that included the use of taboos as shock value (often used nudity), they were overshadowed by the civil rights movement (Sandford, 2003, p. 18). Other than the call to social

action and spontaneity, my proposed version of a *happening* tends towards rumination and narrative involvement of its constituents. Metaphorically, *happenings* are the data, tools, or artifacts for the construct of the bricolage and consequently serve as the conceptual framework for this project.

In addition, the term *happening* is intentionally used as a gerund, otherwise known as a noun, derived from the verb to happen. It is defined as occurring or taking place by chance, befalling, transpiring, which insinuate continuity in time and place while also used as a noun such as an experience, action, and change (Happen, n.d.).

***Happening* Further Defined**

I define a happening as deploying art to reflect, interpret, and communicate a conscious change. The *happenings* start and become different. They are a mirror of the critical consciousness process as transformation. My storied life becomes my illustrated life since I use stories, poems, and watercolor paintings to communicate critical consciousness in my life.

Espinosa-Dulanto states, "it happened, and the rape was not only a moment or an action or a penetration," suggesting ongoing results of memories that echo (Espinosa-Dulanto, 2019). Similarly, a happening depicts oppression and its ongoing victimizing results. A *happening* is a time loop or scratched vinyl record that skips back to play the same part of a memory. However, through the *happening* critical consciousness occurs not once but continuously as knowledge or awareness of oppression. It is a didactic endeavor that models understanding what happened and continues to happen in a narrative as lived experience. It is any art as a counter-narrative of the oppressed in the process of becoming freedom resulting in the critical consciousness analysis. Critical consciousness has *happening* as its first name with counter-narrative as its surname (Espinosa-Dulanto, 2019).

The *happening* has its dark side when we do not reflect and learn from it; then, the scratched vinyl record becomes a torment, the *happening* dwindles to merely repeated trauma. Fear then avoids the *happening* as re-victimization or as a reminder of oppression. *Happenings* lead to levels of understanding; otherwise, they are merely oppressive memories. Therefore, the schema of this autoethnography is made up of a series of *happenings* conveyed in personal narratives or vignettes, some of which started as oppressive memories.

An example of the *happening* as an accumulation of vignettes titled *Pablito's Problem* is included in Chapter Four. It relates Pablito learning when he became Paul, while a different version of a *happening* recounts Paul learning why he became Paul and yet a different *happening* underscores Paul accepting Paul on his own terms. Furthermore, another *happening* elaborates on how Paul uses his experience as a didactic opportunity to teach or help others see the emancipatory event. Moreover, *happenings* can continue, such as Paul telling his story to educators in an effort to highlight unintentional oppression when they realize they have made Pauls out of Pablitos, Gregs out of Gregorios or Marys out of Marias and voiding potential oppression (Freire, 2005).

An actual *happening* includes a reflective narrative as the agent of experiential knowledge. A *happening* includes other *happenings* analyzed through the reflective process. A *happening* is not limited to one media. It is what Kincheloe et al. call "lured disciplinary genres" and includes any narrative form that may use multiple intelligences and multiple media, as noted in Figure 3, a watercolor painting titled Jotted Memory of Pablito's neighborhood. Pablito recalls his house as the ugliest on the block. A separate insightful *happening* claims it as one impetus for leaving home as a teenager, while the nostalgic dreamlike painting is also addressed in a different *happening*. Therefore, knowledge is plural through the *happenings*.

Furthermore, a *happening* is a testimonial for continuous change. It is not a static counter-narrative even after it has been published. It is a tree that grows; it has leaves and branches resulting from the reflexive growth; and, its blooms and fruit as knowledge. A *happening* may take a dialogue or narrative form, but it can easily be a painting or any performance construct. If life is a story, then happenings are how we interpret and recount what happened and is happening on a conscious scale. Therefore, a narrative differs from a *happening* when a "praxis" of change occurs (Freire, 2005, p 65).

Autoethnography

As an autoethnography, this study endeavor seeks the data in *happenings*, as liberation stories, and ultimately as valid Latinx's testimonials of critical consciousness (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014). It includes "autoethnographic voice that concentrates on telling a personal, evocative story to provoke others' stories and adds blood and tissue to the abstract ones of theoretical discourse" (Bochner & Ellis, 2011). Denzin details the autoethnographer's position as:

auto: self-reflection

ethno: to explore people's experiences

graph: to write, to make an image,

to perform a script that I (or you) create;

autoethnography: bending the past to the present;

I write my way into and through my experiences;

I treat myself as an universal singular;

I devise a script and play myself. (Denzin, 2018, p. 14)

It is autoethnography as a storied life experience and a bricolage of *happenings*, inherently political for social change, and intended to impact malleable minds open to hear them

and participate. Autoethnography is a cultural encounter with the self and a mirror that not only reflects both but attempts to amplify their partnership.

Critical Consciousness (CC)

CC also known as Freirean "conscientization" and its profoundly political overtones, critical consciousness is "critical awareness of the social, political, and economic conditions and contradictions of a person's life is necessary in order to identify those that are repressive or oppressive" (Gutek, 2005, p., 431). While there is no litmus test for critical consciousness, we know that we know as an abstract endeavor in a Cartesian manner ("Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth," 1993). Congruently, Freire refers us to the "Jasperian 'split'—consciousness as consciousness of consciousness," not to riddle us with a double tautology but to underscore consciousness similar to a metacognitive endeavor (2005, p. 79). In simpler terms, consciousness is experience and understanding the consequences of the experience.

Critical consciousness is fundamental to this study because it is the impetus towards autonomy. It is that light bulb turning on moment or that aha flash that is seen in a student's face when they understand a concept that has eluded them. It is the flash of release from ignorance that teachers cherish because it liberates them as well (Freire, 2005). Therefore, critical consciousness is "produc[ing] knowledge that may conflict with prevailing interpretations" and identifying that moment of awareness of the process is the aim of this study (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 9). Critical consciousness as revolutionary brings about independent thinking and is therefore synonymous with education (Mclaren, 1998). Freire claimed the "discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action: nor can it be limited to mere activism but must include serious reflection; only then will it be praxis [and must be] presupposed by critical and liberating

dialogue" (Freire, 2005, p. 65). Critical Consciousness is a narrative structure as an introspective dialogue in the learning process. Critical pedagogy is, therefore, the theory by which the *happenings* are "represented."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand the *happenings* of my storied life as counter-narratives of oppression. And, how turning to critical consciousness for inspiration which serves as a launching platform for "denouncing normalized notions of power and domination" is relevant for all who share a Latinx history (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 236; Ramos, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, based on Freire's version of ideology as the "belief system—the core beliefs and values—that creates and maintains a group's identity and often expressed in a view of history and a political agenda," it is the determination of this study to find the sources (plural) of shared oppression by discovering my subtle, political and ideological undertones expressed in the *happenings* (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) (Gutek, 2005, p. 428). Therefore, this proposal lays out the *happening* as a conceptual framework for this study which is substantiated by three basic ideas: 1) a storied life leads to self-narratives, 2) self-narratives as reflexive always inform and change ideologies, and 3) understanding the information enhances critical consciousness that propels to comprehend individual and collective identities further and to create our reality and culture (Bruner, 2003; Chang, 2015; Freire, 2005; Hayler, & Moriarty, 2017). In short, the *happening* shows that we understand our story — by extension — our history that it is not only the past but our present, and it leads us to update our positionality. The autoethnographic purpose of this study is to model an understanding of my emancipation and how it impacted my past, formed parts of my present, and how it motivates me to change my future.

Significance of the Study

The idea is to hearten creativity and imagination using writing as a tool to learn/teach social endeavors and to lead by understanding critical consciousness (Denzin, 2018). Through a bricolage of autoethnographic narratives, seen from critical consciousness and derived from critical pedagogy, I will investigate my critical consciousness that gave way to knowledge of my oppression (Freire, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001). As a major significance, this study is a Latinx exercise in agency. Therefore, the importance of this study includes the marginalized ability to display literary craft and passion, intertwined with didactic tendencies and fiction that I locate within performance autoethnography. As such, this study adds to not only the discourse made famous by Paulo Freire on liberation as a self-making process or conscientization but also to the current extant discourse on autoethnography as a media to illustrate culture awareness in the self-making process.

Research Questions

Although the issue of pinpointing the exact moment of my critical consciousness is fascinating to the point of necessitating its documentation — most would deem it too personal, private, and having an undetermined compensation. Hayano, as one of the first autoethnographers, explains, "the problems of autoethnography are the problems of ethnography compounded by the researcher's involvement and intimacy with his subjects" (Hayano, 1979, p. 99). The intimacy gives way to issues of ideologies that include emotional (psychological), philosophical, epistemological, ontological, socio-political, and are formed as controversial inquiries such as:

-Am I ready to know if I am truly liberated? (Is this going to cause pain?)

-Do I know what I am doing, or is this an example of Frankenstein's hubris that I teach my students (epistemological/knowledge/identity)?

-Do I believe everything happens for a reason?

-Should I know these answers (ontological)?

-Am I unique in asking and wanting to understand?

-How normal or different am I?

-Do I have a right to know?

-Why should I teach what I believe (socio-political, prosocial)?

These issues exemplified in the proposed *happenings* point to the main research question:

-How is critical consciousness depicted as knowledge production in the lived experience of a Latinx English teacher's happenings?

Moreover, several sub-questions that stem from the first and drive this research study include:

-How are the happenings part of the social fabric?

-How do happenings form the autoethnography and the bricolage?

In this study, I expect to answer these questions by weighing in current literature as a point of origin and move towards showing that individual agency shown in authentic, creative, and critical narratives lead to group agency with valid social opinions that eventually translate into social action (Freire, 2005). This literature analysis begins by taking an in-depth look at the narrative as imaginative, progressive, and dynamic, followed by exploring the resulting narrative's content from critical consciousness as a theoretical lens, and finally examining current, focal literature that values a bricolage as a creative endeavor.

Outcomes of the Study

While I admit that the framework of this research study unusual, complex, and even esoteric to a novice without deep understanding of qualitative research or anyone not directly involved in every aspect of the study, I therefore avoid attempts at criteria making for evaluative purposes in favor of what Adams, Bochner & Ellis describe as outcomes or goals which are the closest likeness to minimal conditions for an autoethnography. Bochner explains that "the word criteria itself is a term that separates modernists from postmodernists, foundationalists from anti-foundationalists, empiricists from interpretivists, and scientists from artists," insinuating that any form of criteria would be seen from a Goldilocks and the three bear's viewpoint --- too subjective or too objective (Bochner, 2000, p. 266). Consequently, the targeted goals used in the implementation of this study include working towards:

- 1) Illustrating critical consciousness for the field or society's benefit. It involves the experience of knowledge-making or highlighting the arrival at being aware that oppression has taken place.

- 2) Respecting every individual and their experience as necessary, including the autoethnographer. In particular, this calls for ethical awareness and sensitivity, which means there are topics, characters, and circumstances that I must avoid or that I must circumvent not to avoid controversy but to evade the possibility of hurting someone even in an indirect manner.

We are all part of *happenings* that may affect us but for which we are not owners. Although the *happenings* are my memories or recollections expressed in a fictional creative literary media, I choose to avoid some.

- 3) Recognizing the significance of any original structure. Which means that I must analyze my own creations, why I made them, and not others.

4) And, finally, practicing and promoting research at a high level (Adams, Bochner & Ellis, 2014, p.142). I choose to follow the call to action and "further establish autoethnography as a rich and viable method for social research by teaching, talking about, and writing autoethnography" (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2013 p. 678). This outcome brings us full circle to the first and includes critical scholarship as an emancipatory call to arms.

Ultimately, this study aims to recognize and value the perspective of the oppressed other by stressing one individual's lived experience and reflective narratives that highlight the emancipatory knowledge building process, which I call *happenings*. Specifically, these *happenings* are broken down by epochs that preliminarily show a progression in experience and knowledge, indicating critical consciousness is continuous and far from static.

Correspondingly, the assessment of this autoethnography by nature is also elusive, tied to the bricolage only compounds the intangible. The current discourse agrees with Gingrich-Philbrook, who speculates that "any evaluation of autoethnography...is simply another story from a highly situated, privileged, empowered subject about something he or she experienced. To evaluate autoethnography in a genuinely useful way, you have to open yourself up to being changed by it, to heeding its call to surrender your entitlement" (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2016, p 618). Therefore, the *happening* is my manner of finding critical consciousness within the autoethnography.

Moreover, I must note that no amount of preparation, research, or objective reasoning can prepare anyone for such an autoethnographic endeavor. The four *happenings* have given way to outcomes that function as occasions to recognize, to de-link, and to transform oppressive orientations into occurrences that give voice to compassion, justice, and love. They begin with *Pablito's Problem* — which chronicles my first recollection of oppression as a prepubescent.

Followed by the second happening titled *The Monkey* — set during the '70s and '80s or through secondary education, *Jesús Mil Veces* — looks at family traditions, and followed by *fear* — which narrates the occasions that challenge me to assume positive intent as an adult. They are further explored in chapter three.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For this dissertation, the review of literature must encompass established and current contextual works while attempting to relate three central categories: the self-narrative, critical consciousness, and bricolage. Narrative, as a reflective endeavor, express agency, and positionality. As critical consciousness the narrative becomes emancipatory through Freirean praxis, and the bricolage creatively brings together the narratives into one cohesive autoethnography (Denzin, 2012; Ellis, 2016; Freire, 2011; Kincheloe,2001; McGrady et al., 2001; Reed-Danahay, 2017). Conversely, it is beyond the scope of this paper to chronicle the history of the three central categories, however, I must note that several scholars consistently pop up in every research database; these include Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, Deborah Reed-Danahay, Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner, Norman Denzin, Joe Kincheloe, Tony Adams, Tami Spry, Yvonne Lincoln, and Heewon Chang. While these scholars may only constitute 20% of the references, they also represent 80% of the total research material. Furthermore, all these researchers have contributed to the field for well over thirty years. Still, I have made it a priority to seek out their latest work or editions, barring the great Aristotle and Freire, and although it has not always been the case, I attempted to seek fresh scholarship that is less than ten years old.

Taking a cue from Leguizamo, I offer my version of "arms against a sea of troubles" by highlighting my liberation process. I propose through multiple reflections and "research

constructs as part of a bricolage of *happenings*--my "self-conscious, contextual" *happenings* as narratives to decontextualize and synthesize my "critical consciousness," to further social change while remaining true to a positive, compassionate outlook (Paulo Freire, 2011; Kincheloe, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzo, 2018). In an effort to advance social equity I offer an autoethnography that incorporates all four of what Chang terms "typologies," that includes the "imaginative creative (IC)" consisting of narratives, poetry, and art (watercolor), but also embraces "descriptive realistic (DR) tendencies that often make use of raw "confessional emotive (CE)" inclinations without forgetting the "analytic interpretive (AI)" formal process known as qualitative research inherent in the autoethnographic methodology. (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016). I offer the autoethnography using critical pedagogy as a lens to see the contemporary issues of oppression, along with a hodge-podge of personal narratives that teeter between autobiography and creative nonfiction to stress internal and external conflict from my marginalized geography. While attempting to avoid the esoteric, the topography of this study relates to becoming aware of growing up oppressed in the latter part of the twentieth century in a south Texas border town. Borrowing words from Tedlock and Strauss, I will "braid" critical pedagogy's liberation process of consciousness as a bricolage with the narrative lived experience and creative nonfiction as a framework to reveal identity.

And, I use four *happenings* from my lived experience as part of that braid (Bochner, 2000,2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016; Ellis, 2016; Freire, 2005; Spry, 2018; Tedlock, 2018). Furthermore, this endeavor requires "reflective self-discernment as well as critical cultural understanding," that bids me back to my Latinx roots on several levels, and I have been jolted with memories that have rekindled my passion for the narrative to highlight modernity's social injustices (Bruner, 2003; Chang, 2016, Kincheloe, 2011; Spry, Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko,

2009). Much like Leguizamo, as a jack-of-all-trades (bricoleur), I, as a "writer-performer-observer," offer the *happenings* as specimens of live current, continuous culture for our consideration, engagement, criticism, and synthesis of understanding (Denzin, 2012; Kincheloe, 2011; Orbe, 2005; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001, 2018). The *happenings*, as examples of marginalization, retell the story as narratives full of cultural nuances that will be analyzed.

Lived Experience, Narrative Writer, Text, Audience, & Reflection

What has been said is confirmed by the fact that while young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience.

-Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (384 B.C.E. – 322 B.C.E.)

Although in a politically correct world, many would wince at Aristotle's claim about the young and practical wisdom, the emphasis is on *familiarizing* as the link of practical wisdom's universals with the particulars of experience. Aristotle's application confirms that knowledge comes from specific reflective, sometimes esoteric, cognitive details made as such by time and practice. Furthermore, based on the traditional definition of bricolage as part of a "fossilized" rendition of history, Aristotle's stance should be seen as one possible rendition of many (Strauss, 1962). Similarly, this study attempts to familiarize the particulars of lived experience from the universal vantage of the marginalized depicted in the narratives of lived experience also known as performative text.

The *happening* adheres to the National Storytelling Network's definition of narrative or "storytelling as the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination" (NSN, 2018). Storytelling/narrative is an

art, and its delivery of the lived experience is a medium much like the brush and paint is to the painting; it relays a story. It has roots in oral and folklore as rich traditions of which volumes of storytelling literature exist. Symon and Maggio explain that:

Stories in this context are processes through which society (open-ended, ongoing activity) becomes culture (activity contextualized to specific circumstances). The stories are meaningful selections - deliberate or subconscious choices by people who construct and share their worldviews by connecting some aspects in particular ways (2014, p. 2).

Although the topic and the context of the narrative are important, they stand in contrast to the content and its presentation, such as the suffering or indignities experienced by the storyteller and the rendition of the story's *happenings*. Adams, Holman, and Ellis state the "story is the mechanism that illustrates and embodies these nuances and happenings" (2014, p. 129).

We have all experienced a version of storytelling that puts us to sleep, such as a professor's lecture that includes a narrative delivered in a monotone and indifferent to the audience's participation, or a person at a party whose attempts at storytelling are lackluster. A solution lies in retelling the heartfelt lived experiences. Although storied lives encompassing angles that vary from the empirical to the ontological can also be textualized and captured by the art of storytelling, they can also be argued in strict narratology processes (Bruner, 2012; Schrader, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Prince, 2012). Browning claims that "narratology is the study and theory of narratives, or complex stories- what they are made of, how they are structured, and what we gain from using them as a vehicle for communication" (Browning, 2009, p 673). Therefore, as a narratologist, I will analyze my narratives as a means of communicating the critical consciousness process- it's content and its context.

Narrative as self-making.

However, the storytelling process within an autoethnography is a much more intimate narrative process that Jerome Bruner terms an "act of self-making" that defines the storyteller (Bruner, 2002). Jerome Bruner explains:

The narrative [is] usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be- and, of course, shouldn't be. Nevertheless, much of self-making is from outside in- based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad expectations that we subconsciously pick up from the culture in which we are immersed. (p.65)

The narratives reveal the act of "self-making" and frame identity in ways that I had not considered until I took on this autoethnographic task. Initially, I thought I was already liberated or aware of my critical consciousness, and, I may have been to a certain extent, however, as this autoethnography unfolded, I have found new levels of critical consciousness and awareness. This "self-making" will be further explored in the next section as critical consciousness (Bruner, 2002; Freire, 2011).

Furthermore, Tedlock, trained as an Aztec shaman, has the most remarkable take on qualitative research that blends unique styles and blurs the boundaries between research and figurative language. As a researcher, she has a figurative writing style that abounds with metaphors and similes to give us vibrant descriptions. For example, in describing autoethnography, she claims it is "like street photographers, seek[ing] the magical in the quotidian: lemon yellow flowers framed in gray-and-purple thunderstorms" (Tedlock found in

Denzin, p. 855). Tedlock emphasizes that it is ok to use a literary style to write about qualitative research, and that is what I so desperately needed to hear.

Tedlock also explains rhizomatic theory as having "neither a beginning nor an end," it can begin from any part, and "without hierarchies produces a nomadic space, a place where individuals are shaped by new experiences and identities that may lead to the development of double consciousness," which allows researchers to delve into a "partial enculturation" in order to understand (Tedlock found in Denzin, pg. 857). Her writing has nudged me to shift my perspective about research and writing. It encouraged me and resulted in stories that illustrate what was *happening* at that time instead of defining what I wish had happened; Tedlock's writing served as a catharsis. This paradigm shift echoed what Paulo Freire claims must happen to the oppressed; I had to come to terms with myself as a writer that embraces his abstract tendencies. I had to learn this on my own as a personal pedagogy (Paulo Freire, 2011). I now know it as a critical pedagogy.

The criticality of Theory, Pedagogy, and Consciousness

Since there are few if any marginalized Latinx male English teachers in South Texas that are trained, qualified, and willing to undertake and explore the autoethnography task, I have made it an objective to identify emancipatory decoloniality and "de-linking" through the reconstructions of my lived experiences (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Dutta, 2018; Laughter et al., 2015; Mignolo, 2011). These concepts are briefly addressed in the *happening* titled, *Pablito's Problem*, but examined in detail in the *happenings* related to the identity of place, time, and knowledge.

Furthermore, the narratives embrace thinking as "pluriversal" or not singly attributed to a species, class type, or time, much less nationality, and therefore intrinsically critical. Walter

Mignolo, who has written extensively on decoloniality and semiotics, goes on to emphasize a "global political society" instead of a nationalistic agenda so prevalent today. These issues are commonplace in big business, which negates the dignity of the maquiladora worker and which is central to the fourth *happening* titled *fear*. This last *happening* includes a short story titled *Coyote del Año*, which underscores oppression encountered as everyday life on the South Texas border with Mexico (Mignolo, 2011).

While Kincheloe et al. claim that critical theory "[brings] attention to differences, singularity of experiences, and identities," they also state one clear distinction in their definition of a critical theorist as "a critical scholar/pedagogue/activist as a researcher, teacher or theorist who attempts to use [their] work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions," (Kincheloe et. al. 2018, p 237). Moreover, they mention seven points considered crucial for the critical theorist's mantra. Briefly, these are 1) thought is mediated by power, 2) facts are tied to values or ideologies, 3) capitalist tendencies mediate concepts and objects, 4) language forms awareness, 5) hegemony exists, 6) oppression is plural, and 7) research practices are implicated in maintaining capitalism as well as all other forms of oppression (Kincheloe, 2018, p. 237).

Kincheloe et al. 's seven-point definition of critical theory, which indirectly connects not only John Leguizamo and me, but directly points to critical pedagogy and eventually brings up the bricolage or bricoleur as "handy" person that creatively uses everything at their disposal to finish a task. Lisa Given's, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* categorizes the bricolage as "arts-based research" (Given, 2008, p. xiv) while Denzin & Lincoln mention a "pragmatic, strategic, self-reflective, and pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This is an important definition

that speaks to the heart of this study for as a personal praxis, most teachers (and I include myself) do not consider ourselves researcher activists, much less critical bricoleurs (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Handforth & Taylor, 2016; Hatton, 1989; Lévi-Strauss, 1962; McGrady et al., 2001). That is, until a task such as this autoethnographic dissertation is taken on and research practices become consequential.

Furthermore, the knowledge-building process which Ndlovu-Gatsheni states is "at the core of decoloniality [a]s the agenda of shifting the geography and biography of knowledge-who generates knowledge and from where?" becomes an emancipatory action (Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 14). Moreover, I make no effort to hide the fact that this research is an attempt to "shift" from customary empirical research that underscores conformity and tradition that only benefits hegemony. This autoethnography strives to feature a unique and creative knowledge to critique the current powers and society that drive our popular culture and have marked the marginalized as socialistic and anti-American. I do not shy away from being different, at least not anymore (Hancock, Allen, & Lewis, 2015).

Critical pedagogy.

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever. Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never

rude or selfish; it does not take offense and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes. Love does not come to an end.

----- 1 Corinthians 13: 1-8

Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* mentioned, "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches" (p. 80). This bonding is a humbling process that is part of several of the *happenings* as discursive and dialogical in which the latter strives to model the creative side of what Freire calls integral to critical consciousness and true freedom. Dialogue is powerful. It is what teachers call teaching for social justice (Laughter et al., 2015). The discussion shows students we care and storytelling with them is a crucial aspect of learning, bonding, and is assuming positive intent. If teachers do not learn to accept students as teachers through this dialogue or storytelling, then much as Julio Cammarota and Augustine Romero predict in *Raza Studies* the "tradition of critical pedagogies that educate for the benefit of humanity" will be for naught (Cammarota & Romero, 2014). However, I have included the epitaph from the New Testament to indicate that we must all demonstrate love and compassion and treat everyone as our intellectual equal otherwise, we come across as condescending and objectifying people. Freire states, "attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects that must be saved from a burning building," and illustrates the need for compassion (Freire, 2005, p. 65). Bringing about liberation is the ultimate act of kindness and compassion. Mustakova-Possardt suggests trading in the golden rule for a platinum rule which posits "treat each other as we would have others treat us"

(Mustakova-Possardt & Lyubansky, 2014, p.110). This quote serves as a reminder to assume positive intent and always practice compassion even though sometimes love from others is not apparent. Moreover, the last *happening* demonstrates that love does not wane, nor is it contingent (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007).

Conscious Oppression.

In 1925 a seven-year-old named Rolihlahla from Mvezo in the district of Umtata, the capital of Transkei, started his first day of school where he was stripped of his birth name, one of the only things given to him by his father and given a "Christian" name because the British colonials could not pronounce his original name and considered it "uncivilized" (Mandela, 2008). In the same way, in 1970 and half a world away from South Africa, my second grade, Anglo-protestant teacher told me that I did not look like a Pablito and rechristened me, Paul, essentially downplaying my Spanish language, Latinx culture, and fragile identity because in my teacher's worldview they were different, marginalized, and exemplified the other. The US-mainstream culture, English language, and identity continue to, in the words of the great Rolihlahla "Nelson" Mandela, "automatically assume to be superior" (Mandela, 2008).

Pablito's incident is the premise for the leading *happening* and is included in Chapter Three. Moreover, it has taken me a lifetime to come to terms with the differences and its consequences. Pablito's oppressive assimilation begs to be told in a narrative or performance autoethnography. This endeavor involves a massive dose of soul searching and gut-wrenching reflective writing. And, I have come to understand how painful. Paulo Freire mentions that "only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both [the oppressed and the oppressor]" (Freire, 2011 pg. 44). This statement hints of weakness and is the basis for a narrative about zombies as part of the *fear happening*.

Praxis of Critical Consciousness: Language & Identity

Furthermore, staying true to Freire's critical consciousness that requires action against oppression, I knew that I had to take action (Freire, 2011). This action can best be explained through Tedlock's double consciousness and partial enculturation (Tedlock, 2018). Instead of rejecting the oppressor and in this case, it was the U.S.A. way of life and language or dismissing the oppressor's language, I embraced it by going back to school and becoming an English teacher with a master's degree in rhetoric and composition and soon to have a doctoral degree as well. I welcome the ability to "dialogue" with it and learn knowledge with it in order to create my own reality or what Freire termed, "education as the practice of freedom" or, more specifically, "a historical epoch characterized by a series of aspirations, concerns, and values in search of fulfillment; by ways of being and behaving; by more or less generalized attitudes" (Freire, 2005a, p. 5).

As one of these "epochs of freedom," I distinctly recall learning and understanding that the word *critical* has other definitions besides important and criticism. It also means "exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation, such as 'critical thinking' or 'critical commentary'" (Critical, n.d.). Freire thus refers to critical as a careful judgment or judicious evaluation rather than a significant criticism, which in itself is an essential semantic clarification. Furthermore, his process of conscientização seen holistically refers to its opposite as "magic or naïve understanding" in which consciousness as critical is an "attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context" (Freire, 2005). This critical (in the full sense of the word as important and careful judgment) understanding moves us to act and change our reality, it is the creation and re-creation of our environment or "reality." It is the liberating process by which we impact and determine our culture (Freire, 2005,

p. 5). Thus, the conscious, liberated person is distinctively artistically creative and innovative and uses their abilities to change their environment; they make things happen. And, it is essential to note this awareness was an impetus to not only journal or narrate my stories but to also use watercolor drawings as depictions of what Shakespeare called, "[my] mind's eye" (Shakespeare & Editors, 2003, p. 7). Furthermore, this critical consciousness is the act of cognition as knowledge awareness and knowledge building of which educators and researchers are particularly capable. Ergo critical consciousness is what education strives for.

Nonetheless, I firmly believe that rejecting the English language and US-way of life or style would have given the oppressor or hierarchy more power over me by causing more misery. Consequently, as a liberating endeavor and as a creator of my reality and culture, I'm using the language of the oppressor to re-invent and empower myself through reflective stories that take the use of creative license to engage the reader in a dialogue, much like a braid (Tedlock). Therefore, as a bricoleur that uses whatever is available to demonstrate critical pedagogy, I believe that freedom from all oppression lives centrally in not only academic life but also in the personal. An example of creating on my terms is the use of a coat-of-arms which was prevalent in more imperial times, I now use it with a twist of my own to express the idea that we can live in harmony with the past while embracing the future. My coat of arms is unique only to me, and maybe my brother, since it not only uses my paternal surname but my maternal as well (see figure 14). It would not even apply to my daughters.

Nonetheless, I have made a point of addressing the yearning for freedom on a webpage, on a coat of arms which states education precedes freedom, and have used it as part of a truism found on the title page of my e-portfolio's:

"FREEDOM involves consciousness honesty. Honesty practiced breeds trust. Trust leads to good thoughts, personal responsibility, and critical action; justice follows willingly. Love abides where justice flows freely. However, If we ever lose compassion, then we forfeit the right to FREEDOM."

(Paul Perez-Jimenez, 2012)

Following the logic of the truism/philosophy and in direct contrast to Leguizamo's rage, the issue of love and compassion arises. How can the oppressed justify peace and love while fully knowing their oppression and their oppressor? It is so much easier to want to turn the tables and pound their heads in like Leguizamo consistently expresses. And why not? Latinxs may have been colonized and oppressed, but we are still here.

Furthermore, it is predicted that by 2045, the white population in the U.S. will no longer be the majority; the Latinx projected growth rate will soon be 86%, third to multiracial at 176% and the Asian at 93%. And, most astounding is that the white age under 18 will become a minority by 2020 (Frey, 2018). Will Latinxs become the dominant society and oppress those who oppressed them? Leguizamo does a beautiful job of telling us about oppression, but he never mentions liberating our oppressors (Freire, 2011).

This is where we, as teachers have one up on Leguizamo; we can carry on these dialogues with our students. Freire as the consummate authority on critical consciousness as the knowledge of liberation explains that it must happen in the form of exchange or discourse between the teacher and student where both become learners, yet "this lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly solidary with them" (Freire, 2011, p. 45). He also points out that the oppressor or master is

not free either. Freedom is reserved for those that are genuinely human, and that can only happen through love.

Maya Angelou convinced in the power of love, advises, "I am grateful to have been loved and to be loved now and to be able to love, because that liberates. Love liberates" ("Maya Angelou's Master Class Quotes," n.d.). Similarly, Mustakova-Possardt reiterates Freire and states,

love for truth, beauty, and goodness as the missing link that brings together moral values, character, sincerity, moral reasoning, critical discernment, responsibility, empathy, and compassion into a qualitatively different consciousness — empowered, resilient, and authentically moral (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998).

And, she concludes, "Love is the depth dimension of human existence" (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). Then, the great teachers know that compassion is not only part of our pedagogy but is inherent to our personal lives.

Freire also stipulates that the act of liberating ourselves is a magnanimous act, and we should not seek to be masters of our old masters for that would dehumanize ourselves. He states:

Because it [oppression] is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later, being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. For this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well (Freire, 2011, p. 44).

This process of learning to be free of abuse is the pedagogy that Freire speaks of, and critical pedagogy is an attempt to highlight this radical love within education. Furthermore, the bricolage's four *happenings* underscore the conflicts of a vocation as striving towards the love that comes with being fully human. "Our 'vocation' is to be fully human and entirely free, and this can only happen if we go out on a limb and dare to love each other so that we can all be free from oppression" (Freire, 2011, p. 43). This compassion is what I deem a move towards assuming positive intent. The fourth *happening* titled *fear* is an attempt to analyze and reconcile the positive intent within a world that may not value love as much as I do.

Bricolage

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

-Roy Batty, replicant played by Rutger Hauer, Blade Runner, 1982

The preceding epigraph hints, but the movie scene captures a sobbing oppressed android renegade, as he happens to run out of time. He saves the protagonist from falling to his death, and on a rainy roof's edge of a decrepit building, he has no choice but to sit and surrender to his humanoid internal programming that stops his life; however, he first delivers one of the most famous cinematic soliloquies. As death happens, a white dove is freed from his hand to fly off while the protagonist looks on bewildered by what is happening. Roy Batty's last act, as a magnanimous gesture or to declare the value of life regardless of who's it is, saves the one that has been hunting him. In essence, he restores life to a man that is sure to die without his help. Ironically, it is the one thing that he so desperately wants but cannot have. The juxtaposition,

symbolism, and metaphor of sitting while rain, tears mix, and fall, no longer distinguishable, while a white dove rises, moves one to wonder what happened to this marginalized renegade; what was his tale? Avid science-fiction buffs recall Heinlein, Herbert, Asimov as the best; however, Ridley Scott's movie scene and adaptation of Phillip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by far stands out as one of the most captivating glimpses of a tale never told.

The previous scene inspired me to look at the persecuted, the oppressed, and emulate the narrative style, the author's intent, and focus on capturing emotion, arouse wonder, and relay what happened. Such high-quality narratives, text, stories, essays, poems, and media are meant as an "investigation of the nature of individual experiences: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage" (Pinar, 1975) and form part of my *happenings*. My artifact narratives or *happenings* have evolved into reflections that involve an in-depth, intimate look at Freirean philosophy to contextualize the "praxis" of liberation and my identity as a Latinx, as an English teacher, and as a researcher (Paulo Freire, 2005b). Furthermore, these *happenings* continue to evolve into new experiences that influence my positionality and serve a particular interest in my pedagogy and humanity. The emphasis on the quality of the lived experience leads me back to my original insight regarding the *Blade Runner* epigraph and the notion that narrative as craftsmanship for relaying is equally valuable with the lived experience (Bochner, 2017; Segalo & Fine, 2017). To borrow from Ronald J. Pelias,

Tales recalled from the researchers' experiences, put sense-making on display in narrative form... [personal narratives] privilege how people make their lives meaningful, wrestle with the facts at their disposal to

construct coherent explanations of issues that matter to them, and turn experience into stories that serve interests (2018).

Kincheloe goes on to say, "dramatic ways of observing and making meaning constitute the methodological bricolage" (2005, p. 323). And I, therefore, take pride in inventing a novel concept such as the *happening* to go "beyond the blinds of particular disciplines and peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 323).

However, as a researcher, I know the heartfelt, first-person point of view, and inspirational critical narrative text with zest have not always enjoyed the mainstream (Krase, 2018). And, Academia's perfunctory stance on a researcher's positionality within their own research still sparks vitriol to the point that I seriously considered leaving autoethnography for researchers with established credibility; even then, Gloria Anzaldua's voice was "labeled poetic but not theoretical, and, worse, divisive or irrelevant" at one time. (Davalos, 2008).

Then I heard the *silent scream* in Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto's essay beckoning the oppressed voices by noting, "all these forces are in constant struggle to change the hegemonic patterns and constantly build on each other. It is the local, as social agent, with its unplanned displaced traditions and differences that would derange the order of the homogenous-hegemonic plan" (2004). Espinosa-Dulanto's call to arms continues to echo and embolden me to not only tell my story but to find new ways to do so. Hence, the bricolage idea was born.

As a social agent and researcher that opts for a qualitative inquiry, I choose to "braid narrative ethnography with memoir and creative nonfiction" to voice my differences (Tedlock, 2018). Such a conceptual framework embraces an ethnographic approach that includes practitioner observations as well as critical theory and personal narratives as "storied lives"

tinged with creative tendencies (Dubnewick, et al.,2018). I stand with Bochner and Ellis, who advocate, "People who appreciate the gifts of autoethnography realize that when they dive deeply into the ocean of private thoughts and feelings, they can make contact with what is staunchly universal" (2016).

Therefore, like Roy Batty, I too have a tale, actually several "staunchly" not "universal" but rather, as per the Walter Mignolo definition of decoloniality, "pluriversal" and inspirational narratives that refuse to go out as ephemeral "tears in rain" to the ocean of oblivion, but instead continue as a bricolage of *happenings* constructed of parts and changing meanings (Kincheloe et al., 2018;). These *happenings* set the context for and are the means of relaying my identity as a member of a marginalized group that has mastered the oppressor's language by becoming an English teacher and thus using the oppressor's tool for liberation and decoloniality.

This bricolage dissertation is my attempt at creating from the things that surround me. It is an effort to do with what I have -, my love for writing, my family, and creative tendencies, and my liberating experiences that form the autoethnography.

Research places the genesis of bricolage on Levi Strauss's metaphorical rant on the comparison and contrast of the engineer who uses biology as scientific and objective with the bricoleur who uses the verb 'bricoleur,' it's extraneous action, and hinting of speculation in constructing from parts in regards to mythical thought (Straus, 1962; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001; Johnson, 2012). However, I allude to Straus's notion that the bricolage process "take[s] into account that in the continual reconstruction from the same materials, odds and ends in English, it fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society. The relation between the diachronic and synchronic is therefore in a sense reversed" (1962, p. 13)._The insinuating notion that one's history should not only be perceived as an occurrence in time but also

developed through current stances or understanding as an ongoing process not limited by time, drives me to label this endeavor as a continuous *happening*. I pursue an autoethnography in which I propose that indicative of Nietzsche's notion, a bricoleur's perspective of life is both ongoing and fossilized to be continuously re-constructed with tools readily available.

Furthermore, Kincheloe reiterates this perspective in his statement that, "As one labors to expose the various structures that covertly shape one's own and other scholars' research narratives, the bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location on his or her personal history research" (2005, p. 323).

And, encouraged by this complex definition of the bricolage, I turn to the description of my lived experience and narrative, first as the tools to produce a *happening* as data created, then to the analyzing of the data of the *happening* through the aforementioned theoretical lens.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS

Identifying the Framework

This study proposes a bricolage of four autoethnographic *happenings* as data and as method for inquiry. Furthermore, to analyze the *happenings*, I engage theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical predispositions gained from the experience of oppression. To be more precise, the conceptual framework for this dissertation combines narrative autoethnography with creative nonfiction, synthesized as a series of narratives that include drawings and arbitrated from a significant aspect of critical theory which draws further perspective from Critical Pedagogy and decoloniality to understand the complexities of a Latinx English teacher and writer's critical consciousness experiences in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas (Freire, 2011; Mignolo, 2011). Hambleton & Greenwood's description of writers as "shap[ing] thoughts into words, and those words can inspire, motivate, teach, and entertain those who read them," along with Macintyre's notion that, "the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest" amplifies my understanding of autoethnography (2012, p. 4; Macintyre, 2007, p. 219). But, the autoethnographic process is not as easily explained. Hambleton & Greenwood's stance partially correlates to Carolyn Ellis's who stipulates that an "autoethnographic approach, an engaging story, has pushed to connect social science to literature, academic to personal ones, emotions to cognition, and social life to the concrete living of it as stories that focus on the self in social context" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016 p. #).

While working with engineers in manufacturing plants the last of which was an aerospace company that paid for most of my undergraduate degree, I was trained to see the methods and processes in everything. First, we would break everything down into individual segments, and as we put everything back in order, we would write procedures that would later be known as standard operating procedures. There were procedures for everything, even a procedure on how to write a procedure that followed or incorporated an editing process that involved every manager and director's signature for approval; it served as a means to check, double check, triple check, and ultimately, hold everyone accountable. The quantifiable process from an engineering aspect is known as a process chart. In my current field, I teach something very similar known as synthesizing or as I teach it to my secondary students; breaking apart into smaller chunks and putting it back together in a unique way. I thank my master's rhetoric professor for putting synthesizing into perspective.

Similarly, as a breakdown of the methodology, the data comprises storied life experiences to be taken apart, reflected on separately, synthesized into words known as narratives, then reflected on again to analyze them based on a specific criteria or theory, which in my case is critical consciousness derived from critical pedagogy, to formulate my identity and culture. And, as a further venture to the methodology, I have developed a unique process chart (see Figure 1) to describe the method that is true to Ellis' autoethnographic approach that is "engaging, literary, personal, expressive stance to reflect a social context" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 117).

A Mesquite Tree as a metaphor for the Happening

As a coincidence or maybe it has been subliminally suggested, I have been true to Freire's critical consciousness definition for a while without knowing it, I have been busy creating. Besides my narrative writing and poetry, my creativity had been focused on doodling,

then drawing, and the past few years I have been experimenting with watercolor. It started off with branches and trees (Figure 2) but progressed to bringing memories to a canvas. Although I must admit a lifelong obsession with branches and trees, I cannot help but think that this fascination is not coincidental, for the process framework for happening is a tree.

The latest watercolor painting serves to illustrate the process. It is a still life of my backyard as seen from my bedroom window. A tiny house serves for the background that was built in 2005 for my three daughters that at that time were between five and ten years old. And when the youngest of the three became a teenager and no longer played make believe, the little

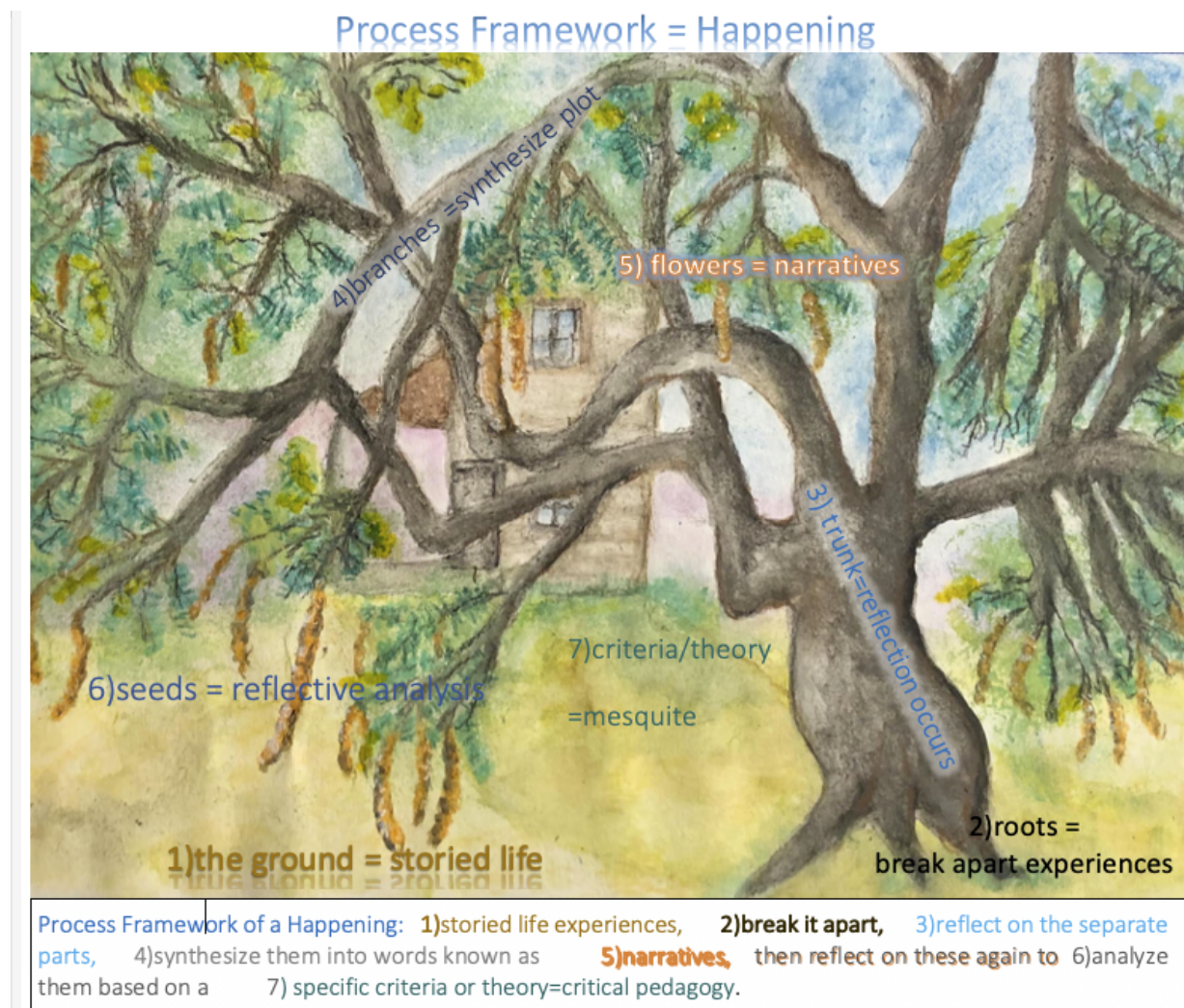


Figure 1. Process Framework = Happenings

is used sparingly by a want to be tinker and the tools mostly gather dust and cobwebs. However the context of the painting serves as a metaphor for the *happening*. The air and the ground are my storied life. The root system is the re-creation of my experiences; the twisting branches are the plot with inherent twists; the leaves are versions of my oral narratives, doodles, that are told and forgotten as they fall off. However, the blooms as flowers are my narratives that make it to written form and they hold my analysis and reflections as seeds which have the potential to go on forever. The painting is labeled with the process as a form of chart to demonstrate.

Method as Critical, Careful, or Judicious

While generating the *happenings* as data is strenuous and time-consuming. The analysis of the *happenings* as data is twice as strenuous and odd. Odd because the more I thought about the analysis process, the more quantifiable it became such as the number of words, the number of times that I used my name and so on. Then I started to see the study from a multi-method and pragmatic stance which led me to a mental breakdown and realized this could take years to analyze. Furthermore, how was I going to be objective enough to generate the criteria to investigate the information when I was the one who wrote the data? On the verge of hysterics, Paulo Freire figuratively spoke to me through his writing on pages 37 through 43 of his *Education for critical consciousness* book from which the following criteria were generated. The *happenings* must be seen through a critical consciousness perspective that is a reflective, introspective process that includes my thoughts about:

- Epochs/temporalities
- Representations or creative tendencies
- Changing attitudes
- Dialogues or lack thereof

- Actions from understanding
- Emancipatory realizations.

However, as depicted in *Pablito's Problem* (see Chapter Three), the reflective process is not separated from the *happening* as a detached commentary or analysis but often highlighted within. It is included as part of the narrative as an omniscient observation (Dubnewick, et al., 2018).

A Glimpse at the *happenings*

As the main *happening*, *Pablito's Problem* is one of the narrative data that I propose for analysis. The first *happening* is a testament of the reflective process that exposes vulnerability. Through a series of flashbacks, I, the narrator, recall my childhood from the early 1970s in a South Texas border town. A border town that parallels my own desires to shed the ethnic label for assimilation into the American mainstream

The other three *happenings*, but much like Freire's epochs are linked thematically. However, the resulting three *happenings* have the following titles:

- The Monkey* relays the teenage years through college.
- Jesús Mil Veces* involves my family and heritage.
- fear* narrates the oppression of my adult life.

Four *Happenings* as Data

Pablito's Problem

“Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what, and who [we] are so that [we] can more wisely build the future.”

- Paulo Freire

Time softens most pain; and, while I recall a five-year old's traumatic incident from an adult's perspective, remembering aches like massaging an old jagged scar.

In the tumultuous world of the '60s, October 28th, 1962, is known as the day Nikita Khrushchev blinked while President Kennedy and my mother both breathed a sigh of relief. Kennedy received a letter from Khrushchev with an agreement to end the Cuban missile crisis, which effectively put an end to the onset of nuclear war; and, my mother -birthed me into this world.

I grew up Pablito, to distinguish me from my father, Don Pablo. We did not adhere to the custom of calling me Junior even though as a pre-teen I once included it as part of my signature (see Figure 3). Just like their parents before them my parents farmed to get by in northern Mexico until they reluctantly realized immigrating was the only means to survive. Like them, I have often heard that lingering agrarian lure far in the distance like the howl of a lonely wolf pleading for a response and wonder who I would be if I had answered the call or our land had not been lost. To this day, green rows of head high corn stalks topped with their golden tassels fascinate me as much as stargazing (see figure 2). And, we moved to a McAllen neighborhood with orderly lined up houses on Lindberg Avenue. It was nicely organized and structured much like desks in the classroom I would later treasure. Our first house, however, was a tiny pink colored shack that I barely recall on 21st street. It was temporary. The second, on Lindberg

avenue was constructed with horrible orange-red block bricks with nail marked stripes forever frozen on its surface. It must have been someone's ill attempt at making the brick acceptable.

My little Lindberg house was not only ugly it was dangerous by today's standards. We



Figure 2. Lingering Agrarian Lure

had poisonous shrubbery that we did not even know about such as Carmencita or ricinus communis whose bright red prickly seed pods hid beans that are the source for castor oil. The CDC claims it is one of the world's most dangerous plants from which ricin powder is derived. We used the seeds as ammunition for our sling shots and flung them back and forth between our neighbors. I remember seeing the pretty purple red bush all over our neighborhood and now I have not seen one in years. The painting named *Jotted Memories* depicts a Carmencita bush (see figure 3).

There was also the electrical cable that ran down the center of our backyard even though it was twenty feet in the air, there was also a very climbable mesquite tree. I had an invisible

fort on that tree and the electrical cable was always inches from me. I touched it once and was surprised that I did not get electrocuted. Luckily, I think I was not grounded otherwise, I should have had the shock of my life.

We moved into that house in the mid-sixties soon after my little sister was born. The house weathered and tired even when new, grew to be our home for well over thirty years (see



Figure 3 Jotted Memory Pablito's Neighborhood

Figure 3). But we never let go of the ties to Mexico especially during the holidays.

Don Pablo credits the move to McAllen to a *pachanga* or party where uncle Roberto, also a farmer however, somewhat older, with a big family. He noticed my father's desperation. "Pablo, you are starting off your family, break your ties with this place and head for el Norte, give your kids the chance to grow up with options." For years, my parents would not let go of the land and kept up the farm as it sapped them of time and patience while my father worked with the city of McAllen, and my mother labored at the Discount House, a department store on the

corner of Sixteenth and Beaumont. Don Pablo accepted the role of provider and assumed the benefits thereof yet, only bore what he considered his portion leaving Doña Esperanza to pick up the slack with limited benefits. My father did not have much of a formal education; however, it has never kept him from arguing a point especially about his fascination with wildlife documentaries and climate change. His persuasive style leaves much to be desired and has been a driving force behind my need to continually seek scholarship opportunities. As I grew up, I was often ashamed of his lack of education. It was not until I became a father that I realized he educated me by example, what teachers call modeling. His commitment to his family never faltered. He knew his responsibilities began as the breadwinner even at the cost of his own well-being. My father went to work each day, never taking a sick day, taking on every over-time hour offered, and vacation time was strictly planned until his retirement forty-five years later. He reverted to what his father taught him and like my grandfather, became a truck driver for the City of McAllen. Even during hurricane Beulah my father had to leave us for work but not before reassuring me and advising that if I felt any danger from the storm, I should know that courage lies deep within us. Confidence is always doing the right thing, such as taking care of my little sister and taking refuge under our bed if I felt danger from the storm; it was the safest place in the house. And, when that storm blew out my bedroom window, my mother knew he could not come home to fix it; she hired a neighbor that was familiar with construction to repair it. She understood his responsibility as breadwinner and could not jeopardize his job. I have also attempted to emulate that sense of duty in my life, yet often I forget that our lives and circumstances could not be any more different. Nonetheless, I hope that the love that drove my father's actions will also be evident and eventually noticed by my family.

Back in the Lindberg house, my little sister and I shared the big bed in a lilac-colored room that was down the hall from the periwinkle master bedroom which was adjacent to the aqua colored living room that led to the canary yellow kitchen. I fondly remember and often dream of that happy four-room house, which I then considered the ugliest on Lindberg Avenue. I do not know who chose the colors, but they did not change until I became a teenager and decided to paint my bedroom. It was nestled between the Coca-Cola distributing center and the expressway to the south, both vibrant symbols of capitalistic progress and St. Joseph the Worker Catholic church, my only haven and viable option to the north. Although the house on Lindberg Avenue was small and plain it was a giant step from the two-room pink shack on 408 South 21st where my parents and I first landed in 1963. Scant memories confirm the color as well as the time for I recall a scolded little boy in what I thought was a girl's coat reacting by coming to attention. And, on a ten-inch black and white television in the two-room pink house, I saw him salute a passing horse drawn casket which must have been President John F. Kennedy's funeral coffin in the winter of 1963.

Upon arriving at the pink house my father started working night shift with his cousin at a nearby *camaronera* or shrimp processing plant just off of 18th street by the old city jail. Eventually 18th street became Bicentennial Boulevard, the old city jail was converted into a fancy lawyer's office and Bentsen Towers, McAllen's second skyscraper, was built caddy-corner on Bicentennial and Business 83. Several blocks east stood the original McAllen High School. The school's only remains is the entrance archway with 1913 indelibly chiseled on it like a sad epitaph; everything else was replaced by the Valley's tallest building, currently known as Chase Bank.

My mother tells the story of her two neighbors on 21st street. From our window she could see into the neighbor's kitchen. Every morning the neighbor would brew coffee and serve it on clear rose-colored demitasse cups that only heightened the alluring coffee. While pregnant with my sister, the wafting coffee caused powerful cravings. But that neighbor berated my parents and would have little to do with them. She would yell, "Lazy wetbacks go back instead of sleeping all day!" through that same window. The neighbor on the right was the opposite. She was kind brought treats to my mother when she was pregnant correctly guessing my parents could not afford much. I would go over to her house, see apples on her table, mention that I really liked apples and she would slice one for me. The two opposing neighbors were not on speaking terms, but when the neighbor on the right found out about my mother's craving for the coffee, she confronted the other neighbor and told her about my mother's coffee craving insisting that she bring coffee to my mother. The berating neighbor conceded, brought over the coffee and treated my mother exactly as she had imagined it. She then realized that my father worked at night and relented. Later, on Lindberg Avenue history would repeat itself. On the right we had neighbors that were so kind that they eventually became my little brother's godparents. Neighbors on the left only saw and treated us as poor dumb wetbacks. Years later they would soften their stand enough to simply acknowledge us with a simple greeting when we saw each other. The neighbor situation mirrored the times, McAllenites either accepted the Latinx heritage or preferred to call themselves Americans who hated immigrants. I would get caught up in the controversy.

In McAllen poverty and heritage were coincidentally sectioned off by Spanish names while the affluent had English names. On the McAllen city maps our small neighborhood was called *barrio La Paloma*, Spanish for the dove, in contrast to the more affluent neighborhoods

north of the railroad tracks named Summer Breeze, Benston Heights, Chesterfield or Westway. It was a condition we shared with Balboa Acres which was worse off since it was considered a *colonia*, slightly more punitive than *barrio*. However, my white friends in middle school never claimed to be from *barrio* Chesterfield or *barrio* Westway and there were no *colonias* in the affluent part of town. In the seventies and eighties, McAllen aspired to be an All-America City distinguishable by its zeal for prosperity, pride, and recognition as well as a rivalry with its neighboring cities such as Edinburg the county seat and the home of the University. I loved declaring McAllen my hometown even though Edinburg would go on to win the All-America honor three times before it was bestowed on McAllen in 1996. Competition made McAllen stand out much like its mayor, Othal Brand, an impressive entrepreneur, and pallid gringo whose white skin tone reminded me of death, in a town made up of eighty-five percent tanned Latinxs. He was reminiscent of a plantation owner who was rumored to be the only mayor in the country with direct access to then-president Nixon. My father's recollection of the mayor is from a picture of Othal handing my father a plaque for 45-years of work at his retirement dinner. In contrast to my father's work ethic, my mother retired years after my father; at one time she was a downtown department store clerk, later a factory seamstress and is still expected to have a clean house as well as breakfast, lunch and dinner ready when my father sits at the table. I learned that brute force and an enduring attitude will go a long way. And, always have a plan b such as going under the bed for safety.

My life consisted of school, watching reruns of Gilligan's Island, Lost in Space or Batman, going to church, and playing football on the street without ever thinking that a passing car would cause us harm much less death. The dreaded Vietnam draft did and that I mulled over often. Fear of conjured future confrontations would haunt me since then. Back then we walked

to the nearest corner store for bread or sugar and even ventured across the highway for some Mr. Q Burgers with a carefree attitude that slowly dissolved as high school approached. Our parents did not baby proof the house nor did we ride in car seats, we rode on the back of pick-up trucks and survived. That type of caution was considered wasteful...too expensive. Time, generations, and mindsets shift and as a parent, I am also guilty of overprotecting my daughters. My logic has always been to err on the side of caution and my family even at the expense of my job, a luxury my parents did not have. I rely on my knowledge, education, and degrees which no one can ever take from me; my parents could not.

On Lindberg Avenue my house was flanked on both sides by neighbors named Jose, it was the center of activity. I would later be accused of trading one Jose for the other. Yet, Jose, who we called Junior was my best friend, I called him J, and he called me PPJ. However, he also had the meanest father that ever lived. To this day, I recall my little sister trembling at the sight of Don Jose's blue station wagon pulling into his driveway. Her two-day old ponytail whipping around trying to keep up with her three-year-old body as she sprinted back inside our house, hoping Don Jose's call to our mother to complain did not include a visit. I also ran leaving him grumbling at us for made up mischief. His calls to my mother would be to inform her that her kids were up to no good. My little sister would be accused of running around half-naked just because she was in her little cotton undershirt, never mind that it was 100 degrees out and we had no air conditioner. We considered Don Jose so mean and would cry with our mother to hear that Junior and his brothers were getting another spanking. Our hearts sank every time we heard Junior yell, "No Tata don't hit me!" And, we heard that way too often. My parents never dealt out such violent punishment, so I longed for and often still dream of having the know-how and courage to stand up to Don Jose.

During the late summer, considered hurricane season in the Valley or at least the season most likely to see precipitation, I especially liked walking and playing in the rain. And, when it did, I followed the roof line that would spout down gushes of water all around our house, for the houses on our part of town had no gutters. I made sure that I walked around to where Junior could see me from inside his house, and I could tell he wanted so much to be out in the rain with me. Soon enough, Anita, Don Jose's wife and Junior's mother would call my mother to let her know that *los niños* had gotten out and were playing in the rain. Little did she know that my mother was not only aware of it but had encouraged it. However, my mother would then ask me to stay on the other side of the house so that Junior could not see me play barefoot in the rain. Don Jose and Anita would never allow Junior outside shoeless much less out in the rain for he would catch a cold. I remember going into their house to watch the only color television on the block and to play with Junior's many toys, but I would not last long because they always had a humidifier or heater to avoid Junior getting sick and he was always sick. I, on the other hand, ran barefoot and played in the dirt and had a unique taste for my little sister's mud pies.

I recall that my mother and Anita often attended parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings together because my mother relied on Anita to translate, especially to my teacher, Mrs. Aweson, who I considered sophisticated. I distinctly recall Mrs. Aweson nonchalantly saying, "You do not look like Pablo, you are now Paul." As Paul, I was assigned the task of announcing one of the skits during the upcoming pageant program to be performed in front of the next PTA. During the program when it was my turn to play master of ceremonies, I got up in front of everyone, and in the loudest voice I could muster I said, "I know it is hot in here, but there is too much talking during the play. You in the back don't talk so loud, use your library voice." I forgot about the announcement so, I resorted to doing what my teacher did every day. I got after everyone for

talking too much just like my teacher did day after day. And, I sat down leaving the introduction of the next act to my stunned teacher whose face I will never forget. I turned to where my mother sat next to Anita, and since she had no idea what I had said, she beamed a smile of approval and began clapping. I felt like crawling under my bed with embarrassment. That same week my sophisticated teacher took a ruler to my palm for speaking Spanish in front of her. And, I was thus conditioned to mimic them, abhor my name, language, culture and have a fear of speaking in front of people.

At home, Jose continued mocking me about my parents not speaking English, and as I let it get to me, I became ashamed of them. The duality of my situation continued until 5th grade. It felt like two worlds with two languages, cultures. He also decided to get even with me for teasing him about playing in the rain. While watering his father's plants and grass, mimicking his father's method of placing his thumb at the end of the hose to cause a spray, he dared me to get him wet. I did not think much of it and complied. When he ran soaked back inside his house, I realized that I had better run home too. Minutes later as I was playing on the far side of our house, Anita came over. She towered over me as she used one hand to grab me by one of my arms and lifted a belt over my head with her other. "Pablito," she growled, "if you ever get Junior wet again, I will take this belt and give you a good whipping!" I was frantic. I slipped away and cowered under the safety of my bed crying for hours until my mother came home. I expected that I was going to get the first whipping of my life. As my mother helped me out from under the bed, I sobbed to explain and saw tears run down her cheeks, too. My mother explained to me that the neighbors were different from us, but that I should respect those differences by avoiding getting Junior into trouble, then she went on further to assure me that it was ok to be scared, but courage was surviving that fear. And, while she was around, no one would ever touch me that way again.

My mother consoling me and tenderly explaining the situation has withstood the test of time, and to this day I see my 85-year-old mother through a five-year old's eyes and tear up every time I read this. Anita had complained to her, and my mother had very calmly asked her not to ever raise a hand to my sister or me. She would take care of any complains. However, she never much took the complains seriously. She never relented and believed that playing outside made for healthier kids.

Despite our puerile antics and there were many more, some more serious than others, Jose and I became best friends. The only fight and beating at the hands of a bully I ever came close to experiencing were averted thanks to him. Although I have romanticized Pablito's problems, there were plenty of situations that could have been handled differently, I regret not telling Jose that much. And, we drifted to different worlds.

The Monkey

And then, I turned twelve. My world became a desperate effort to compensate for lack of confidence. I have often mistaken magic for religion, possibly confusing it with spirituality, faith, or a desperate need to believe that our lives are guided by order and purpose. Too often, I have over thought a situation and reflected to the point that the real becomes blurry. The mulling of an incident leads me to brood over issues regardless of how or even whether they happened.

And I have attempted to guide the order and purpose in my life rather than following my instinct, much like changing an answer on a test to later find out the original was correct. At the risk of sounding cynical, I partially attribute the lack of confidence on my Roman Catholic upbringing and its emphasis on guilt. I now prefer to call myself a pragmatic Catholic that skips the Sunday morning ritual because it too often has become an emotional self-flagellation. Sitting for an hour ruminating on the past and what could have been has left me melancholy, miserable,

and depressed. Furthermore, homilies are seldom inspirational, frequently condescendingly simple, and delivered as a lesson by Charlie Brown's teacher- far from what my favorite elementary school teacher, Mr. Reyes, would consider a motivating lesson.

I recall Mr. Reyes, who coincidentally used magic tricks to grab and maintain our fleeting attention. He is possibly the best confidence builder and one of the most influential in my teenage years. Upon first meeting him, he claimed, "I can hypnotize anyone of you, and you would never even know it," to a class that was eager to believe.

As the speaker for the class, I immediately reacted with, "Sure you can, prove it." The class consisted of an equal amount of bright-eyed little girls and attentive boys. Twenty-eight giggly girls and very tanned little boys, for most of our summer was spent at one of the local swimming pools, and all of it was outside for air-conditioning had just made its debut in our part of the world but not in our homes. But, in 1974 and my twelve-year-old mind, McAllen, the Rio Grande Valley, and Northern Mexico were my whole world. That year, fourth grade ended and became fifth, way too early after a short summer, even though they were all way too short at that age. The year was marked by several exceptional circumstances. Mr. Reyes became my first Latino teacher who was preceded by Mrs. Long in first grade, followed by Mrs. Awesone, Mrs. Ingles, and Mrs. E. consecutively. I was surprised to find out that teachers did not have to be nurturing old white women that seldom inspired, and luckily for me, Mr. Reyes surpassed my expectations through his knowledge, demeanor, and humor.

Known as a smart but sensitive soul, I recall several songs from that age that underscore my outward behavior. Although the radio was seldom heard in my house, I remember Bo Donaldson and the Heywood's *Billy don't be a Hero* brought the realities of war and death home. As we played dodgeball in the school playground, we discussed Billy's bravery and the atrocities

of the Vietnam War. And, even though all of us swore we would honor the draft, in the confines of my mind and bed, I cried with fear. I secretly hoped the war would be over because I could not face any violence, much less killing another person who went against my religion, beliefs, and principles.

Mr. Reyes continued getting us to bite, and we took it, hook, line, and sinker. At which point, he asked for volunteers. Typically, I would have been chosen; however, he picked Ernest the class clown. Ernest always tried his best but would usually fall back on making a joke of anything that he was involved in. He was placed in front of the classroom, and with an actual pocket watch for a pendulum, Mr. Reyes hypnotized Ernest. As he closed his eyes, he was told that whenever he heard the phrase "sit down," he was to become a monkey, and he was to stop only when that same person would say, "do you want a banana." The classroom was as silent as a church on Monday, and we did not know what to expect. At that moment, a teacher's aide knocked on the door, and most of us jumped. She poked her head in and in a loud voice declared, "Mr. Reyes, you are needed at the front office, I was sent to take care of your room while you're gone." Since classrooms were not equipped with intercoms, the class didn't think it out of the ordinary. At that point, Mr. Reyes protested that it was not a good time, but she insisted that the Principal had asked for him, and he was to go over immediately. He told Ernest to wake up, and he began to give us instructions on what to do while he was gone, "Everyone get your math assignment and work on it, we will continue this later," and he walked out. Mrs. Leal, the teacher's aide, walked to the front of the room and began to monitor and reiterated his instructions. Ernest had been sitting up front, and he began to walk towards his desk in his usual slow way, not intending ever to get there. Most of us were already on one of the math problems when she confronted him,

"Ernest, what are you doing? You should be on your math homework, go SIT DOWN."

On cue, Ernest started to howl like a monkey and walk with his knuckles to the floor; he jumped on top of the desks and put on an Oscar-winning performance. We could not stop laughing and tried to explain to Mrs. Leal what was happening and begged her to say, "do you want a banana," but she would not have anything to do with it and attempted to get Ernest down from the teacher's desk. Amazed and bewildered, most of us could not stop laughing even though we were all convinced that Mr. Reyes was remarkable. The show went on for several minutes until Mrs. Leal finally was convinced to say the phrase by Mr. Reyes. Although the uproar lasted for some time, the class was never unruly, except for Ernest, who, from then on, heard the phrase "do you want a banana" every day from one of us.

Much later, we realized that Mr. Reyes, Mrs. Leal, and Ernest had been in on the prank. However, by that time, Mr. Reyes was on a pedestal that, from then on, only grew and was never toppled. In hindsight, Mr. Reyes chose the perfect person to follow through on the plan. The job called for a cut-up that could make a fool of himself and not think twice about it and a straight-laced, follow all rules kind was not needed. If I had been chosen for the monkey, I would not have been able to go through with something that I did not believe in. I would have laughed and given it away. Convinced that I could not play the part of a monkey on cue or do anything that went against my principles eventually, I learned the harder I tried not to be a monkey, the more I became one.

That year, my parents became involved and were able to speak to my teacher in Spanish. Mr. Reyes persuaded them to accompany the class on a field trip to South Padre Island and a tour of the University's marine- biology lab. My parent's pickup with camper, which I loathed since we only had one vehicle and a truck, was the practical choice. It came in handy, and several of

my classmates rode along with me. Mr. Reyes even convinced my parents to lend the class our 8mm camera, and I directed my class in a vampire movie titled ALUCARD (Dracula spelled backward). As the camera owner, I became the cameraman and director. And, that is how I opted for a different role in the classroom. I stopped being a leading man and center of attention and became the leader that focuses on the big picture. I became the administrator with forethought. Simply said, I grew up, became an adult in a child's body. I started making decisions to direct my future and became my mother, the one person I knew directed all our lives.

Jesús Mil Veces (JMV)

I was taught that using profanity indicated a lack of education, and only certain characters used profane expletives. However, expletives that were not considered profane indicated character and personality. My mother is known for her expletives.

The closed-door vibrated with a thud, and I heard my mother blurt out "Jesús mil veces" like a little prayer followed by an accusatory grumble, "muchacho." She did not expect the door to my bedroom closed and had walked into the door, nose first." *Jesús mil veces* "was her go-to phrase. While other people say damn it or other far worse derogatory exclamation, my mother says a little prayer. She uses it often; sometimes, she substitutes "Jesús, Maria y Jose" as she makes the sign of the cross. Her little prayers say much about her. Mainly that she does not cuss, and that she resorts to her religion for any distressing confrontation or fear. I distinctly recall our family trips to visit grandparents in either Monterrey or Anahuac as nerve-wracking for my father's driving caused her much distress and an abundance of little prayers until, to my father's relief, we began to recite the rosary instead.

As she opened the door, she rubbed her nose; I suppressed a chuckle. She did not and burst out laughing at herself. Darkness had concealed a closed bedroom door that only hid a

Farah Fawcett poster on the inside; it had sparked a funny look from my mother when I had pinned it, but she never asked or suggested that I take it down, shrugging it off as if to say, "boys will be boys." That pragmatic attitude, along with her sense of humor or at least the ability to laugh at myself, continues to be a cherished inherited trait. In hindsight, the serape background on the poster had the only evidence of any Latinx roots anywhere in that room; all other belongings were typical to any pre-teen American boy.

My mother, however, was a self-made Latina woman that took control of things, handling a part-time job and full-time farm that was 50 miles away in an adjacent country while keeping my energetic five-year-old brother and three-year-old sister, in check. My mother is known as kind, generous, and thoughtful. I have seen her speak to hired day labor workers, clergy, and bankers with an equity matched by few. However, she harbored one flaw that, to my twelve-year-old mind, eclipsed everything else. -She did not speak English, nor did she attempt to speak it. And, to this day, she does not even try to.

My father fared worse- he tried and failed. He tells of an incident at the doors of city hall where a police officer walking in front of him grunted something in English, and he fearfully just replied, "No." The officer then laughed and in Spanish, asked if he could simply open the door since the officer had his hands full. At which point, my dad embarrassingly replied, with his usual thick accent, "Yessir." My father continues to project a simple attitude that hints of well-hidden pretensions but now demonstrates a calm, simple country folk attitude of a modest man.

My great maternal grandfather, my maternal grandfather, my father, and mother were known to be gentlemen farmers before their halcyon days. I include my mother because she did most of the managing between her part-time job at a downtown McAllen store and taking care of

four of us while my father held a full-time job in McAllen. She is a wealth of stories on her own and continues to surprise me.

My parents made a living out of farming and subsidized it with their city jobs until the peso devaluation in the early '80s, at which point my parents gave up farming. My grandfather continued the tradition until the day he lost a good part of the land, including the lime-green house.

The greenhouse was old. The living room housed a picture of a little girl and a little boy crossing a rickety bridge as a guardian angel dressed in pink and green robes hovers over them. Except for the small television that was rigged up to my grandfather's Datsun, the lime lime-green house did not have electricity, which only made the guardian angel picture more notable. Air conditioning was unknown; however, the lime green house did not need it; all the bedroom windows faced east and allowed a constant cooling breeze that at night warranted a blanket sometime before dawn. The green house took its name from the lime green paint that made it visible even though it was set off from the main road.

It was the center of my grandfather's enterprises that were sprawled around the main house like spokes on a wheel. Even though it was several miles from the land that he cultivated, it housed much of the farming equipment needed. I recall one year we witnessed the shucking of a load of corn husks. The shucking was contracted out to a local band of men that rigged an old Chevy off the ground, removed one of the tires, and the wheel was used to drive a big belt band which turned a makeshift shucking contraption that seemed cartoonish. But, resulting in a mountain of cobs left to decompose between the main house and the small buildings that housed my grandfather's Datsun and other tools. For years afterward, they were ammunition that my cousins and I threw at each other. The corrals were behind the toolshed, and further on down was

a favorite old tree that swung out over the pond where we skinny dipped without hesitation. I can still hear the sound of the wind whipping through those trees and the chicharras taking over at night as we scrambled for fireflies.

Although the facts are fuzzy and rumor rampant, I'm sure he felt a loss much worse than mine, and I felt the geography of my childhood had vanished. Losing the green house marked a shift from one generation to the other, and get-togethers were then held at my parent's house. Each of my cousins did the same, and we grew apart. We now only see each other on Facebook, weddings, or funerals. Although my family is big, I did not get to know my cousins' kids, and they do not know mine. And I am seeing that shift in my immediate family too.

Alzheimer's advanced quickly, and my grandfather did not understand. For the longest time, I considered the Alzheimer's my grandfather's coping mechanism to save face for his losses until I saw a glint of symptoms in my mother's eyes and realized the odds my daughters may very well see those glints in mine. I have often tried to find the green house on Google maps, and once thought I saw its hazy remains overgrown and barely recognizable, much like a sad ghost wishing to be forgotten. My grandmother knew and harbored no ill will. Although most of her hearing was gone, she maintained the sense of humor passed down to my mother until her death a couple of months before reaching her centennial birthday.

There is much that I attribute to that couple, such as my grandfather's industrious jack-of-all-trades attitude and ability to weave a story or my grandmother's pragmatic approach and love of family, all of which I hope to also pass on to my daughters. Years later, we understood more about them when we learned that the original farm with their first house where I first recall the guardian angel picture, along with fifty acres, had been placed under my grandmother's name and willed to her daughters. The will made it known that upon her death, that parcel was to be

divided equally between my mother and four aunts. It excluded my two uncles since my grandfather had given them their inheritance long before he died. My mother and her sisters decided to sell, which may not have sat well with many, but it underscores my grandmother's intention of giving something to her daughters. My mother's portion became a pergola that faces east and often used while she says her prayers and daily rosary. It bears a simple dedication in one corner of the floor that says, "Thank you, Conchita."

When I related the story to my mother, she chronicled several facts, and she reminded me of the old bed in my bedroom. It had been one of her wedding gifts. The bed is now long gone, however, she said that the bed had a paired chiffonier that she had left at my grandmother's house and added, "You should know about that chiffonier, it's the one you so much wanted, and the last item taken out of your grandparent's farm before they lost it." For years I remember seeing that chiffonier in a bedroom of the green house, and when my grandmother passed away, I made sure that everyone knew I wanted that wardrobe. I do not understand why I wanted that wardrobe, but it now has more sentimental value since it was tied to that big bed that marked my childhood. I mention it to my students every time we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My life is pockmarked by such coincidences that suggest sense and meaning.

The chiffonier has three doors on it; the middle door is made up of a mirror that runs three-quarters of the way down; it hides four drawers that often stick and are hard to open. The mirror shows its age with ends that fade away, much like my grandparents' final days. I often wonder what scenes that mirror reflected and imagine that it remembers and gives me glimpses of my grandmother getting ready to attend church by combing her thinning hair into a bun and covering it with an intricately designed gray *velo* or the sight of my great-grandfather taking his *pañuelo* to wipe his big mustache. I recall that he spent his last few days in the greenhouse and

passed away in his sleep on one of the lumpy beds that my cousins and I often shared. Although the green house had only two big bedrooms, it had at least six big lumpy beds. I hope my death is as peaceful or at least like my grandmother's. My mother has often tearfully told us about one of her final conversations with my grandmother in which she urges, " Help me get dressed and ready. Have you seen who is one of the visitors in the *sala*? It is the Virgin Mary." While the scene can be conveniently chalked up to delirium, I too blamed delirium when I felt my grandmother's presence long after her death. It occurred during my first year as a teacher when I almost gave up because I thought I was way over my head. I was swamped and sprained my big toe to the point that I thought it was broken and compounded the situation by having to take three days from work. I was on pain medications, close to despair, deliberating whether to take another day to recover when in the middle of the night as I lay in bed, I heard steps coming up to the foot of my bed and my grandmother's presence consoling much like the guardian angel in Plockhorst's picture while also sternly warning me not to give up. Petrified, I woke up my wife to calm my fear. I have often relied on her rock-solid bravery and suspect that her fearless attitude was a significant attraction and one of the reasons why I married her.

Another incident occurred at my aunt's wake. My mother had gone up to the open coffin to pay her last respects and I rushed up to help her and walk her into one of the pews in an effort to console her and avoid a crying scene in front of my big family when out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw my other aunt who incidentally looked identical to my grandmother in her final days. She walked up and sat at the opposite end of the pew. Seconds later, my mother and I took notice of my aunt, who we thought was seated next to us, being led by someone else into the parlor from the opposite end. We both looked back at the empty pew, at which point my mother commented, "Wasn't your aunt already sitting over there?" And, we both looked back at

an empty bench. I quickly realized it had been my grandmother, and my mother agreed that it was my grandmother's effort at consoling us.

The celebrations were occasions that I now love to remember and often miss. The parties and get-togethers were memorable. I recall posadas in Monterrey that were decorative and colorful. At Christmas Conchita, my grandmother, as well as Mama Chaga, my father's mother, had elaborate *pesebres* that took up half a room. Their pastoral setting had so many figurines that I wondered where they were stored for the rest of the year. They were placed on the biggest diorama that included hills and rock formations. They must have taken several people to put together; I only saw the beautiful results. And every year, the *pesebres* seemed to get more prominent and more decorative. At the foot of these mangers, we knelt, and we "*acostábamos al Niño*" with beautiful songs and tenderness that it always brought a lump to my throat, which was soothed with *buñuelos* and *colaciones* the latter a candy I no longer see anywhere. I liked the firecrackers we felt; they seemed to make the ground move. And the food was never scarce, especially when my grandfather would slaughter a pig, the *chicharrones* and *tamales* never ended. Mama Chaga was known for her delicious flour tortillas, while Conchita made the best mole con Arroz. So we got together often.

Later, during a college class on the Beat generation, I recall reading William Burroughs and his rendition of living in the Valley and northern Mexico. I took the occasion to reflect on the subject and remembered my grandparents. Much like Burroughs claims, my parents and grandfather also helped the hired hands or "braceros" that stayed on their land, but it is easy to forget that most were like nomads or migrants that moved from place to place since they had no land to call their own.

I recall the family of Eusebio, the majordomo, or the one in charge of the everyday goings-on in my parent's farm. Eusebio was married to Delia, and they lived year-round on our farm. The farm had a small but new one-room wooden house where the family slept. However, there was also a more prominent and much older rickety shack with a high-pitched shingle roof with holes in several places. In its heyday, it must have been a formidable house, but by then, half of it was used as a kitchen, and the other half was piled waist-high with corn for the farm animals even though rats and other creatures also considered it their stash. Although I admired it from afar, I dreaded its dark corners and high shadowy rafters, and I avoided going inside on the pretense that it was not safe. It was too dark for my taste, and the owls did not help to appeal. Even though the house had been on that farm for decades, it had never been painted; the wood had a grayish-green patina that now sells at antique shows to make expensive picture frames. I also remember the most refreshing breeze on the eastern facing porch. From that porch, I recall gazing at the most beautiful star-filled night sky that has never been matched.

Eusebio and Delia had a five-year-old boy that we called Pipo, a three-year-old named Caudilio, and a one-year-old little girl, Bruna, whose name was at odds with her cute demeanor. Bruna more appropriate for a mole nosed old hag conjuring over a cauldron while shrieking ominous laughter. Pipo had polio. When we first saw him, our hearts sank to see a malnourished dark-faced little boy pulling himself along the ground with his arms. He had a tender high-pitched voice and would carry on a conversation about anything. My mother brought him to the Shriners in McAllen to have him fitted for shoes and braces, but she first brought him home to clean and bathe. He later received a six-month physical therapy treatment in Corpus Christi. His eyes sparkled as we placed him in the bathtub, but he scolded us for standing around him and

requested a bit of privacy. And, we took turns guarding the door while he played in what was to him the fanciest bathroom and bathtub, for he had only seen outhouses and tin washtubs.

Having land insinuates, we were well off, and although we were never hungry, the truth was that my parents were mortgaged to the limits, and the land was eventually lost. However, another incident will forever be engrained in my psyche as unforgivable, elitist, and taking advantage of privilege. During the corn harvest, many workers were hired to *piscar y pepenar* or harvest and pick up anything left over. Many of these workers traveled with their families and kids my age or younger. Some were from the state of Guanajuato, and their accent was so different from mine. In Spanish, their meek voice sounded singsongy, which only added to their humble appearance. Two of my cousins whose house neighbored by grandfather's green colored house were much more accustomed and at ease with the workers and their families.

I was the kid from the city or pocho who spoke Spanish like a gringo and the son of the *patrona*. I did the lightest work, such as weighing the worker's burlap sacks; they were paid by the kilogram. I noted the bushel's weight and kept a tally of each worker's weight before they dumped the corn on the trailer that was pulled by a big green John Deere tractor. The model number I still recall was 730 since it was plastered in big green and yellow numbers. My cousins and I would take turns driving the big loud tractor. One of the worker's daughters, tiny, dark, and dirty, approached me with bright eyes and a big smile. Her only mistake was being curious, kind, and poor. She asked my name and attempted light talk. My reaction has been my regret. I didn't even acknowledge her. My cousins poking fun at me for having a girl like me made me nervous and awkward. I made it known loud enough for her to hear that she was beneath me, and I saw the bright eyes and smile vanish; like magic, I made them disappear. I instantly knew the harm I caused and should have known that my mother would have never acted with such a lousy

character. As usual, when I got home, I sobbed the story to my mother, whose disappointment added to my guilt. I could easily chalk it up to my immaturity. However, the date was indelibly marked on my soul; I was thirteen years old during that September harvest in 1975. Again, as an odd coincidence or divine will, nineteen years later, I married an equally deprived girl from that region whose birthday is September 3rd, 1975, and whose father was from Guanajuato. We have four daughters last one named Destiny, whose bronzed summer tan and smile reminds me of that little girl from 1975.

As I reflect, I must note that even though my parents and grandparents helped and took care of their hired help, those helped were only a drop in the bucket compared to the hundreds of people that came and went through our farm. As my mother later pointed out, in no way could anyone conclude that everyone was taken care of. Burroughs claims that he took care of the help by providing help and medical attention to everyone, and I find it hard to believe based on the numbers, their nomadic, and his lack of resources. He may have, like my mother points out, helped a few. Based on my heritage, I too feel the colonial itch and long for the land but not as Burroughs did. He was an opportunistic type that saw farming as another get rich quick scheme, much like turning cockroaches into feed pellets for chickens or building an "orgone accumulator" (Johnson, 2006). His heart was not in it, and even though he was smart, he had no patience or foresight. The truth was that Burroughs devoted too much time to his hedonistic pleasures at the expense of formulating a moral character, which marks him as a true Beat writer. His parent's two-hundred-dollar monthly allowance that originated from his grandfather's invention that perfected the adding machine may have been part of the problem. Burroughs was a white middle-class misfit who, because he did not have to work to survive, indulged in anything he wanted, and when the money was not enough, he proclaimed himself a victim of society. In

Mexico City, during a party, and in a drunken stupor, Burroughs had shot his common-law wife, Joan Vollmer. She dies because of Burroughs and Joan's drunken modern antics as William Tell. The next morning's headlines stated, "a rich man from Texas shoots his wife," yet the fact that no charges were brought against him only proves how privileged he was (Johnson, 2006). For years I tried to understand Burroughs as he wrote a letter to one of his Beat friends stating that he could not write about his wife's death not because he was scared of atonement but something else that "scared" him more, the thought that "Joan's brain pulled the bullet." Burroughs attempts to shrug off responsibility by attributing the incident to Joan's death wish.

From an oppressed viewpoint, I tried to put myself in his shoes. I wrestled with the idea until I realized that I will never be able to understand what it is like to be white, middle class and a good looking jetsetter from the 40's nor will I ever fully understand why he compares the Valley to an elephant graveyard and a place to come to die (Johnson, 2006). On the contrary, I find the Valley exhilarating. Summer mornings and evenings in the countryside under the mesquite shade are paradise. Granted that from noon to six, the sun makes the area a rival to Hades, but as a native, I have learned to work around it, something Burroughs never figured out. Instead, he preferred to play the victim of big government, local politics, and blaming others.

I find it awkwardly ironic that during the civil rights movement, a bunch of white middle-class deviants had the audacity of comparing their pain to those that were colonized and literally beaten. I know gentlemen farmers and Burroughs was neither a gentleman nor a farmer, let alone a combination of both. There is a fundamental difference in philosophy between someone that grows up feeding all their appetites and dependent on money versus someone who grows up deprived dependent only on their ingenuity to survive and thrive. And, it surfaces when both are destitute; the first knowing that they can no longer do what they are accustomed or throw money

at a problem, gives up, while the other already used to being disadvantaged also relies on their usual practice of survival and falls back on their ingenuity and resourcefulness. It is a more significant, nobler challenge to survive and thrive without money. I learned this lesson from the little girl that smiled and tried to talk to me despite her oppression, and from the girl I married, who also knows poverty and oppression. My wife's words have also been indelibly recorded when she pointed out, "We do not have to spend money to have fun. Let's try solving the problem with what we have instead of relying on money as a resource." "Let's make do with what we have!" Those words and that lesson would later help me through one of the toughest times of my life.

However, I am compelled to concede that Billy Burroughs' life has also influenced mine on two fronts. He single-handedly illustrated hubris and white privilege, thus settled my issues with white envy, but, more importantly, his postmodern writing, of telling it how it is, peculiar to the Beat Generation writing, paved the way for the audacity to write my narratives.

fear

Middle school gave way to high school, my voice got deeper, I got chunkier, more opinionated, but I did not get any taller. Despite insecurities, I mustered up enough confidence and asked a girl to be my girlfriend. And, then, I got so smug that I asked her to wait for me while I went to a Catholic Minor Seminary to discern my vocation.

For years my grandparents, parents, and our parish priest pushed that I investigate and seek a priestly vocation. As a good Catholic monkey, I listened and did what I was told regardless of my fear of leaving my mom and dad and dread of being alone. As spiritual priests in my parish wielded leverage in the name of guidance that continues to impact me; however,

that story has not percolated into existence. Suffice it to say I was too often told that fear of God was the start of faith, and God wanted me to be a priest. So, I left home at sixteen in an effort to manipulate and shape the best possible future and please God.

I went one hundred and sixty miles away to Corpus Christi, and a Jesuit run high school. I joined a band of brothers that continue to have an indelible bond through social media. Jesuits ran the minor seminary. Their stories would mesmerize and prepare us to pursue the major seminary in college.

I fondly recall the minor seminary chapel where I learned morning and evening prayers along with Benediction's *Tantum Ergo Sacramentum*, a tradition that dates to St. Thomas Aquinas and the medieval ages. The high ceiling chapel has a fresco painting of the Immaculate Conception, which I attempted to recreate on watercolor, and then I was driven to come up with my version. But I have always wondered if I had been given the commission to paint that mural, what would my version include? I spent many hours in that chapel and cried bitter tears. The seminary is conducive to bellybutton gazing; so much introspection that guilt became our quixotic windmills.

Of these giants, the most memorable was after my first visit home to see my parents. My mother drastically aged since I had last seen her three months earlier. I cried, convinced that she would soon die, and I would not be there. It was the first time that I saw my mother as vulnerable, old. I mourned her falling from that pedestal. In hindsight, I began to mourn her death in that chapel when I was sixteen years old, and even though I have been burying her for

well over forty years, she continues to prove me wrong even though she has now truly become



Figure 4 - Watercolor Virgin II

old. She continues to make the best food, specifically tamales, and I have attempted to emulate her passion for feeding her family every time she can. I am proud that she passed on her tamale technique to my wife.

As renditions of these memories, I painted several versions of the chapel's fresco that I termed my *Watercolor Virgins* (see figures 4 and 5). Figure 6 is a photo of the actual fresco which I received from one of my old classmates. Figure 4 includes my favorite saints and my version of the guardian angel from the painting first seen at my grandparent's house. The incense rising includes flowers that represent my wife, daughters, mother, and sisters.

Despite my crying in that chapel, the three years at C.C.M.S. were some of the happiest



Figure 5 - Watercolor Virgin I

and funny times of my life. I would not trade those years nor change anything about them. Especially a particular underclassman from somewhere deep in the heart of Texas whose thick Texan accent had him pronounce *Oedipus Rex* as "Ate a Puss Rax" as part of the daily recital for Speech class. I still laugh every time I recall the incident.



Figure 6 - C.C.M.S. Fresco

Yet, out of thirteen boys that graduated in 1981, I am convinced that twelve have become distinguished gentlemen, and one has been immortalized as an eighteen-year-old that should have grown old with us. I can only claim a right to remember him as a true friend that loved the James Taylor song, "You've got a friend." Out of the other twelve classmates from the class of '81, I was the only one that continued to a major seminary at the University of Dallas. A choice I have often considered an "encrucijada" which the Spanish dictionary defines as *"situación difícil o comprometida en que hay varias posibilidades de actuación y no se sabe cuál de ellas escoger"* or difficult situation compelled towards differing possibilities of action in which one does not know which to choose. "Encrucijada" was one of the first words I learned in my college Spanish class taught by a sophisticated British professor whose Castilian accent I emulated to redefine myself apart from my oppressed history. Although its English equivalent is

crossroads, it does not carry the connotation implied in Spanish. However, its significance is like Freire's use of "praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2005, p. 80). And, so I dove into my twenties headfirst. Anticipated fear would impact my disposition; soon after, I realized life is neither simply black nor white but prematurely gray. I learned to change my outlook or become broody, disguising it as prayer. And, introspection became the manner to hide guilt. I started college at a major seminary more than five hundred miles from home. My sisters and brother felt the pressure of my departure and to this day, continue to feel it; however, they have been kind enough not to mention it. It became my initial detachment that could have been delayed but not avoided. I recall the major seminary as sophisticated, opulent, and a complete contrast to the small town where I grew up. I met friends that I will cherish forever, but in reverence to them and my selfishness, I choose to refrain the pen and keep those times private.

However, the figurative and literal structure of the major seminary was enormous. The place had many large areas that stand out, such as the game room, which was directly underneath the dining hall and just as vast. It had a basement with storage racks lined up like a warehouse. The cavernous basement also housed several washing machines even though there was a complete cleaners service with pressing machines that folded shirts with a crisp starch finish. But the most memorable were two gathering areas that were on opposite sides of the building. The Collegiate Lounge was for undergrads, and the Theologian Lounge was supposedly for upperclassmen working on graduate work. The Collegiate Lounge had a long-gilded pattern couch that was at least fifteen feet and faced a floor to ceiling window that led out at a balcony, which was an extension of the building and looked out onto a central garden that was surrounded by the rest of the building. The garden had manicured trees and tulips that flowered just in time for a

memorable Easter. The balcony was big enough to hold the whole student body of young men frocked in black cassocks that covered French cuffs, for each was expected to match the decorum. Immediately outside, the garden began Suribachi, a hill that had a stairway path towards the University, and it had constant traffic of seminarians going and coming.

The Theologian Lounge was on the opposite side of the building, was at least twenty feet from the ground, and overlooked the Olympic size swimming pool. The summer I stayed there, I got to use that pool often and nurtured a tan and long curly hair that made one of my colleagues nickname me the Mexican Shirley Temple. I was not sure how derogatory that was. The Theologian Lounge, which was masterfully decorated by a color that I would have never expected to work – orange. Unlike the Collegiate Lounge, it had two orange couches that were not as long, but they faced each other in the middle of the long room. It also had several smaller tables, one of which had a checkerboard box of games that exuded luxury, yet I never saw anyone play any game on it. On opposite sides, both lounges had shelves, books, and heavy bronze knick-knacks that conveyed a lavish taste. I preferred the Theologian Lounge since it was darker and had less use. I suspect graduate work was a secluded affair not meant to be squandered away in a lounge regardless of the luxury of the lounge. I would walk in there and sit on one of the extravagant chairs, stare at the tapestries, one of which I fondly remember as a Mediterranean scene. I would stand at the window and take in the panorama, the pool, and what was known as the lower 49- a meadow that had a brook, which was a tributary of the Trinity River complete with a beaver and dam. The minor seminary had cultivated my skills at praying, which translated to bellybutton gazing and spouts of melancholia; the lounge was ideal for both. The time spent there indelibly captured by my mind's eye, and I am especially proud of several

watercolor paintings that replicated the memory (see figures 7 and 8). Although the tapestry may not be accurate, the lounge and its colors are. If I was to be sad, it was a perfect place for it.



Figure 7 Theologian Lounge



Figure 8. Tapestry

The place was far enough from any other building and surrounded by trees that reflected the four seasons turning fascinating colors of orange, red, and gold. The landscape dazzled anyone, especially a boy from the Valley whose experience was limited to only two seasons- one hot and the other hotter. I would walk in there to do my homework or turn pensive, moody, and melancholy, knowing that back home, this lavish lifestyle was not an option. Further, on the horizon, the glass-covered building of Las Colinas, the lavish part of a neighborhood and business center in Irving, Texas. The indulgent Mandalay Four Seasons Hotel with its piano lobby bar capped off the luxury. I desperately wanted to belong and be part of that scenery. The seminary similarly oozed with lavish amenities. The immoderate dorm consisted of individual large hotel-like private rooms. We dined in a banquet hall with food prepared by a gourmet chef who had three African American ladies that helped him and who he jokingly called his harem. He was a big burly African American who prepared food fit for a king while chewing on a fat stogie that although never lit it would be consumed by the end of the day. My classmates would tease him whenever he prepared hotdogs by asking him what was for dinner? He would react with the same insinuating line every time, "Little boys."

Although the place may have been wrong for me, the people I met compensated for the situation, and I do not regret meeting them. Among them I met my best friend – I've only had three. Unlike Jose, Steve and I were from different worlds and states. At first, he let us know that we held Texas in too high esteem; he was right. We spoke our minds without any fear of judgment. The stories and antics still make me smile. Nonetheless, the years as friends saw us grow from fatuous brats to responsible young men, and ultimately, we would only be called father by our own offspring; neither one of us became a priest. We would later become the best man at each other's weddings, but eventually, we too would grow apart and into separate lives.

The summer after my sophomore year, I came home and was assigned to a small parish in a small town where, ironically, twenty years later, I would build a home for my wife and our daughters. That assignment had me work at the adjacent shrine while I stayed at the parish rectory. I also took on a temporary part-time job as a waiter in a seafood restaurant by the mall called Pelican's Warf, which is now long gone. Waiting on tables allowed me to practice my social skills, of which I was very much in need of. And, I must have been good since I was always well tipped. The last few weeks of summer, when the parish priest just up and went on vacation for a month and said, "You're in charge. Make sure you attend the parishioners if they come by and have at least one service every Saturday and two each Sunday and prepare good homilies. In hindsight, I had the audacity to not only prepare but deliver several sermons with my parents beaming in the front pew.

I was pushed to play make believe parish priest at the age of twenty to real parishioners with real expectations of which I was inadvertently oblivious. As a turning point, I recall a young man, easily five years my senior, who wanted to talk to a priest but was told that I was the only one available. I can still see his desperation as he began to unload on me. His girlfriend wanted marriage, and he was not ready. I was not prepared! How could I possibly tell someone what to do if I had never been in that situation? I had not worked to support a family, I had not even had a binding relationship, and I was to give this man advice; furthermore, he had a venereal disease and wanted me to tell him what to do. This was a complete contrast to the safe theologian lounge, where I could be completely selfish. The desperate moments we both felt are described in the following two poems.

Branches

Sinewy and frayed by bitter gusts,
it stalks the fringes and invades privacy
by peering through a pane that reveals
sadness and bewilderment at such turbulence.

Over a missing
headboard and through
absent curtains, the
mad bough sways
countless tendrils with
gnarled ends
mimicking cold fingers
that nip, tap, and curl;
beckoning against a
gray January moon
filled sky that hides the
time.



Figure 9. Branches

Dreading to disturb; lost
in the morphing maze, a mocking simulacrum that underscores deficiencies.
Instinctively dreading and knowing it's now Sunday with its guilt-ridden far-away church
bell lure for there is something in the muffled message that
makes a body feel alone.

Bougainvillea Sunrise

Sunrise over San Juan, Texas may not include the picturesque beaches seen below the horizon of its Caribbean counterpart, however everything above it is equally majestic.

And, as a faithful 21-year old sitting outside the grandiose basilica oblivious to my pantheistic tendencies, I addressed my morning prayers to the sun peeking through a lattice of palmetto and bougainvillea flowers.

A desperate welling melancholia of longing to know what to do, who I was, and what was missing.

I wished,

I begged,

I longed for a sign, until I recalled I was in public and a stone's throw from stares.

A second later, I recovered from my fabricated grief and melodrama.

My tear-filled eyes darting to hide, and wiping away the last remnants of dolor,

I recovered to a blushing composure.

My fear of God had brought me to this place where the beautiful sunrise contrasted the dreadful God that I was told about.

Maybe God prefers me happy

instead of a good little fearing monkey.

It may have been the inflorescence vailing their royal purple hue to the dazzling sun's rays and playfully mimicking stained glass that convinced me, for I saw the flower frolic with the sun as happy companions, and instinctively I knew my vocation was elsewhere for I longed to share a similar love.

However, a doubt remained, why was I so melodramatic?

Coyote del Año

Although I returned to the seminary, I would not finish my junior year, and I left the seminary discouraged and longing to experience life. Somewhere along the way, I had the forethought of changing my degree to International Management even though it consisted of mainly Spanish, French, theology, and quite a few philosophy classes. By stressing my ongoing international management degree, at twenty-one, I began that experience working for a customs broker, and in time it eventually led to working as an expatriate specializing in supply line logistics in manufacturing in Mexico making a very good living.

Expats working in Mexico had it good in the 1980s and 1990s. And, I worked as a purchasing or materials manager for several Fortune 500 companies such as AT&T, GM, TRW, Ametek Aerospace, enjoying the benefits of working as an American. I was in my early thirties when, again, I returned home. I had just ended a two-year assignment in Monterrey, Mexico, which had given me a taste for the jet setting crowd in places like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Japan, and Mexico City. And, since I was the only single manager to speak English and Spanish like a native, I was often volunteered as a tour guide to wine and dine both higher-ups and vendors or rather I was wined and dined; I became well acquainted with all the touristy spots and best restaurants in Monterrey. I was never lonely for company, and dating was easy when one is considered affluent, eligible, and having an American salary. Too much of a good thing can be bad, and after two years, I tired of that life. And, if anyone ever claims that men do not have a biological clock, they are greatly mistaken, and turning thirty for me triggered that alarm. I recall a similar praxis moment when I deduced that the priesthood was not my calling. I recall a

poem from that time titled 'Bougainvillea Sunrise'. However, this life-changing instinct urged me to marry. I knew it was time for me to marry and settle down. I started by returning home to McAllen.

My plan was rather simple, find a job that furthered my options for marriage, and there was no better place than the manufacturing plants along the border, each of which employed up to 5000 young ladies. Somehow my colleagues understood my readiness to settle down, and I was set up with the one and only blind date that I ever had. She was a nineteen-year-old little girl working on the third shift, which started at 11 pm and ran through 7 am. As one of less than ten Americans in that plant, I worked from 8 to 5, so we agreed that she would stay an hour later, and I would come in an hour earlier. I have never been early for anything in my life and predict that I will even be late for my funeral. She was not happy, but I was eager to make it up. I asked her for a posada party. But not before she let me know her feelings. I recall shaking her hand and feeling a grip that sent me to the verge of complaining. She greeted me, saying, " So you're the reason why I have forgone getting home to sleep." And, it sounded so accusatory and derogatory that I turned red with shame. Later I was to find out that blushing had been my best option along with apologizing and attempting to make it up, and I was eager to try the latter.

To celebrate a Christmas *posada*, I took her to a party attempting to show off my new car, I know I was ostentatious, but I was trying to impress. I recall during dinner my date asked if I had a girlfriend, and I had just broken up with my third girlfriend from Monterrey, Mexico, and I had pictures of her. I made the mistake of showing the picture to which my date tore it up in front of me, and boldly claimed that I would no longer need it. Although not sure of what that meant, it did give me courage, and four hours later, I asked her to be my girlfriend. However, after several margaritas, I fumbled and asked her to be my lover. It caused such a turmoil that I

had to vouch that I was not married, and at three in the morning, we decided to go out for breakfast. I wanted to further show off by having breakfast at IHOP in McAllen, which was my second mistake. She quickly pointed out that she could not cross over, for she had no documentation. I was accustomed to crossing over every day and had become desensitized to any consequence. I told her it was not a problem; I did it all the time. She was to simply reply "yes" when asked if she was a US citizen. We practiced the word making sure she did not pronounce it "Jez" instead. When we got to the customs checkpoint, the officer asked me if I was a US citizen, and I said yes, and he turned his attention to her, asking, "And you young lady, what country are you from?" Her voice was confident, and she pronounced "yes" perfectly just as we had practiced, but her eyes relayed a doubt that knew we were in trouble. We were led to the custom's offices at three in the morning, and she was placed in an office while I was interrogated out front. The gentleman, I stress the word with sarcasm, was no gentleman. He looked at me and in a loud voice, declared, "that little piece of ass better have been worth it." I was flabbergasted and attempted to explain that I was trying to show off and had drunk a bit too much Tequila. The response was sobering. "You better call someone to pick you up because we have impounded your car for attempting to introduce an illegal alien as contraband." I attempted further protest and was blatantly threatened with a cavity search. My new beautiful girlfriend was categorized as something other than me, as an illegal alien and contraband. But worse, as a "little piece of ass," she was branded a sex object. At four in the morning, I called my father but got my mother, and both came to pick up their thirty-two-year-old son after a gullible attempt to smuggle someone into the United States. I felt like a giddy teenager.

As I stood outside the customs offices, my father on my left and my mother on my right chastising me for doing something so stupid, I held up my hand in an attempt to explain and

point out the young lady that was being released through the back door back to Mexico. My words to my mother have ever endured, and regardless of the situation, I happily said, "Mother see that girl over there, I will be marrying her." I think my mother may have inferred some doubt, and my father smiled. He did point out that we could not just have her go back on her own, mainly since *peceras*, Mexican buses, did not run at four in the morning and that we should make sure she got back home safe. So, while my father drove and my mother drove shotgun, my newfound girlfriend and I sat quietly in the back seat like two love-smitten teenagers.

Several days later, during our traditional Christmas party at home, my brothers in law surprised me with a gag gift - a pair of tidy-whities on which the words "*coyote del año*" were written with a black sharpie. Less than a year later, I married that girl, thirteen years my junior. Soon after, she and I picked up my impounded car and began a life together.

My lifelong partner was chosen with every intention that most of us harbor- attraction and love are at the top of the list. However, we are also aware that we are remarkably opposites. She is fearless; I am not. I am patient; she is not. She is street smart; I am book smart. On the day that I asked her parents for her hand, her mother asked me why? "She cannot cook." "I know," I told her. "I can," insinuating that I was not looking for a maid or an incubator for my offspring but an equal partner. I pray that my girls have taken note and do the same when choosing their lifelong partner.

My wife and I have discussed this subject on more than one occasion, and we both understand that I was looking for qualities in a partner that would contrast and complement mine. She loves horror movies, I jump at every scene and prefer science fiction, which she abhors. I am extremely ticklish, and she is not. She is frugal while money burns a hole in my pocket. I've always known that my potential is infinite, but I can easily get sidetracked, I needed someone

that was disciplined to stay on track and give me the motivation to do the same. Although I am positive, my imagination tends towards pie in the sky. She is down to earth and pragmatic. I'm romantic at heart and want to be eulogized while she claims funerals are a waste of flowers and money. On a lighter note, we are the oil and vinegar that makes a delicious dressing together. And, she is the third and last best friend I have had in my life; I have not had the need for more.

She has, on several occasions, told me about a story that sends shivers down my spine while she nonchalantly brushes it away. A friend of hers asked her if she knew a good painter since she needed one of her rental houses painted. My wife simply said, "why? we can do it and save a lot of money." So they started. The house they were to paint was old and smelly, and the backroom had a distinct black soot stain that started halfway up the wall as if a candle had been placed too close to the wall. According to my wife, there may have been some sort of altar placed there at some point. When they got there, my wife started putting newspapers on the floor of that room while her friend went to get breakfast for them. My wife placed an open can of paint on the newspaper, which was strategically placed in the middle of that room. She realized that the brushes were in a different room and she went to get them. When she returned, the newspaper had been crumpled into a ball, and the paint had been taken out of the can and dumped on the floor. It was not poured because the can was clean along the edges. Clearly, something sinister was in that room.

I would have had a heart attack and run out screaming like a banshee. My wife, being my wife, picks up as much of the paint as possible redistributes the newspaper and paints the room as if nothing had happened. One would think that maybe she did not understand the implications, but on the contrary, she was very much aware. That quality is why I married her. She says that my blushing and apologizing admitting I had done wrong was what attracted her to

me. Most men, according to her, would have stood their ground and said what of it. She is headstrong, does not usually cry, stubborn, and can easily bluff. I am noble, cry at sad movies, and overthink before I act even though I wear my heart on my sleeve and get caught telling the smallest of lies, so I avoid it at all costs.

My students once asked me if I feared my wife, who holds a brown belt in karate and can stare down a cobra. After thinking about it for a while, I told them, "I fear losing her for my life was rebooted with a new operating system when we got married, and she holds the 36-digit password."

With this personality, I became an administrator or manager as they are called in business and a cut-throat profession. I hated it. The first time that I experienced a lay off was worse. By that time, we had two daughters that were my life and joy, and recovering from a lay off was brutal. It took me months to find a job. I recall my daughter playing in our backyard and hearing the ice-cream truck that passed every day. After the second time that I had to say no, she realized and did not ask anymore but only put her face down, and when her younger sister pleaded for ice-cream, she explained to her that we did not have money for the ice-cream. It tore my heart, and I fear it was too much for her to bear. A five-year-old trying to explain to a three-year-old that they are poor should never occur. Since then, my worst fear has always been not to be able to provide for my family. So, I went back to work in a profession I abhorred. For twenty years, I worked in the maquiladora industry butting heads with unscrupulous and narrow-minded and hated every moment.

The usual one-hour drive to work would consist of saying the complete rosary every day and praying that my professional life would change. And then it did, and I was shocked. I was let go from the last manufacturing plant, and I remember asking the human resources manager

why and saying what will I do. In business, your boss never speaks to you when you are fired, and they are usually out of the plant in an effort to avoid you, an action I've always considered cowardly. However, my worse fear was staring me in the face. I had to consider the possibility that finding a new job may take a while, and it may place me back into a position that I could not provide for my family. Visions of my daughter's beautiful face telling her sister that we could not afford food came back into my mind with a force that welled up and caused bitter tears.

On the way back, while I drove across the Rio Grande, heading back home and feeling very depressed as I started to pray again, it dawned on me. Like that aha moment I've seen in so many students that figure it out. Working in Mexico, the plants must adhere to Mexican rules and regulations. And, one of them is that every employee must be compensated based on their seniority and rank. I had been given a golden parachute that amounted to enough money that I could concentrate on my degree for a year, change careers, and still survive. It was the perfect solution since I had been taking night classes to finish my bachelor's degree and needed a few more. While my ego was bruised, I could overcome that pain as I sat in one of the five courses that I needed. I could go back to school full time and change my career altogether. I now cried out loud with joy, my prayers had been answered, and it had taken a bit to sink in. God had answered my prayers, knowing that I could not quite that awful career on my own. God did it for me. I could now pursue my lifelong dream and become a teacher.

Challenging the notion of good intent.

But the grass is not always greener on the education side. At the young age of forty-five, I became a full-time student and loved it. I quickly received my bachelors and found a job doing what I had always wanted- teaching. Two years later, I got my first master's degree and then my second and have not stopped since, even though there have been occasions that tested my

decision of careers. On three occasions, I have experienced the wrath of the dreaded principal and their unbridled power. Power in a high school is not democratic and strikes dread in many of us. Fear of going against the grain to uphold autonomy and dignity. A good example is college instructors for dual credit courses that are required by their immediate secondary supervisor to pass students in tertiary courses whose grades are recorded by the college that is overseen by a state agency autonomous to any district. Most will not hesitate since their bread and butter comes from secondary. I was ordered to change a college grade from a C to an A by a principal for a student whose mother was an administrator and whose writing was far from average. I suspect that I will never be placed in that situation again since I put my integrity above everything else and was dismissed for it. I suspect someday a whistleblower will complain to the appropriate agency and then get fired too.

The other two occasions are even more alarming. In a system that does not value teachers, the ramifications are complicated; however, the students have figured it out. Complaining that teachers are too hard in an effort to get rid of them for a chance at a better grade has become all too common, and it works for students and unscrupulous parents and enabling principals. A simple complaint stating, "I am not learning anything" or a parent complaining that I spoke about my experiences at Stanford too often takes precedence over rigor ¿Desde cuándo que los patos le tiran a las escopetas? Or, since when do the students know more content and pedagogy than the teachers? I fault a top-down mentality of administration that objectifies teachers as a disposable commodity in favor of not confronting and enabling students and parents. The solution is rather simple, but an inflexible head that holds subordinates responsible to avoid controversy in place of allowing them autonomy is simply a Trump-like manager that only wants yes people to work for him. Higher Ed's policy, which requires the

student to discourse issues with the professor and refrains parents from getting involved, is a step in the right direction.

However, the truly oppressive issue to a reflective educator, is that is caused self-doubt in my abilities as an educator regardless of official evaluations that indicate excellent teaching skills. The subtle oppression either becomes depilating, and many good teachers just quit, or it is an impetus to get even better at your profession. And, for me, it has driven me towards seeking the highest credentials in lesson planning and development – a doctoral degree in education with a specialty in curriculum and instruction. I hope to use it to empower teachers and push for a democratic system in education. We need to invest in what Freire called a partnership for freedom where both students and teachers or teachers and administrators create their knowledge (Freire, 2005).

Zombie Theory

As a teacher, I love to see that aha moment or awareness when students figure something out that they think is important or worth it. One of the first lessons in which I incorporated Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and started to include his version of education against the banking system resulted in an aha moment. It was rendered in the following skit.

Setting: a classroom minutes before class is to start two students have a discussion, which is then transitioned by the teacher to include the whole class.

Student A: My worse fear came to life yesterday in science class.

Student B: What happened?

Student A: You know how I fear snakes, well someone let Mr. Garza's pet snake out, and it was slithering all over the classroom. No one could catch it.

Student B: What did you do?

Student A: I ran out of that class, and I do not plan to go back.

Student B: Oh, you're such a wus.

Student A: Oh, really, you're not afraid of anything? What is your worse fear?

Student B: I hate zombies.

Student A: Did you see the latest episode of Supernatural where zombies start attacking?

Student B: Although I hate zombies, I love zombie movies. I prefer Zombieland.

Student A: That's an old movie, much like Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter.

Student C: Yeah, the best movies about zombies are all the Resident Evil movies.

(The teacher overhears the conversation and joins in.)

Teacher: Yes, but they are not like the first movies like Night of the Living Dead or Dawn of the Dead. Those were some of the original zombie movies.

(redirecting the attention to the full class.)

Teacher: Why do you think there is such a fascination with zombies?

Student C: I think that it is an excuse to shoot others in the head and splat their brains all over without feeling guilty or at least able to justify the action. That way, we get to do something gory and not feel bad about it, to shoot others for target practice and get away with it.

Teacher: So you have no problem shooting someone?

Student C: Yes, if I had to survive.

Teacher: Would you shoot a zombie if they were your zombie little brother? Or mother?
Or best friend?

Student C: NO! I...

Student B: Wait...that changes everything!

Student A: How? Why would you be willing to justify killing someone you don't know but not if you knew them?

Student B: We are talking about zombies? Right?

Student D: I would kill anyone that was a zombie, regardless of who they were if it meant I had to do it to survive. It's either them or me, right?

Teacher: Why? How?

Student C: Zombies are not alive.

Teacher: What is a zombie?

Student D: Mindless humans that do not think past their nose, all they do is live off the living, literally.

Student A: Yes, they do not care about others or themselves. Have you seen how bad they look?

(All laugh then...)

Student B: A zombie doesn't look ahead or plan beyond their next meal, and they are constantly looking for someone to eat?

Student D: Zombies

Student C: Zombies do not care; they do not show emotion. They cannot love or show compassion and would sooner bite you if you showed compassion towards them.

Teacher: Are you saying that a zombie is anyone that shows apathy?

All: Yes!

Student A: A zombie is someone who feeds off the living. Zombies do not plan or collaborate together against the living except in Will Smith's I am legend, but that one insinuates that zombies can be cured.

Teacher: So, can they be cured?

Student B: Yes. They can because they were real humans once.

Teacher:(addressing the question to student D) Would you still shoot your mother if she was a zombie? Knowing that she had the possibility of getting cured?

Student D: Well, no.

Teacher: Then zombies are around, today aren't they?

Student B: How?

Student C: Then, a zombie is anyone that does not think.

Teacher: What do you mean?

Student C: Serial killers that have no compassion are zombies.

Student B: Wait then anyone that does not care about the future or their grades like student E there that has his head down. (pointing to the back of the classroom) If he is asleep, he does not care and is a zombie?

Teacher: What makes the living different?

Student C: We can think! We plan. We want to learn. We care!

Teacher: Care about everyone? Even if they are not like us? Or even if they are zombies?

All: Yes.

Teacher: How is this similar to Pedagogy of the Oppressed?

Student A: Are you saying that anyone oppressed is a zombie?

Student B: If your oppression is not knowing how to read, then yes.

Teacher: What if you are racist?

Student C: If you do not care, then yes, you are a zombie.

Teacher: How should the living that care deal with racism?

Student A: According to Freire, if the oppressed or racist, in this case, do not want to be liberated, then they are going to remain oppressed. It must come from them.

Student C: Freire also says that we must care, but he calls it love. So then we must love enough to find a cure together! Not like teacher and student but like a partnership!

Student E: OK, I am not asleep, and I am not a zombie. I was listening. I care.

Student A: Wow, we should start a slogan.... Don't be a zombie love everyone!

Student C: Wow, teacher- You didn't give us the answers; you brought them out of us.

Is that what real teaching looks like?

Summary

Pablito's Problem as the first of four *happenings* is rich with evidence from the early years but is not the only flower in the bricolage arrangement. Yet, it is notable that the particular blooms are versions of *happenings* that are different from previous versions and which have fallen by the wayside to become fertilizer for this latest version. For example, the new version includes memories about my big bed that my mother recently noted and serves to prove that the *happenings* are as dynamic with changes as a tree is to the seasons. And, Pablito's Problem as a *happening* is exceptionally different from *fear* the last *happening*. See Table 1 as a summation of the happenings.

Table 1 Pablito's Problem Contextualized

Happening (title)	Timeline/ Setting	Content	Context	Critical Consciousness
Pablito's Problem	1962-1978/ McAllen, TX	Backlash to Pablito's' fragmented Latinx experiences	End of the Civil Rights movement	The narrator comes to terms with identity. - Pablito turned into Paul.
The Monkey	1972 1979/ McAllen, TX	Paul's teenage years	Antiwar movement	Inferiority Complex- oppressed to

Jesús Mil Veces	1978-1994/ Corpus Christi, TX / McAllen, TX / Irving, TX / Monterrey, MX	Paul coming to value his heritage	Latinx Pride is depicted in contrast with financial oppression.	perform like a monkey Using ethnic pride to come to terms with white envy-Realize the beauty of my people.
fear	1990-2015/ McAllen, TX	Educator Issues	Oppression from within Latinx	Midlife crisis. Sees fear but knows love is stronger

Note: The setting for most of the happenings is the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and Northern Mexico except for 1978 through 1994.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

While the development of the *happenings* has taken a lifetime to write and, true to their description, they will continue to unravel; however, this chapter identifies pinpointed occasions of critical consciousness and presents an analysis of their genesis. Although the four *happenings* as sections overlap and their plot are not linear, however, they are a snapshot understanding of the situation. The *happenings* contain memories of stories grouped thematically. The *happenings* are staged in a rough timeline interspersed with foreshadowing that describes a Mexican-American schoolboy coming of age, a young teenager seeking both independence and acknowledgment, a young man struggling for personal and cultural identity, and an adult coming to terms with senescence and his ethnicity. All four happenings are held together by a Latinx cultural string, which becomes narratively noticeable. This autoethnographic dissertation has underscored Chang's notion that it "should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 48).

Four critical consciousness occasions have become apparent within the four happenings. However, the CC moments are not apparent, nor are they esoterically abstruse. They are subtle and progressively accumulate much like drips of water slowly rising in a glass of water or a sapling turning into a bush and, ultimately, a tree. And, the *happenings* relay the critical consciousness within them as I identify the aggregated moments that lead to awareness and liberation.

Data Records

Atkinson claims that autoethnography is too experiential, relies on the autoethnographer's lived experience, and not analytical; therefore, it is not research (2006). Delamont declares that we (autoethnographers) should not be so audacious that we are not that interesting, and we should mind our hubris. Delamont's opinion goes to an extreme by claiming autoethnography as "pernicious and intellectually lazy" (2008). Taking agency to declare Delmont's view as narrow, I agree with Lacewing, who declares:

We need to be flexible, not trapped by one set of values or the illusion of value-free knowing, but able to move from one valuation perspective to another, and from these many points of view, assemble our picture of the world. We may still ask, from what aspect does Nietzsche develop his views, his critique of philosophy, his position 'beyond good and evil'? The answer, roughly, is 'life.'

-Michael Lacewing *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* (2015)

While this critical consciousness study keeps the Adams, Bochner & Ellis previously mentioned seven points in mind, the thought that autoethnographers may not be true researchers or "intellectually lazy" is an oppressive statement for it attempts to make knowledge into a homogenous activity of a selected few. It inadvertently continues to oppress, has far-reaching implications that cannot be taken lightly- it questions the validity of autoethnography. Validity as a qualitative abstract notion infers value, and both are inherently subjective to infinite preferences making one interpretation impossible or, more likely, individual, unique to a person's perspective (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p 166). Validity is, therefore, a preference, much like anchovies or pineapple on a pizza.

In contrast, if validity refers to the trustworthiness of the autoethnography and by inference the autoethnographer, then the issue of authenticity comes into play. Interpreted inwardly, questions the autoethnographer or me personally; am I believable as the autoethnographer? Do I evoke a sense of agency or apathy? Is my delivery or sincerity an issue? Interpreted outwardly, calls to question the autoethnography or material; is it genuine?

As the subject and object of my autoethnography, I kept the aspect of validity as trustworthiness at the forefront of the entire study and addressed it in the following manner: Although I believe the autoethnography is an act of agency as a “declaration of personal experience [that is a] transgressive political act performed without repentance. It is[also] an artistic declaration of personal experience given by a witness despite constrictive taboos” (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 22). Furthermore, the importance of validity impels me to artistically and creatively weave and “blur boundaries, crafting fictions and other ways of being true in the interests of rewriting [my]selves in the social world” and tell a good story (Denshire, 2013). Consequently, this autoethnography tries to blend several media to highlight and demonstrate the moments of critical consciousness. An effort to corroborate the happenings with artifacts from that time, such as the first-grade silhouette with a signature that states a firm positionality (Figure 3) and a change in signature in 5th grade (Figure 4).

Furthermore, to underscore empathy and "defend an ethical ideal of authenticity, not least because of its critical and oppositional force, which is directed against experiences of self-abandonment and self-alienation" that are rampant in contemporary society I have taken up this autoethnographic task (Bauer, 2017).

As a final note, I must emphasize that validity from a positivist quantitative realm is a whole other matter that is not in the range or scope of this study. However, at the onset of this

study, I had originally considered a mixed methodology, and I began to synthesize the *happenings*. As part of the extensive writing process, I generated a planning template modeled after the creative arts beat sheet to orient and organize the writing tasks for the twenty-eight original stories considered and vetted down to twelve and finally four. The HaT is an excel spreadsheet titled a Happening aide Template (HaT) (see Appendix). The notes on these may be extensive, but they deviate from the bricolage methodology. I include a copy as a testament for compulsive extremes, but the HaTs for 28 stories deviated from my goals as indulgent and too empirical. Going that route did not look for creative tendencies but rather tendencies that quantified such as minimum and maximum word count.

Furthermore, I regret losing much of my manuscripts, especially a brown corduroy covered journal, as part of a bundle that I put away for safekeeping back in the Lindberg house and the last century. I could not access it when we left sometime in the late nineties; truth be told, I hid them so well that I could not find them, or they were gone when I attempted to retrieve them. Their value is priceless only to me. The corduroy journal kept many of my thoughts, short stories, and the original poems titled *Bougainvillea Sunrise* and *Branches* which I have replicated to the best of my memory and now include in the fear *happening*; the rest is only a vague recollection and lost like Roy Batty's "tears in the rain." Since 2009, the year I began my master's program, the data has resided in my aging laptop and uploaded to the cloud in 2015 the year I started my doctoral courses. Even though my Hewlett-Packard desktop is stored in the playhouse, the hard drive is no longer accessible; it held most of my data before 2009, which was most of my stories, written journals, and countless pictures.

Four CC Identified in the *Happenings*

There is no doubt that the four *happenings* describe my growing up; they are "tied to either an autobiography or ethnography" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 17). And, the autoethnographic intention was to qualify clearly that the narratives begin with a young boy who has a complete life outside school, his parent's farm, and his grandfather's lime green house. It is a full rich setting that speaks of *pachangas* or celebrations as a valuable culture before he is assimilated to believe it is not. They are reminiscent of a bildungsroman or coming of age in a Latinx South Texas at a time when bilingual education was popularized (BEA, 1968). While the previous chapter's content contained my lived experience, this chapter "interprets" through a cultural lens. The chapter contains a series of identified moments that constitute becoming aware of assimilation while also noting repercussions

Critical consciousness within the storytelling becomes apparent through the reflective process as part of the *happening*. Each vignette starts with a storyteller's observation as a narrative inquiry much like Benjamin posited:

It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information of a report. It sinks the thing into the life of a storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. (2004, p.94)

Though the "presentation of the circumstances," the *happenings* have a short introduction that precedes like a commentary, it also serves as an omniscient introduction to foreshadow the social value.

Critical Consciousness 1

The plot, especially in *Pablito's Problem*, as a platform is not unique for it stands on the high shoulders of its Latinx predecessors such as Thomas Rivera's *Y No Se Lo Trago la Tierra*, David Rice's *Crazy Loco*, Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, and Viola Canales's *The Tequila Worm*, the importance is on the instance of critical consciousness as an autoethnographic message highlighting the break from oppression.

The first *happening* is a coming of age story that serves to introduce the bricoleur. *Pablito's Problem* was initially titled *Anita's Story*. It only included the story of my childhood friend's mother, who almost took a whipping to me and initially had my best friend's mother's actual name as the title. Like any good narrative, it has been revised on several occasions, and eventually, it was completely rewritten to reflect what was *happening*. It became what Sorbin terms a "descriptive narrative [which] allows for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening" (Sarbin, 1986, p. 9). I have been writing vignettes about growing up Latinx in a white world that glittered with notions about what I longed to be - American. The title changed to *Pablito's Problem*. And, in the process of re-writing with its reflective tendencies, I became aware of the time when I assimilated, became the oppressed, and realized when I had been subjugated from Pablo or Pablito to Paul.

The first praxis moment or critical consciousness occurred in 2nd grade. I now discuss it as a precise moment in time, but the truth is that it was much more elusive. My 2nd-grade teacher Mrs. Aweson was my favorite teacher until Mr. Reyes came along in 5th grade. She reminded

me of my grandmother but was much taller. She had blue hair and rarely raised her voice. She did not have to; we knew how to behave and understood that school was a whole different environment from home. The statement found on page 52 from *Pablito's Problem* stands out, "I was thus conditioned to mimic them, abhor my name, language, culture and have a fear of speaking in front of people." This line underscores the critical consciousness found in the narrative, even though it is not directly pointed out. This fragmented view we now know as pathologization (Kres-Nash, 2016).

Baynton warns, "The *concept* of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them" (Baynton, 2001, p. 35). I would believe anything Mrs. Aweson said and took her at her word. Furthermore, her pronunciation of English taught me phonetics that later would have people tell me that I was not Latinx because I had no accent, everyone else did. And, without knowing it, I accepted English and the history of the United States as my own. I have included Figure 1 a silhouette from 1st grade (circa 1971) as an artifact noting that before 2nd grade, I was signing as Pablo Perez, Jr., and Figure 2 from 5th grade (1975) serves as an artifact that indicates my signature changed to Paul Perez.

As a young boy, as a teenager, and into my early twenties, I thought my parents were simple, uneducated immigrants just because they did not speak English. It was not until years later when I recalled the story that I realized I had been wrong about my parents. I thought they did not know much about city life, and I saw them the same way that society saw them. I was not aware that they did not have the luxury of being overprotective. However, the truth revealed that my mother's deliberate upbringing made us healthier. My parents often turned their liabilities into assets for our benefit, such as allowing us to walk home from school to become independent since they could not pick us up because they were at work. My parents are now in their late 80's

and going strong. They taught me that my way of living and culture is nothing to be ashamed of, to be comfortable with who you are is confidence. I am now doing my best to teach my kids and students about our culture and not be afraid of forming their version. Culture is a dynamic concept that may include shared attitudes, values, and practices, but more importantly, it is created by us. My parents' culture is as drastically different from my culture as I suspect my kids' will be from mine

What is evident, though is that, I fell into the colonizer's assimilating trap. My envy to be American integrated me into the education system of conformity, and I believed that Junior's parents were more sophisticated because they spoke English and knew so much more about the American way of life and dream when in reality my parents were much wiser than I ever gave them credit. Junior's father was definitely American since he kept a picture of himself in uniform, and it was proudly placed at the end of their hallway, a place of distinction.

Years later, when I understood what had happened, I felt a need to actively react, and I embraced a cultural tradition that includes using both my parent's surnames (Freire, 2005). I may have been Pablo or Pablito Perez when I was born, but when I realized that I had been converted into Paul Perez, Jr. I made a conscious decision of changing again on my terms to Paul Pérez-Jiménez (accents included), which by the way, is, in part, my actual birth name.

As part of the research, I returned to the little hamlet where I was born to get a copy of my birth certificate. To my surprise, my birth certificate states my name as Pablo Pérez-Jiménez (see figure 11). All these years, I had taken for granted that my name was Pablo Pérez, as everyone claims was my birth name. In reality, everyone takes my naturalization certificate as the official declaration of who I am (see figure 15). I also found the local newspaper mentioned my christening that states my name as Pablo Pérez-Jiménez (see figure 10). This realization

strengthens my conviction to embrace my name as Paul Pérez-Jiménez. The name change is a matronymic, as well as an avonymic attempt at emphasizing the idea that my rich heritage is not only made up of my father's proud bloodline and my mother's resilience, but it includes my creative efforts that mirror my grandfather's industrious attitude. It is part of my liberation and depicts the ongoing emancipating effort towards wisdom.

Critical Consciousness 2

For the second Thanksgiving in a row, this past year, my nephews have volunteered to say grace before our meal. Surrounded by their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, they made a commendable effort while most of us practiced patience and admired their spunk. One of them began a practiced routine, "In 1620 the Mayflower landed on Plymouth Rock where Squanto helped William Bradford and the colonist celebrate the first Thanksgiving..." and finished off by admiring William Bradford. After dinner, I commented to my sister that even though their grace was beautiful, I was concerned that my Latinx nephews assimilated that story as part of their history. I ask my sister about the story, and she mentions their 2nd-grade teacher, which sets off the researcher in me and oppression flags.

I experienced a *déjà vu* moment that involved my beautiful, immediate Latinx family, and in particular, two of my wonderful nephews that are currently eight years old. I saw myself mirrored through their situation. Going back in time, for a brief moment, I was also a 2nd grader facing my teacher, who was also hugely influential. So influential that I had written a story about the situation and through a process of reflection, I re-examined the vignette and termed it my leading *happening*.

It is essential to know that I did not understand or become conscious of the situation until I was well into my twenties. From an eight-year old's vantage point, I, like my nephews, could

not fathom the situation and is why I did not approach the subject with my nephews. Of course, there is also an ethical situation that my sister and brother-in-law may take issue with and ask me not to get involved in their son's upbringing.

Like my nephews, my second-grade teacher filled me with wonder towards the conquistadors as brave discoverers of America. As a 2nd grader, I could not understand why my Mexican cousins that lived and went to school less than 50 miles from my school did not celebrate Columbus as I was pushed to do. When I proudly asked my grandfather if we were related to Hernan Cortez since Cortez was my grandmother's birth name, I could not understand his reaction. He emphatically stated that if we were, we should never admit it. And, it was not until I was in college when I read Garganigo et. al. that includes Columbus's December 25th letter to the king of Spain listing, much like an invoice, the resources of the new-found land and not even mentioning the sanctity of day (Garganigo et al., 2002). Garganigo et al. also helped me understand the extermination of my ancestors and of which Leguizamo claims 70 million were killed.

The difference between my nephew's 21st-century situation and my 20th-century conditions was that no one told me or helped me understand what was happening. While I must allow my sister to address their situation, I do not want my five-year-old daughter to wait until she is in college to understand that Columbus was not the hero portrayed in our schools, nor do I want her caught up in culture or white envy.

The second critical conscious moment is not so obvious and has taken years to understand. It involves my family, my heritage, a sense of cultural pride, critical pedagogy, and the reflective that borders on psychoanalysis.

To begin, I must note that I stand firmly in solidarity with the Jewish community. They have every right to keep the lessons of the holocaust at the forefront. Their partial genocide involved atrocious acts that eliminated well over six million human beings and should never have occurred. My concern is that well over ten times of indigenous with ties to my culture were also eliminated, yet I did not hear about it until I was in my forties and went back to college. The western powers that were white, Spanish, and Catholic were just as bad or worse than the Nazi perpetrators. Coming to terms with and getting past it has resulted in my de-linking from the old universal towards what Mignolo terms the pluriversal (Mignolo, 2013). In other words, I have learned that other possibilities or worlds exist. My mother says that. “cada loco con su tema y cada mente es un mundo.” Every mind is a unique world. She has modeled the pluriversal that I have sought to understand.

And in seeking to understand *The Monkey*, which depicts a scene from my fifth-grade class in which Mr. Reyes, my fifth-grade teacher, supposedly teaches a lesson on humility, I concluded that I could not be the monkey. In an attempt to grasp the idea that my 5th-grade teacher did not ask me to play the part of the monkey, I compensated by chalking it up to my limitations. I could not perform on cue, make a fool of myself, and perform like a monkey. The idea that I was not or would ever be flexible enough to make a fool of myself like Ernest was a preference and not a limitation, for I have made a fool of myself on purpose countless times, especially as a teacher in a classroom. This notion of performing monkey becomes a motif that is later noted in the *happening* titled *fear*. It refers to when I was convinced to go to the seminary and also in the poem *Bougainvillea Sunrise* as a recurring symbol for performing for others. In hindsight, I was brainwashed and trained like a monkey to be docile, to forget my roots, to forget my language, and to blindly do what others suggested.

And in getting past it, I find that I am allowing myself to speak more Spanish, especially when I know the people around me will understand. My *happenings* reflect this on page 67 when I use *encrucijada* in place of the word's critical consciousness moments. I am now more comfortable with my bilingual or bi-cultural heritage, although leery of the word bilingual. In other words, I do not doubt the intent behind bilingual laws was good; however, bilingualism underscored differences. Bybee, Henderson & Hinojosa describe bilingual education "premised on a deficit view of bilingual students" (2014, p. 140). The label used a notion that set me apart from the American I so wanted to be; it dis-abled me. Kres-Nash reminds us "that society treats people of color in specific ways to create barriers, and these poor conditions create disability" (Kres-Nash, 2016). The bilingual label meant to be positive but seldom claimed since ethnic culture was regarded second class to the homogenous melting pot masses of the '60s and '70s. It set us apart, highlighting race and differences. Kres-Nash surmises saying, "race is pathologized in order to create racism" (2016).

Furthermore, the pathology created an inferiority complex that continues its influence. The great conscious awareness moment is realizing that despite issues, difficulties - genocide, it or oppression no longer defines who I am because I am aware of what happened and is *happening*. But more importantly, I am not the only one who knows. What happened to me happened to all Latinxs and all marginalized ethnicities. John Leguizamo proves this assertion along with countless critical theorists (Anzaldúa, 2010; Beverly, 2005; Mora, 2015; Deleon, 2010; Llorante, 2015; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Thakkar, 2019; Yosso, 2005). There is a solidarity in the knowing. This knowledge impels me to speak up.

Critical Consciousness 3

In a world infected with coprolalia – or the uncontrollable use of profanity, the public, and the media continue desensitizing and normalizing expletives even though studies indicate their use reflects a lack of rational control and giving over to baser instincts (Bergen, 2016). Bergen points out that "perception matters throughout our social lives" yet, many quickly claim no blame following up like the Lorax's Once-ler with "I meant no harm, I most truly did not" (Bergen, 2016, p. 232; Seuss, 1971, p.40). Yet, they do not stop saying profanities. And, I have attempted to model acceptable expletives such as those that my mother and I now use as well.

Although I do not seek the limelight, I understand the notion of wanting to be unique and stand out. And, as a person of color, I recall an undergraduate creative writing course on poetry in which the younger crowd was eager to embrace and incorporate Spanish vocabulary into their poetry. I had a good poem about four churches at an intersection in upstate New York, but when I read the poem, several students told me that I should write from within meaning that I should use words they were using like *vato* for boy, *ruca* for girl, *jefita* for mother, or other Spanish colloquial slang. I did not see the need for it since I had been taught to avoid code-switching. At that time, I had not considered my assimilation. I now find that one of my favorite Spanish words (*encrucijada*) would have fit well; it translates to intersection or to be more precise a location with several possibilities or outcomes exist, and one must be chosen, it insinuates complexity and doubt. I could have easily incorporated *encrucijada* into that poem. The students in that course attempted to explain that I sounded elitist because I did not want to use Spanish in my poetry. They were correct.

I now understand what Langston Hughes meant when he noted

...no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself ... This is the mountain standing in the way of any true colored art in America – this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little colored and as much American as possible (1926)

While I took that creative writing course, I was also in a course about local writers that centered around William S. Burroughs, who I grew to detest. In contrast to "Billy el Puto" I started a journal entry that eventually became *Jesús mil veces* (JMV), which chronicles the gentlemen farmers that I knew (Johnson, 2006). JMV became a tribute to my family that, along with taking on the Jiménez surname, constitutes a matronymic and avonymic acknowledgment. JMV brought attention to my family and who I am. I have now become much more aware of my heritage and must reiterate that " the duty of the younger [colored] artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering 'I want to be white,' hidden in the aspirations of [their] people, to 'Why should I want to be white? I am [colored] - and beautiful!'" (Hughes, 1926).

The third critical consciousness moment was realizing the beauty of my people, my family, my ethnic background, and seeing how oppressions have kept me from understanding our value. Learning to be resourceful and to depend on things within me is a significant part of that that CC moment. It is underscored in loving the color of skin that I have along with the attrition that I sought out symbolically the brown-skinned little girl from 1975 and asked her to be my lifelong partner.

Critical Consciousness 4

In *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Freire claims, "educational practice should not be restricted to reading of text but rather in reading of context" (2016, p.12). The *happenings* continue the timeline of a participant observer. As such, I bear the unique stance of reconstructing the artist, such as the craftsman of a narrative interpreting a story as well as the objective autoethnographer that sees culture in the narrative. Yet, I must also objectively witness the subject of oppression and all that comes with it. Although we are all plagued by many types of abuse, we must go through life striving for freedom from the different forms of subjugation.

I have been both subject and object, and the validity of this research endeavor stands on these two premises. Education was to be the catalyst for my freedom; however, it has also been a magnifying lens showing clarity far beneath the surface. I now see freedom continuously generated and upgraded through reflective endeavors, for as this project progresses, I have noticed new levels of freedom that will be explored in new versions of *happenings*. The subtlety was extreme; it could only be discerned in the course of time and reflection. It took years to realize and "begin the difficult process of theorizing from [my] own locations that includes moments of intense pain, shame, and triumph that life sometimes brings us" (DeLeon, 2010, p. 398). Consequently, reading the *happenings* must include the background of my storied life found in between the lines. As I had mentioned before, oppressive tactics on a young 2nd-grade mind worked to brainwash into submission and continued for years. The social factors verged on an inferiority complex that drove many of my decisions.

One of these significant decisions is noticeable in the poem *Bougainvillea Sunrise* which depicts the decision to leave the seminary and underscores a different spiritual awakening. Roberts, Brasel, & Crawford claim, "Poetry as a reflective and intentional process can help both

the authors of the poetry and the audience of the poems to reach praxis or the process of being moved to action, to affect change" (2014, p. 168). The two poems I chose to include in this autoethnography are what DeLeon terms "praxis through an exploration of the self," and constitute reflective instances that show painful moments of critical consciousness (DeLeon, 2010, p. 398). In a poem, literary criticism contextualizes the narrator separately from the poet, which as a literary critic, now seems so much easier. However, analyzing these poems is what Spry calls the "doing" of autoethnography with critical reflection upon autoethnography as a methodological praxis" but is neither easy nor for the faint of heart. (Spry, 2001, p. 709).

fear has been a constant throughout the four *happenings*. To see this underlying factor is what Burlyuk terms an "acute awareness moment" (Burlyuk, 2019, p 28). It was evident in *Pablito's Problem*, as Pablito faced Anita and her belt. It was palpable as he cried, expecting to get whipped by his mother as well as facing the audience at the PTA program. In *the Monkey* he feared rejection while in *Jesús Mil Veces* it was the fear of God and facing the idea that his mother would not be around forever. The last happening underscored his fear of being alone, as noted in the Branches poem, and later on, he feared not able to provide for his family. And, finally, fear was evident in his fear of inadequacy. Fear has been that continuous string that laces between each *happening*; however, it is not the fourth critical conscious moment.

To see the fourth CC moment, I revert to Aristotle's Poetics, a significant study about the narrative, known initially as oral storytelling, refers to narrative as "political" or coming from a place of power (Andrews, Hull & Donahue, 2009; Ciasnocha, Olsen, Shermis, 2006; Livo and Rietz, 1986; Pinar et al, 2004). Combining narratives claim to power with the creative, and the reflexive lived experience results in a formidable *happening* (Andrews et al., 2009; Pinar et al., 2004). The fear *happening* with its undermining theme depicts poetry, art, and drama to convey

“authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. That thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world” and can only come across as love (Freire, 2005, p. 77). *Zombie Theory* is one of these formidable tools. It represents my attempt to underscore that communication leads to action through love and compassion (Freire, 2005). The fourth critical conscious moment was realizing that love is more powerful than fear. The cognitive effect of compassion drives countless educators, such as me, to keep trying in the face of fear and regardless of the conditions and sometimes in spite of students and administrators that are incredibly short-sighted. Countless of my colleagues have voiced their fear that a false vendetta by a disgruntled student or anyone short-sighted may ruin livelihoods. And, I choose to teach through my telling and re-telling of my stories that become *happenings* for change. These *happenings* are an effort at calling ourselves towards continuous emancipation.

Discussion Findings

This endeavor at bricolage highlights the merits of qualitative autoethnography as a unique insight into cultural identity by identifying critical consciousness of a marginalized teacher's lived experience. The autoethnography epochs a Latinx educator's perspective through narratives, poems, and watercolor paintings that are meant to depict memories or illustrations of the mind's eye. To this end, I have proposed a *happening* as a vehicle for conveying my storied life.

The original research questions include how was critical consciousness depicted as knowledge production in the lived experience of a Latinx English teacher's *happenings*? Each *happening* proceeds much like a journal or diary entry which are by definition self-reflective discursive processes. The happenings reconceptualize the lived experience for meaning however, they do not set out to find the critical consciousness instance, that was meant to be object of the autoethnographic task. But, reflecting and analyzing the situation to find lessons learned is like reopening a hopeless, gangrenous wound, removing dead tissue and carefully stitching, in an effort to avoid a scar, with full recovery and liberating awareness serving as unanticipated consolations. Realizing that Pablito's Problem was a metaphor for Pablito/Paul's Oppression as plural was significant (see Table 3). Writing the *happenings* has therapeutic results but seeking the critical consciousness moment verges on the psychoanalytical and may seem self-indulgent. Yet they record oppression happening much like a snapshot. And, although I have attempted to correlate a cc moment with a happening, the fact is that the consciousness awareness occurred or crossed over between happenings. For example, learning that love and compassion is stronger than fear spanned across all four of the happenings.

Another of the leading questions that drove this academic endeavor centered on how *happenings* form the autoethnography and the bricolage? To this end Baldwin notes:

One writes out of one thing only — one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art.

- James Arthur Baldwin

The happenings are the lived experience of oppressive situations growing up on the fringes and wanting to be mainstream or white. The autoethnography aims to make sense of these situations. As narratives, the *happenings* are historically significant.

Furthermore, as a pivotal stance, the late Jerome Bruner termed the duality of the objective and subjective position of narrative or storytelling as both persuasive and creative as well as central to a competent writer (Bruner, 2002; Chang, 2016). A story and multiple narratives exist in all of us; they yearn to be heard, for we are social, vain creatures. The degree that we come to understand this significant narrative phenomenon marks our place in society (Aristotle & McKeon, 1941; Bien & Selland, 2018; J. Bruner, 1987; J. S. Bruner, 2004; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, & McClelland, 2003; Zion, Allen, & Jean, 2015). Of further importance, the narrative within an autoethnography approach follows what Derek Bolen calls the "writer-text-reader tripartite," marking the writer's intention and consideration of the audience equal to the narrative text (Bolen, 2017, p. 76). This bricolage has found *writer autoethnographer-text-reader-self-analysis* as a five sectional or *pentapartite* more appropriate (see Table 1 Pentapartite beyond the tetrapartite). It includes Bolen's version with the addition of the marginalized or oppressed self, along with the analysis found as a reflective endeavor. The

five sections are just as crucial to a writer or political agent, along with the text and audience

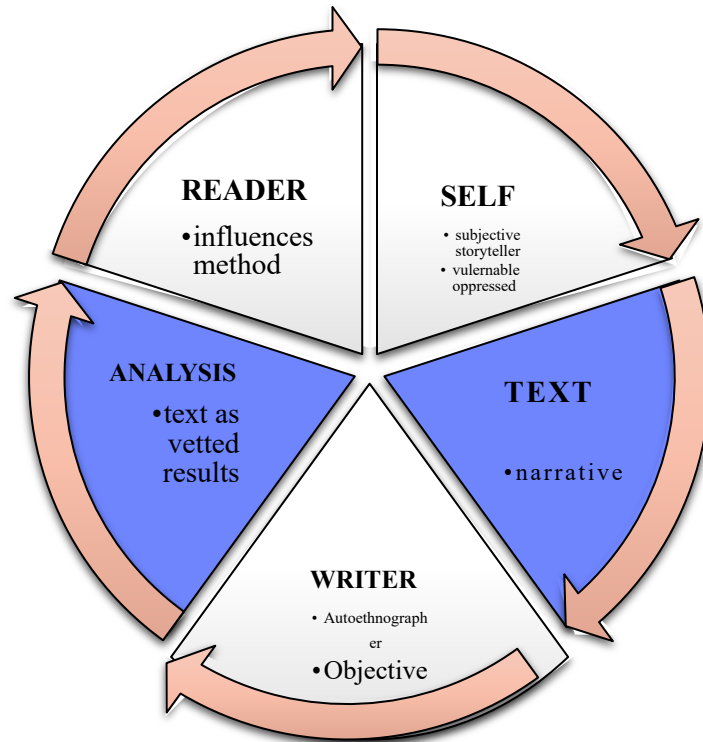


Table 2 Pentapartite beyond the tetrapartite

(Bolen, 2017; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). The pentapartite then becomes happenings that form the bricolage. The pentapartite position marks a significant difference since it splits or highlights subjective self from the objective writer. However, it also delineates differences within the text as the narration and separate from the analysis as vetted outcomes. Although the *writer-text-reader-self-analysis pentapartite* insinuates, the autoethnography holds all parts equal; this study proves the five aspects in the pentapartite are held in balance in the process of the happening. A good example is found within *Pablito's Problem* that tends to show Pablito's critical consciousness or awareness as only one reflective aspect, while Paul's descriptive writing of the moment and its context are also equally important. The writer researcher sees the underlying drivers or oppressive moments and notes that fear has driven much of the circumstances. Furthermore, the analysis is also seen within the narrative as part of the story culminating in what is termed as a *happening*.

Where to go from here

Questions for further reflection abound. However, in this autoethnography, all the parts hold the same equity, and therefore the pentapartite deserves further study. Another potential topic of study is historical identity. Upon understanding that technically my ancestor's original language was definitely not English, but it may not have been Spanish either, for it was the language that the Spanish oppressors pushed on my ancestors during the Conquest, I have been struggling to come to terms with not knowing what language my ancestors spoke. Furthermore, to find out that the original language, another crucial question must be answered. Who were my ancestors? I know that my roots are in Mexico, for I was born there, and so were my father and his father, along with my mother's father and mother, but the cultures of Mexico are many. And, I need to know who my ancestors were before the genocide known as the Conquista.

A third topic is integrity of the happenings from a moral standpoint or what Jackson & Mazzei call, "Using the vocal "self" —the narrating "I" —becomes a matter of ethics for autoethnographers; that is, becoming vulnerable, thinking with (rather than about) events from multiple perspectives and stories, and allowing what may have previously been silenced, voiced" (2008, p. 300).

Conclusions and Researcher comments

However not knowing does not keep us from the "vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv). Although the issue of language applies to many that share the Latinx ethnic background, it is placed here to

underscore that critical consciousness has many levels of understanding or levels to understand. Critical consciousness is not isolated to the indigenous found in remote areas far from modern society

My critical consciousness, as depicted in the *happenings*, is data of the marginalized. As an autoethnography, the *happenings* are my emancipatory process, but they are also my attempt at what First Lady Michelle Obama called “not slam[ing] the doorway of opportunity behind [me], but reaching back, and giving other folks the same chances that helped [me] succeed” (Obama, 2012). The autoethnography as a methodology for my research is my attempt to chronicle the emancipatory process for others' emancipatory struggles. If “the goal of research and evaluation should be a more just and democratic society,” my *happenings* as research reflect that commitment (Mertens, 2008, p. 70). This dissertation proposal exemplifies what Ndlovu-Gatsheni termed “another-thinking, another-logic, and another-world view.” And, if “research methodologies are tools of gate-keeping,” then my autoethnography serves as a means of holding that door opens (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 11).

William Pinar states it plainly, “I want to try to understand the contribution my formal studies make to my understanding of my biography” (1975, p. 2). Higher Education and its methods have now become part of me, and I can dare to say I am doing my part to influence it. Following this strand of logic, whatever is central to me, should also affect Higher Education. I am a husband, father, brother, son, teacher, researcher/theorist, and ethnographer, reflecting a constituent's viewpoint. Furthermore, I have subjectively spent three years of my family's and my life, having sacrificed our resources, endured pain, and sustained the effort, and foregone my marriage as an apprentice to Higher Education. These sacrifices underscore the importance of knowledge, the need for emancipation, and the results towards further autonomy. As a

profession of my autonomy and to emphasize freedom's emphasis, I am making my narratives count for something.

As the last point before concluding, the title of this autoethnographic must be addressed. *Pablito's Problem* refers to Pablito having many problems, as opposed to one. Some issues are concrete situations, and others are abstract conditions, many of which have been resolved, others are for future reflection and potential mining opportunities. Therefore, a more appropriate title should have been Pablito's Problems (plural see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Pablito's Oppressions



Taking stock of the autoethnographic self, the liberated other looking at my happenings has expanded my understanding of my capacity and abilities as a researcher as a storyteller, poet, and bricoleur. Where I once saw fear, I see an opportunity to continue the emancipatory process to *cada mente y mundo*. I see and glean opportunities to further autoethnography by shaking up and re-creating my freedom and thus continue to learn with students, colleagues, and all others.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A HAPPENING aid TEMPLATE (HaT)

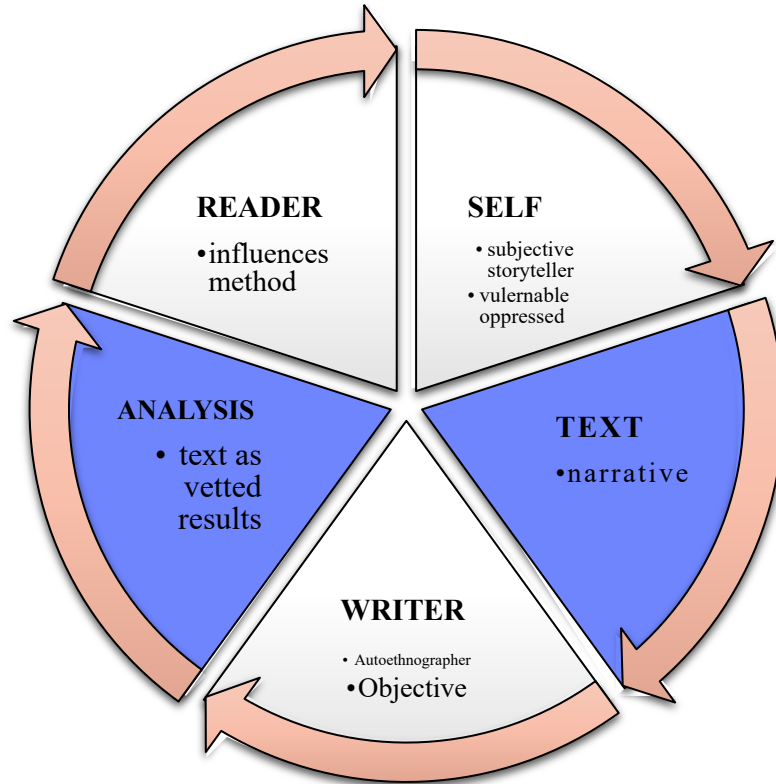
Working Title		Genre		Sub-genre (if applicable)				
Pablito's Problem		Short story		Bildungsroman				
Logline								
In a (SETTING) a (PROTAGONIST) has a (PROBLEM) caused by an (ANTAGONIST) and faces (CONFLICT) as they try to achieve a (GOAL) .								
In a South Texas town, Pablito a Latino boy has an identity crisis caused by an oppressive system and faces a lifetime of enmity as he tries to achieve truth and wisdom.								
WORD COUNT		SETTING: When and where the story takes place .		other archetypes/characters				
Goal	Actual	PROTAGONIST: Who the main character (hero or heroine) is.		South Texas town	confidence			
2,000	2,217	PROBLEM: The issue or event that causes the Protagonist to take action.		Pablito a Latino	Quest			
PAGE COUNT		ANTAGONIST: Who or what tries to stop the Protagonist.		identity crisis	Prize			
Goal	Actual	CONFLICT: The major obstacle, difficulty or dilemma your protagonist faces.		oppressive system	Guardian			
6	6	GOAL: What the Protagonist hopes to win, achieve, find or defeat.		a lifetime of enmity	Mentor			
Important Notes / suggestions for dialogue:			truth and wisdom	Shapeshifter	parents			
				Herald	uncle Roberto			
				Trickster	J his best friend			
#	HAPPENINGS & STAGES	DESCRIPTION		PAGE (approx.)		WORD COUNT		
		Instructions	Synopsis	start	end	goal	cum	actual
1	Happening I	Introduce protagonist(s) and create empathy. They start out fully in their Identity, but throughout this Act, they'll face an opportunity and reader will glimpse their true self.		0	1 2/5	500	500	
1.a	Stage 1: Setup Setting characters	Introduce protagonist(s) and create empathy preferably at antagonist's expense showing them living in or stuck in their Identity.	Narrator foreshadows pain to come for Pablito a Latinx boy that was forced to move with his parents from a farm to southcentral McAllen, TX during the 60's.		1/2	1/2	125	
1.b	Turning Point 1: Opportunity Hero call	An event occurs that creates desire in the protagonist and the reader gets a glimpse of their longing or need.	Pablito's immigrant parents are seen as an example of endurance but, described as uneducated, lacking structure and sophistication in comparison with his new home. They accept their lot in life contrasted with his new place marked by structure, confidence, and competition.		1/2	1	125	
1.c	Stage 2: New Situation	Character attempts to adjust to their longing or need, revealing piece of their Essence in the process.	Pablito sees oppression personified as his best friend's abusive father.		1	1 1/2	125	
1.d	Turning Point 2: Change of Plans	An event creates a new desire with a specific goal that has a visible end point. Goal has to be something the character can't fully achieve in their Identity.	Pablito notices his mothers compassionate, passive response, but longs for courage, confidence and knowledge to actively oppose.		1 1/2	2	125	
2	Happening II	The character wavers between their Identity and their Essence.		2	6	1000	1500	
2.a	Stage 3: Progress	Character attempts to make progress to their new goal, but gets scared and retreats.	Pablito identifies with his white teachers as role models. White middle age teacher renames him Paul.		2	3	250	
2.b	Turning Point 3: Point of No Return	Character must do something to show they're fully pursuing their new goal, and they get a glimpse of what their life would be like if they lived in their Essence.	As Paul he is given a task to MC. During the program he forgets his lines and reverts to mimicking his teacher as role model. His mother does not understand his failure.		3	4	250	
2.c	Stage 4: Complications & Higher Stakes	Character moves more steadily into their Essence.	Paul naively consents to his best friend's wish of getting wet and turns the hose on him. His best friend turns on him and gets him into trouble.		4	5	250	
2.d	Turning Point 4: Major Setback	An "all is lost" event causes character to retreat or happens due to a retreat.	Paul is directly confronted with what he deems violence (spanking) by both his best friend's mother and his teacher causing him to panic and flee to where Pablito was told he would be safe.		5	6	250	
3	Happening III	Character fully returns to their Essence, faces the climax, and lives their life transformed.		6	8	500	2000	
3.a	Stage 5: Final Push	Character must rebound from their retreat and return to their Essence, thus "earning" their success.	Pablito expects a spanking from his mother.		6	6 2/3	165	
3.b	Turning Point 5: Climax	Final turning point of the story brings together all internal and external conflict.	His mother reacts with tenderness, actively confronts the neighbor, explains equity to him, and assures him that she will always protect him. His father previously explains courage.		6 2/3	7 1/3	165	
3.c	Stage 6: Aftermath	Show a glimpse of the character's new life.	After some time the narrator realizes he had misjudged his parents and they were wiser and more refined than what he gave them credit for.		7 1/3	8	165	

Pablito's Problem Contextualized

Happening (title)	Timeline/ Setting	Content	Context	Critical Consciousness
Pablito's Problem	1962-1978/ McAllen, TX	Backlash to Pablito's' fragmented Latinx experiences	End of Civil Rights movement	Narrator comes to terms with identity. -Pablito turned into Paul.
The Monkey	1972 1979/ McAllen, TX	Paul's teenage years	Antiwar movement	Inferiority Complex-oppressed to perform like a monkey
Jesús Mil Veces	1978-1994/ Corpus Christi, TX / McAllen, TX / Irving, TX / Monterrey, MX	Paul coming to value his heritage	Latinx Pride is depicted in contrast with financial oppression.	Using ethnic pride to come to terms with white envy-Realize the beauty of my people.
fear	1990-2015/ McAllen, TX	Educator Issues	Oppression from within Latinx	Midlife crisis. Sees fea but knows love is stronger

Note: The setting for most of the happenings is the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and Northern Mexico except for 1978 thru 1994.

Pentrapartite beyond the tetrapartite

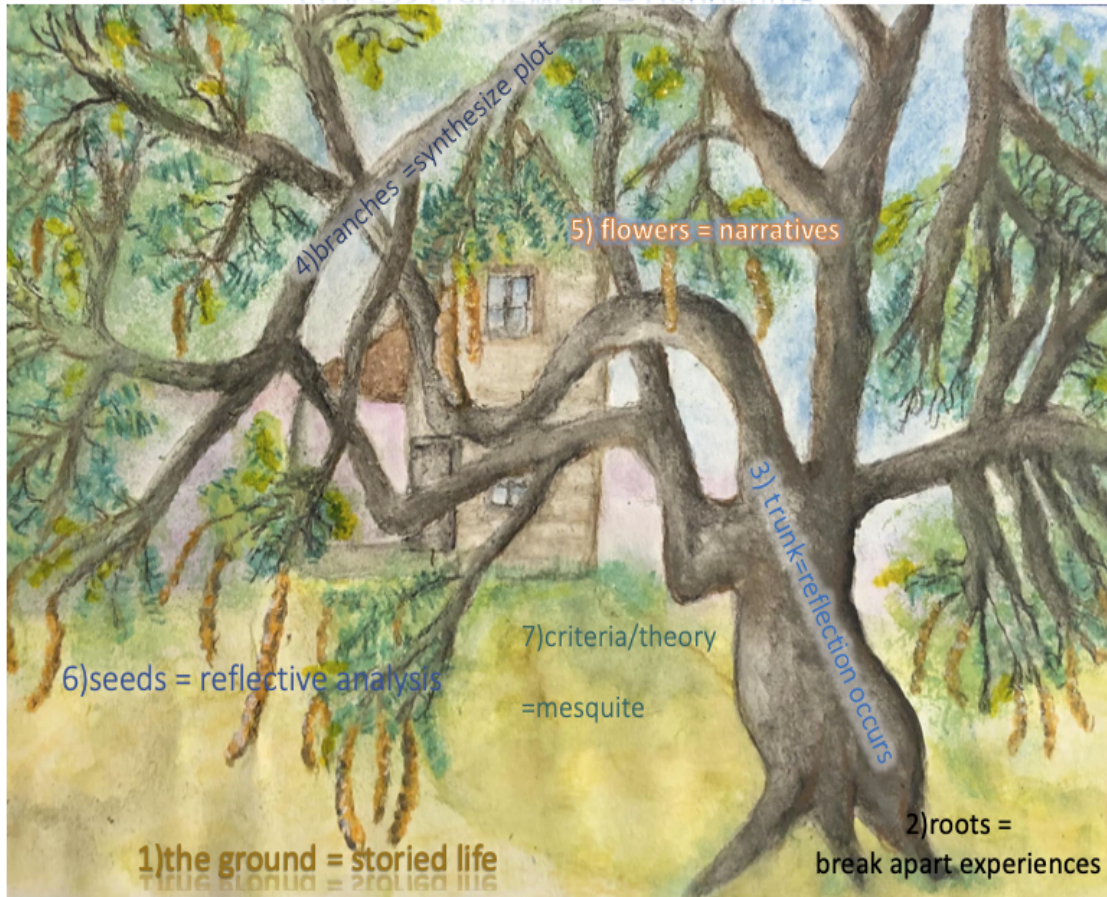


Pablito's Oppressions



Process Framework = Happening

Process Framework = Happening



Process Framework of a Happening: **1) storied life experiences**, **2) break it apart**, **3) reflect on the separate parts**, **4) synthesize them into words known as** **5) narratives**, then reflect on these again to **6) analyze them based on a** **7) specific criteria or theory=critical pedagogy.**

Lingering Agrarian Lure



Jotted Memory of Pablito's Neighborhood



Watercolor Virgin II



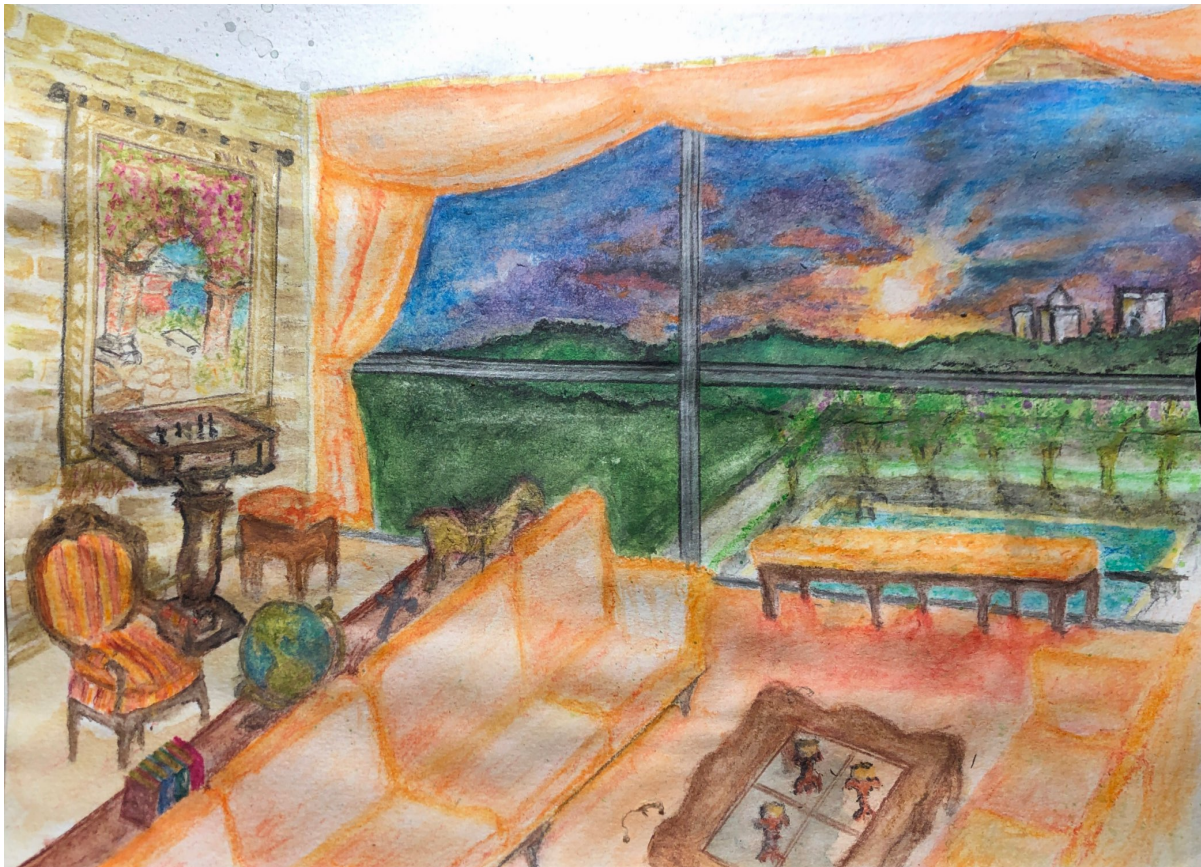
Watercolor Virgin I



Mural at CCMS



Theologian Lounge



Tapestry



Newspaper Cutting of Pablito's Baptism



November 4th, 1962

Right to left: Dona Esperanza Jiménez de Pérez, Godparents: Dona Paulita S. de Jiménez (holding Pablito); Don Roberto Jiménez and Don Pablo Pérez Ramírez

**Bautizaron al Niño
Pablo Pérez Jiménez**

ANAHUAC, TAMPS., a 4 de Nov.— El día de hoy recibió las aguas lustrales un niño de manos del presbítero Martín Guerrero en la Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en Valle Hermoso. El niño recibió en la pila bautismal el nombre de Pablo.



Los padres del niño son el señor Pablo Pérez Ramírez y su señora esposa Esperanza Jiménez de Pérez; fungieron como padrinos el señor Roberto Jiménez y la señora Paulita S. de Jiménez. El nuevo heredero recibió múltiples regalos de sus familiares y amistades.

Por la noche, los padres del menor ofrecieron a los padrinos y familiares una exquisita cena. Entre los asistentes anotamos a las siguientes personas: señor Guadalupe Jiménez y señora Concepción C. de Jiménez, Roberto Jiménez y señora Paulita S. de Jiménez, Concepción J. de Sepúlveda, señor Santiago Se-
(PASA A LA 7a. PAGINA)

Pablito's Birth Certificate

For Pablo Perez-Jimenez aka Paul

FOLIO
A28 1607610




EN NOMBRE DEL ESTADO LIBRE Y SOBERANO DE TAMAULIPAS Y COMO OFICIAL DEL REGISTRO CIVIL CERTIFICO QUE EN EL ARCHIVO DEL REGISTRO CIVIL EN POB. ANAHUAC, VALLE HERMOSO SE ENCUENTRA ASENTADA UN ACTA LEVANTADA POR EL C. OFICIAL FEDERICO T. TREVIÑO QUE CONTIENE LOS SIGUIENTES DATOS :

ACTA DE NACIMIENTO

OFICIALIA : 3 LIBRO No. 2 ACTA No. 303 CRIP: =====
CURP: ===== FECHA DE REGISTRO: 03/11/1962

LUGAR DE REGISTRO: POB. ANAHUAC, VALLE HERMOSO, TAMAULIPAS

NOMBRE:  SEXO: MASCULINO

FECHA DE NACIMIENTO: 28/10/1962 HORA DE NACIMIENTO: 13:00 COMPARECIO: PADRE PRESENTADO: VIVO


LUGAR DE NACIMIENTO : POB. ANAHUAC TAMAULIPAS

CERTIFICADO DE NACIMIENTO : =====


NOMBRE DEL PADRE : PABLO PEREZ RAMOS NACIONALIDAD : MEXICANA EDAD : 29 AÑOS

NOMBRE DE LA MADRE : ESPERANZA JIMENEZ CORTEZ NACIONALIDAD : AMERICANA EDAD : 31 AÑOS


SE EXTIENDE ESTA CERTIFICACION, EN CUMPLIMIENTO DEL ARTICULO 31 DEL CODIGO CIVIL VIGENTE DEL ESTADO DE TAMAULIPAS, EN POB. ANAHUAC, VALLE HERMOSO A LOS 12 DIAS DEL MES DE AGOSTO DEL 2019. DOY FE.


C. ROSA NEVEDA GARZA LEAL
OFICIALIA DEL REGISTRO CIVIL

SELLO DEL REGISTRO CIVIL



Gobierno del Estado de Tamaulipas
Secretaría General de Gobierno
OFICIALIA 3a DE VALLE HERMOSO

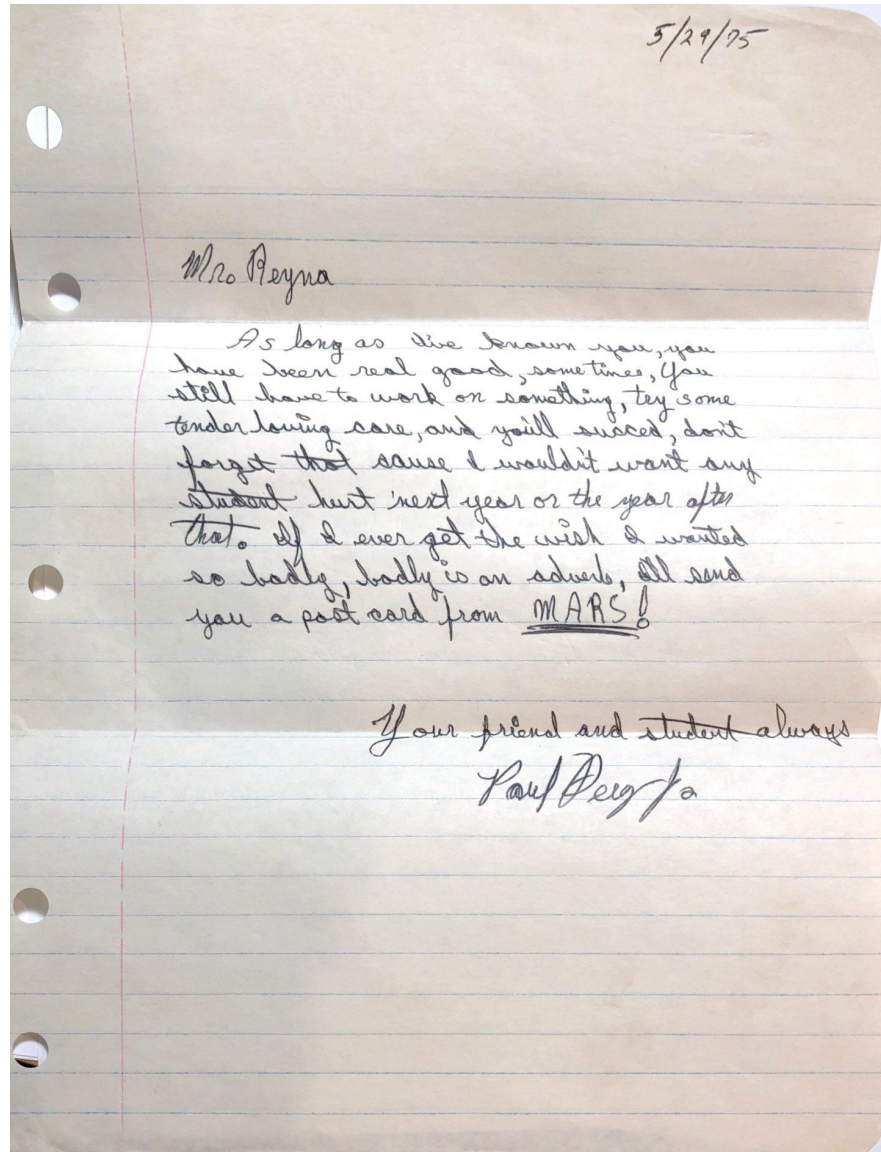


12804000031962003030

COSTO \$85.00

12/8-7 L.-MLP I.-MLP

5th grade (1975) letter to my teacher three years after my re-christening to Paul.



Pablito Picture from from 1st grade & Silhouette with signature also from 1st grade

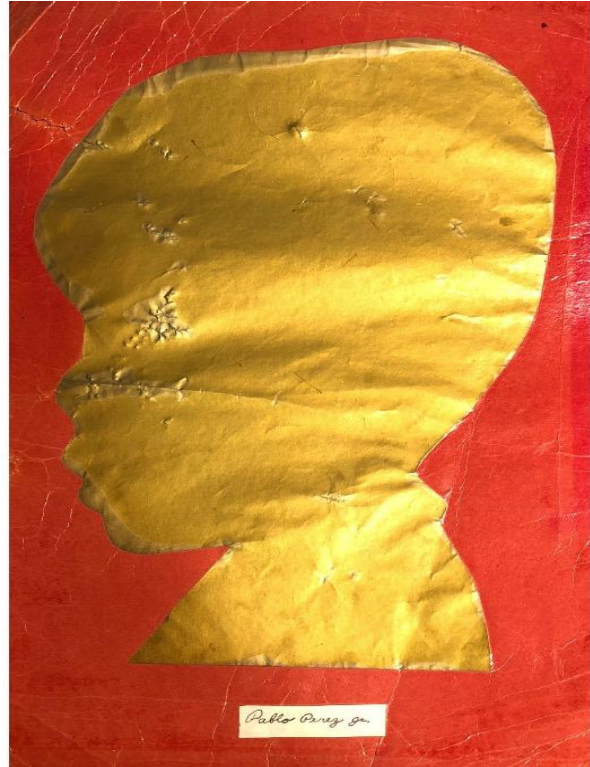


Photo & Silhouette of Pablo "Pablito" Perez
1st grade with signature circa 1971, one year prior
to the re-christening to Paul.

Contrived Coat of Arms



Certificate of Citizenship

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

No. _____

ORIGINAL

Application No. A21 588 489
"Section 301 (b)"

Personal description of holder as of date of issuance of this certificate: Sex Male date of birth October 28, 1962
country of birth Mexico complexion Medium color of eyes Brown color of hair Black
height 5 feet 4 inches weight 111 pounds visible distinctive marks none
Marital status Single

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

Pablo Perez
(Complete and true signature of holder)

 Pablo Perez

Be it known that PABLO PEREZ
now residing at 2516 Lindberg Avenue, McAllen, Texas
having applied to the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization for a certificate of
citizenship pursuant to Section 341 of the Immigration and Nationality Act having proved to
the satisfaction of the Commissioner that is he is now a citizen of the United States of America became
a citizen thereof on October 28, 1962 and is now the United States.

Now Therefore, in pursuance of the authority contained in Section 341 of the Immigration
and Nationality Act, this certificate of citizenship is issued by _____ 18th
day of August in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred
and Seventy-Seven and the seal of the Department
of Justice affixed pursuant to statute.

[Seal]

COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FORM N-560 (REV. 12-1-61)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul Pérez-Jiménez was born in Anáhuac, Tamaulipas (locally known as El Poblado Anáhuac) in northern México to Esperanza Jiménez Cortez from El Charco, TX and Pablo Pérez-Ramírez from Camarón, Nuevo León México. Paul attended public schools in McAllen, TX, but graduated from Corpus Christi Minor Seminary; a Jesuit led High School in 1981. Most of his undergraduate preparation was from the University of Dallas; however, he transferred to the University of Texas-Pan American, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish with a minor in English in 2007. He then received a master's degree in English - Rhetoric and Composition in 2010 from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, followed by a certificate at the master's level in Interdisciplinary Studies - Young Adult Literature in 2012. Paul was awarded the Stanford Hollyhock Fellowship in 2015 & 2016, where he studied equity in teaching. Paul received a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum & Instruction in Higher Education with Educational Technology hours in 2019 and specializing in both Cooperative Learning and Critical Theory from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Since 2007 Paul has worked as a Secondary ELA teacher as well as dual enrollment instructor for freshman and sophomore college courses. His prior experiences in manufacturing include Materials Manager, Planning Manager, and Purchasing Manager from Ametek Aerospace, TRW, AT&T, and General Motors.

Since 1994 Paul is married to Flor González-Pérez. They reside in Alamo, TX, with their four daughters, Wendy, Sammy, Amy, and Katalina. For further enquiry, Paul can be reached through his webpage: paulperezjimenez.com