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The Texas Observer

Juan Garcia has the perfect resume, but can he win his first race?

The CONTENDER

BY TIM EATON

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SEPTEMBER 22, 2006

The Texas Observer

FEATURES

DEPARTMENTS

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Cover photo by Alan Pogue

Dialogue

POWER UP

Thank you for the thorough and informative article "Overrated" in the June 30 issue. It certainly sets out the political and corporate shenanigans involved in "deregulation". There is obviously much that should be done to make the system competitive and fair.

However, there is also much more *The Texas Observer* and daily newspapers could be doing to inform the retail users of electricity of the choices in their area. There is very little information readily available.

People should be given a government agency phone number they can call if there is any question about fair and equal treatment. There is much misunderstanding of the distribution process, which clearly impedes free market competition.

There needs to be readily available information on the choices available in each area. *The Texas Observer*, local papers, and some government agency (hold your breath) should periodically publish:

1. Names, phone numbers, and addresses of all providers in all areas.
2. The basic rate currently charged by each provider and on what basis it might change in the future.
3. Deposits required and on what basis.
4. Termination charges, if any, and on what basis.
5. Information on all "contract" services offered (most of which evidently are set up to defraud the customer).
6. Some frank commentary and cautions on the schemes being sold; the sort of thing *Consumer Reports* does for products. A government agency clearly could not do that, newspapers, which take electric company ads might hesitate, but I bet *The Texas Observer* could provide a good service.
7. Information as to what effect company promises that they furnish wind power, solar power, or any other side benefit has on anything.

Information such as that listed in the above sections won't cure the mess but could, at least, give the consumer some needed information to make the system more competitive.

Merritt C. Farren
Benbrook

James deAnda 1925 – 2006

The Hon. James deAnda, a pioneer civil rights lawyer and one of the founders of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, died on Sept. 7. Judge deAnda was one of four Mexican American civil rights lawyers who argued the 1954 case, *Hernandez v. Texas*, the first case brought by Mexican American lawyers before the U.S. Supreme Court. The case overturned the all-white jury murder conviction of Pete Hernandez in Edna and held that discrimination against Mexican Americans in Texas was so pervasive that the conviction had not been determined by a jury of his peers. DeAnda was also among the founders of Texas Rural Legal Assistance, now Texas RioGrande Legal Aid. In 1979 he was appointed to a new judicial seat in the Southern District of Texas. In 1992, he retired from the bench to return to private practice.

Ann Richards 1933 – 2006

As the *Observer* went to press, we learned the sad news of Ann Richards' passing. In our next issue, we will feature a remembrance of the former governor by Molly Ivins.

Our So-Called Surplus

Kinky Friedman rolled out his first major policy proposal of the gubernatorial campaign recently. This being Kinky, it was a grab bag that included adding 1,000 more cops to the streets of Houston, putting 10,000 National Guard troops and a few Mexican generals on the border, and killing the recently enacted state business tax. To pay for all the goodies, Kinky plans to use the state's budget surplus, which the Kinkster tagged, varyingly, at $11 billion to $13 billion. (The comptroller's latest estimate was about $8 billion.) Historically, high prices for oil and natural gas are responsible for this supposed overflow in the state's coffers. While energy prices are starting to drop, they're still in the stratosphere, historically speaking. So Kinky, like most Texans, can be forgiven for thinking a surplus still exists.

Truth is, Gov. Rick Perry and Co. already raided the vault. It's difficult to figure how much surplus is left—we're dealing with budget projections here, after all—but the safe bet is on the bottom side of "not much." Even as Kinky was formulating how to spend the supposedly healthy surplus, state agencies were preparing to slice 10 percent from their budgets, as mandated by state leaders. People who win the Lotto don't usually sign up for food stamps, and governments with surpluses don't cut budgets.

So where has the money gone? Much of the surplus went to the property tax cut the Legislature passed during last spring's special session. Of course, the tax cut was much needed, not to mention court-ordered. But Perry and the Lege didn't provide enough revenue to pay for the estimated $15 billion in property tax cuts over three years. They paid for some of the cuts with an expanded business tax and a good chunk of the estimated surplus. Even with that, the plan still doesn't balance. As we observed last spring ["Pyrrhic Victory," June 2, 2006], the tax cuts will cost roughly $5 billion *a year* more than the state brings in—the five-year deficit totals $25 billion, according to the state's own Legislative Budget Board. The Lege must balance its budget. So the tax plan's deficit means looming budget cuts or a sales tax increase, or both. To briefly recap: Not only is most of the surplus gone, but the Lege will face a significant budget gap starting in the 2007 session. Given this outlook, it's no wonder state agencies have been asked to trim their budget requests by 10 percent.

Finding suitable areas to cut from the state's already extra-lean budget is a nearly impossible proposition. As usual, lawmakers will end up taking money away from essential government programs. That will come on top of the many unrestored cuts from the 2003 session that knocked hundreds of thousands of kids and poor families off Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. (CHIP enrollment remains at half of its 2002 high of 520,000.) This time around, those programs—and others for the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, and the indigent—stand to see their budgets further reduced. Among other proposed cuts is $14 million from the already on-life-support state park system.

We sit at a critical juncture in Texas. Our growing population is increasingly urban, Latino, and poor. If the state government continues to deny these communities access to education and health care, Texas' future looks bleak. Yet how continued budget cuts will clash with demographic change has yet to surface as an issue in the governor's race. As for the surplus, well, as Kinky might say, that cash cow has left the barn. ■

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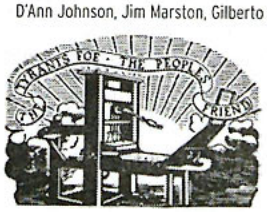

In Memoriam
Bob Eckhardt, 1913-2001,
Cliff Olofson, 1931-1995

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Saints of Insecurity

SECURITY MELTDOWN With nuclear power on the cusp of a renaissance, how secure are Texas' nuclear plants? Not very. A new report on the South Texas Project, a nuclear facility near Bay City, details a disturbing breakdown in security. NRG Energy Inc., the City of Austin, and the San Antonio utility CPS Energy jointly own the plant. The report was authored by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a D.C.-based environmental and scientific nonprofit. It documents eight gaping holes in security wide enough to drive a truck bomb through.

"Somebody could try to infiltrate the plant, attack the plant on the ground ... due to these vulnerabilities," says David Lochbaum, director of the Nuclear Safety Project for the UCS. "They would be able to cause either damage to the reactor core or release of radiation from the spent fuel that's stored on-site. That could harm people living downwind and downstream from the facility." Examples of security vulnerabilities cited in the report include an "unsecured weapons locker"; lax inspection of vehicles entering the plant; and malfunctioning surveillance cameras. When unionized security guards employed by Wackenhut Corp., the private security contractor for the plant, pointed out these breaches to the company and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Wackenhut supervisors allegedly retaliated against the employees, according to the report. The employees passed documents and eyewitness testimony on to the UCS. Lochbaum says that South Texas Project officials have an excellent track record on security and that Wackenhut management seems to be the, um, core of the problem.

In response to the report, the NRC, which regulates nuclear plants, announced that it would investigate the allegations. NRG Energy has contended in press reports that the company has already addressed security problems at the plant.

Despite the alleged security flaws, NRG Energy recently announced a plan to install two new nuclear reactors at the site. The $5.23 billion expansion would be up and running by 2014 if all goes as planned.

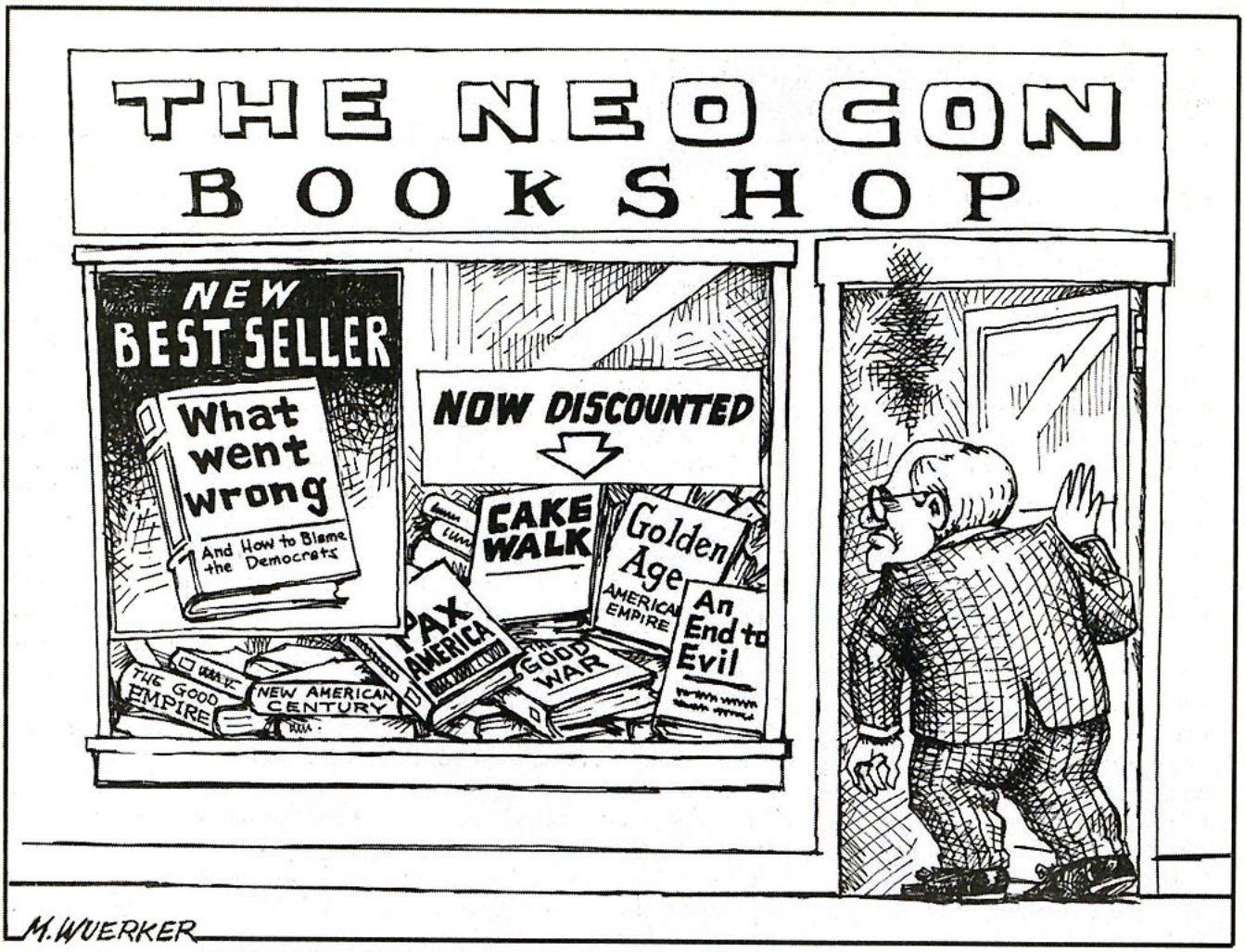
MISSIONARY POSITIONS So a priest walks into an abortion clinic... If that sounds like the setup for a sick joke, it is. And in Amarillo, where an army of militant anti-abortion priests is being raised, it's no laughing matter. After refusing an order from his bishop in New York to return to life as a parish priest, Father Frank Pavone decided to move his anti-abortion group, Priests for Life (PFL), to Amarillo last year. From his Panhandle digs, Pavone is assembling a new Catholic society of men, called the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life. The Missionaries-just a handful so far–make a lifelong commitment to fighting what Pavone calls "the plague of the culture of death"–abortion and euthanasia. The men also receive training in direct action, preaching, and weekly protests at the Amarillo Planned Parenthood office (the only remaining such clinic in the Panhandle). While Pavone has publicly disavowed violence against abortion doctors, pro-choicers say the man keeps some rough company. "Priests for Life has been associated with the most radical elements in the anti-abortion movement, Catholic and non-Catholic," says Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice. For example, Pavone has defended and raised funds for fellow traveler Joseph Scheidler, "a close PFL ally... found guilty of extortion and threats of violence for his obstruction tactics at abortion clinics," according to Kissling's organization.

On August 24, Pavone, along with some of the leading lights of the "pro-life" right-including Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" of Roe v. Wade, and the parents and brother of Terry Schiavo, gathered in Amarillo to break ground on the Missionaries' new national headquarters. President Bush sent Pavone a letter congratulating him on his new priestly army, according to the Priests for Life Web site. At the ceremony Pavone vowed he would "devote [himself] full-time to my brothers and sisters whose right to life is under direct attack and to be, especially for the unborn, the voice they do not have." The pro-life padre is "fully" in support of the Iraq War and has a nuanced position on the death penalty–sometimes it's justified. "As an American citizen I am proud to trust the decisions of those who have the awesome responsibility to make them," he told a group of supporters in 2004.

Pavone frequently endorses candidates–Republicans all–and rails against the separation of church and state. But with godless Democrats threatening to roll back Republican control of Congress this year, Pavone is collaring up for a big fight, tax-exempt status be damned. "Everything we did in the 2004 cycle will be repeated, intensified, and multiplied, without compromise and without apology," he recently wrote in the *National Catholic Register*.

TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE Here's a pop quiz. How many people working on the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) recently created Task Force on Test Security have experience themselves with cheating: a. none; b. one; c. two; d. three; e. all of them. The answer, as always, is 'c.'

Education Commissioner Shirley Neeley appointed the task force in early August to "examine security issues" and oversee investigations of cheating on the all-important state tests. Among the five task force members is Bill Hammond. Yes, *that* Bill Hammond–the head of the Texas Association of Business (TAB). Hammond and the TAB,



you'll recall, were key players in the wide-ranging effort to funnel corporate money into the 2002 election that ushered in a Republican majority in the Texas House. A Travis County grand jury indicted the TAB for its controversial, 2002 corporate-funded mailer campaign that allegedly violated state campaign finance law (a judge threw out some of those charges in July). Hammond and TAB have also been the subject of a civil suit alleging that they cheated during the 2002 campaign.

TEA has also contracted with consultant Olga Garza to serve as a staff member for the task force. Garza served on the board of the Austin Independent School District from 1998 to 2002. She was a board member in 1998, when AISD was embroiled in a test-cheating scandal in which district officials instructed principals at three schools to delete students with low test scores from data submitted to the state. (That's exactly the kind of scam the task force is charged with investigating.) Though Garza wasn't implicated, the scandal led to criminal indictments of the deputy superintendent and the school district itself in 1999. It was the first school district in the country ever indicted for test cheating, though no one was ever convicted.

"That's not really a fair shot at Olga," says TEA spokesperson Debbie Graves Ratcliffe. She adds that as a board member, Garza wasn't directly responsible for the cheating. As for Hammond, Ratcliffe says, "He represents all kinds of businesses, and the commissioner wanted that perspective on the committee."

The task force met for the first time on August 21 and initially recommended that TEA investigate 699 schools that exhibited testing irregularities. They plan to meet again in October.

CALLING OUT THE CANDIDATES A session with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) can be a fearsome thing for a political candidate. In Texas, the IAF is comprised of 12 community- and church-based organizations from across the state that try to organize communities around social-welfare issues. During their so-called accountability sessions, leaders of the foundation fire questions at political candidates who have a limited time to respond. The interrogators demand specifics and forbid candidates from mentioning opponents. When former Comptroller John Sharp introduced himself to the group at their two-day

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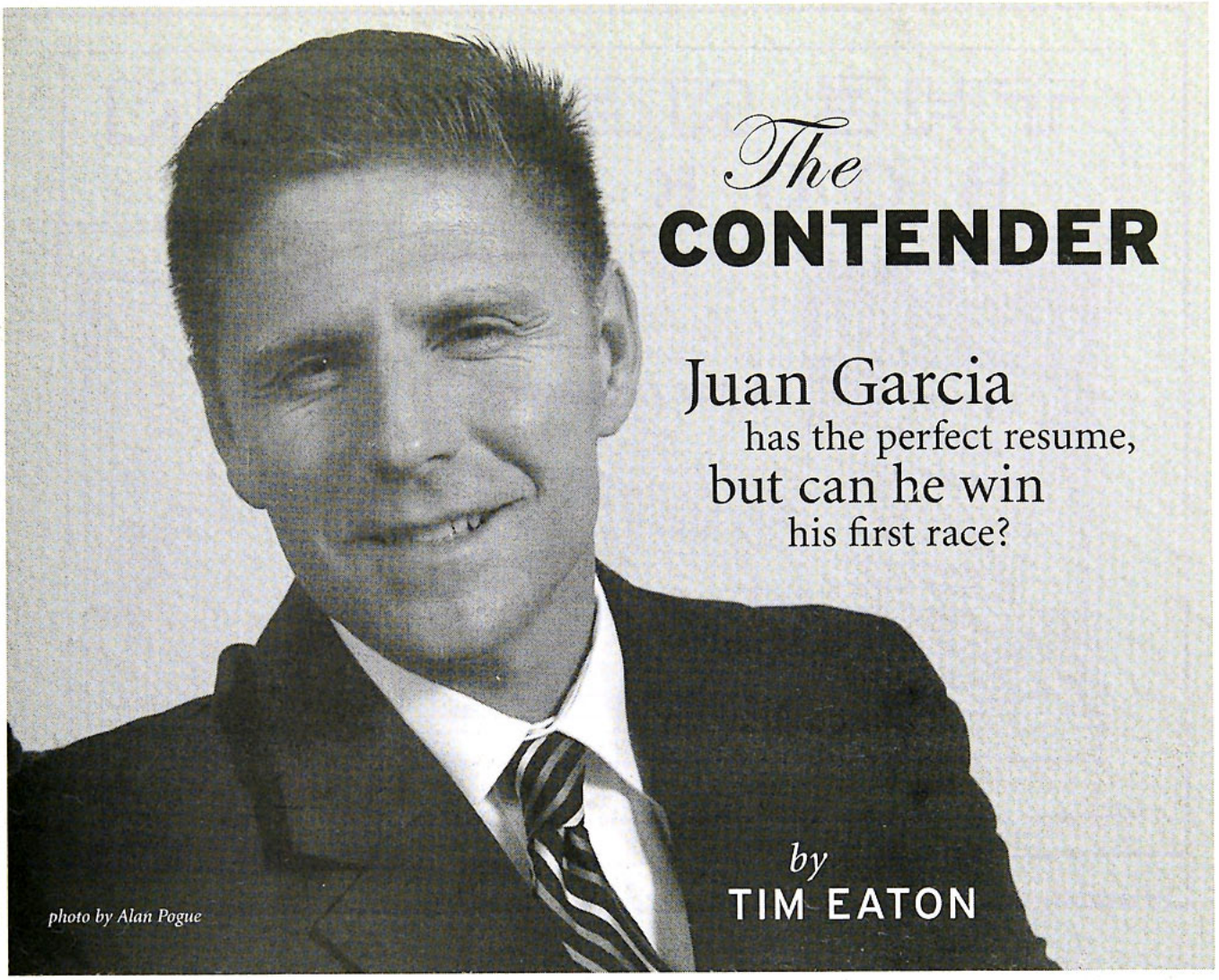

The CONTENDER

Juan Garcia has the perfect resume, but can he win his first race?

photo by Alan Pogue

by TIM EATON

It's a typical sticky summer afternoon in Taft, a sorghum and cotton town in San Patricio County named for President Taft's half-brother Charles. With temperatures close to 100 degrees, it's not a comfortable day to be on the streets, but when you're running for a lower office like state representative, you run a shoe-leather campaign. This is Juan Garcia's first shot at elected office, and he knows what he needs to do.

Sporting a slightly grown-out buzz cut and dressed in an untucked, light green Hawaiian shirt and white pants, Garcia is knocking on doors in a neighborhood of mixed political ideologies. A woman in a blue housecoat on a quiet side street answers his knock. Garcia promises her that he's not selling anything and introduces himself as a candidate. The silver-haired woman seems eager to chat. As she speaks, Garcia leans forward and looks her square in the eye, like he's trying to win a staring contest. As a White House Fellow, Garcia had a front-row seat to watch President Clinton, one of the masters at connecting with people. He quickly learns the woman is a widow and works with veterans. At that point, he begins to extol the importance of proper funding for veterans' programs. He's a veteran himself, a pilot. And Garcia knows how to talk tough on national security. The widow is clearly receptive. As he leaves, Garcia spots one of the telltale signs he has trained his field-workers to look for: the white-and-blue windshield stickers on cars that allow entrance into military bases. Down the street, Garcia tells the son of a base employee, working on a scraped-up motorcycle, to thank his father for helping keep America safe.

When Garcia appeared on the South Texas political scene in 2004, no one had heard of him. But it didn't take long for Corpus Christi's Democratic political groupies to begin whispering about the man who seems to carry all the credentials for an epic political career. They thought he would appeal to just about everyone–not just the Democrats who dominate Corpus Christi politics, but also to the Republicans in the coastal towns outside Corpus. With Election Day only weeks away, Democrats are still energized, and, anecdotally at least, many Republicans are considering abandoning their party's incumbent for the energetic challenger with such great potential.

Garcia is challenging 10-year state Rep. Gene Seaman (R-Corpus Christi) in District 32. In a state where every statewide elected position belongs to the GOP, Garcia seems to embody everything the Democrats need to take some of that power back. He's a veteran Navy pilot. He has worked at the White House. He surfs. He created programs for at-risk children. He leads a photogenic family of six (eight-year old twins, a five-year-old, and a three-year-old). [Disclosure: One of Garcia's cousins serves on the nonprofit board that publishes *The Texas Observer*.] And he has two diplomas from Harvard, a law degree and a master's from the John F. Kennedy School of Government. On top of that, his last name ends in a vowel–a Hispanic name. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas estimates that Texas will have a Hispanic majority by 2020, so having a vowel at the end of your name could prove to be a huge advantage. Riding that trend, Garcia might be ready to start asking for votes across the state—if he can just get elected in this coastal, predominantly Republican district that runs from Corpus Christi to Aransas Pass and on to Port Aransas and Rockport.

The man with the dream résumé has stirred up an unusual amount of excitement for a lowly South Texas state representative race. It's not as much about the boilerplate promises to work toward improving education and broadening health

Garcia on the campaign trail in Corpus

photos by Tim Eaton

Juan Garcia and Henry Cisneros *photo by Tim Eaton*

benefits that rally Garcia's followers. Rather, it's the desire to get on board the political express elevator at the ground floor. His supporters–who include former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros, former presidential candidate Gen. Wesley Clark, and U.S. Sen. Barack Obama–see a budding political star. And they're counting on Garcia's universal appeal to move him quickly through the ranks of politics and government. The leadership of the Democratic Party of Texas also must have seen something; he was tapped to introduce Chris Bell, the party's choice in the race for governor, at the state convention this past June.

Garcia points to his campaign kickoff as evidence of the enthusiasm surrounding his candidacy. "In Corpus, typically, a state House race kicks off with 10 of your relatives and a 12-pack out at the county courthouse," Garcia says. "(But) we filled up the Selena Auditorium. We haven't seen that before. It just doesn't happen like that."

Garcia's friend and campaign treasurer Joe Hall says people see themselves in Garcia. Hispanics and whites, Democrats and Republicans all identify with him. The candidate carries a driver's license with one of the most common names in Texas. But his father's Mexican-American features give way to his mother's Irish traits, so he doesn't look like a stereotypical Juan Garcia. His eyes are grayish-blue, his skin sunburns easily, and his hair is blondish, just like a lot of suburban voters. Garcia says he's opposed to the war in Iraq, which pleases anti-Bush lefties. But he also speaks aggressively about the war on terrorism and proudly of his service flying military aircraft over Kosovo and the Persian Gulf region, which makes him attractive to older, whiter, more conservative people–especially those who have worked at Naval Air Station-Corpus Christi or the now-folded Naval Station-Ingleside. Further propelling the campaign is Garcia's age. He's 40–neither young nor old. He's lived enough years and experienced enough life to satisfy older voters, but his unyielding energy has attracted volunteers who are too young to remember when "The Cosby Show" was on prime time.

"When I was a little boy, I thought this was my calling," he says. It is the same motivation that led him to the Navy after graduating from Harvard. He traces his desire for public service to 1973, when as a boy on a military base, he watched his friends' fathers return from being POWs in Vietnam. Some didn't return at all. "I thought it was important to take a turn yourself," he says.

Garcia's wife wholeheartedly shares her husband's mission. "We're idealistic," explains his wife Denise, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-born brunette of Puerto Rican descent who is also a Harvard-educated lawyer. "We feel in our gut that we'll be able to make some significant changes."

While his classmates are working on Wall Street, zipping around New York in black Lincoln Town Cars, the Garcias say they are happy with their suburban house in Corpus Christi

and the blue, mildew-scented Chrysler PT Cruiser parked in the driveway.

A lot of people–not just excitable campaign workers–talk about the idealistic Garcia as the savior of the Democratic Party. For one, former Democratic state Sen. Carlos Truan of Corpus Christi, who served more than 30 years in the Legislature, says Garcia is primed to be the next political big thing. "He's got the makings of a United States congressman," Truan says, "if not a United States senator."

Cisneros, President Clinton's former HUD secretary and a former San Antonio mayor, echoes Truan. He says Garcia's "potential is unlimited," and he is an "impressive guy" with an "engaging personality." Cisneros' fall from grace amid allegations of lying to the FBI about money paid to his mistress offers a cautionary tale of how quickly young political stars can fade. But in Garcia he sees only a bright future. "He has a real crossover appeal. I think if he wins, I think he will be almost instantly a promising statewide talent," Cisneros says. "We have such an absence of that kind of background."

Garcia cannot claim to be South Texas born and raised. But he is the son of a Navy pilot from Robstown, near Corpus Christi. The military took him all over the country as a child. When it was time for college, he chose the University of California-Los Angeles, where he created a literacy program for young immigrants in the inner city. Then it was on to Harvard for a dual degree in law and government. He later enlisted in the Navy, and eventually it was on to flight school at Naval Air Station-Corpus Christi. Then he went to war. He served in the first Persian Gulf War and in Kosovo (where he met Gen. Clark). When he left the Navy, he returned to Corpus Christi as a flight instructor. He stayed, became a reservist, and accepted his first job at local law firm Hartline, Dacus, Barger, Dreyer & Kern.

Local Democratic politics forced Garcia to choose one of the few Republican-leaning South Texas House districts for his first race. Even his extraordinary appeal won't make up for being a Democrat in District 32. His military and academic background–while impressive–will help, but Garcia won't be able to saunter into office, effortlessly winning the November 7 election. He's taking on an entrenched opponent in Gene Seaman, who has served a decade in the state House and enjoys a certain amount of popularity in the district, one which Seaman says he speaks to and understands. "My district is very conservative and doesn't go along with the Wesley Clark, Henry Cisneros, far-left liberal stance," Seaman says. "My district is very different than that."

Bob Bezdek, a political science professor from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, says Garcia will have difficulty winning enough votes to take the District 32 seat. The only Democrat to carry the district in recent memory was former state Comptroller John Sharp, who is from nearby Victoria County, when he ran for lieutenant governor in 1998 and 2002. "If it takes somebody as strong as Sharp to barely eke out a victory, what does it mean for Garcia?" Bezdek asks. "In my opinion, Juan Garcia has an uphill battle."

Bezdek calls himself a numbers guy, and he is. He's the only one anywhere who can recite precinct-by-precinct voting trends in the Coastal Bend back to the mid-1970s. Bezdek notes that the district is predominately white, and about 60 percent of the district usually leans Republican, which makes it a reach for Garcia. Another factor to consider in the race is Republican statewide candidates–such as Gov. Perry, Susan Combs, Todd Staples and Jerry Patterson–who might drive voters to the polls. Bezdek says statewide and national Republicans have tended to win by at least 60 percent in the district, which is also likely to help Seaman.

Garcia doesn't worry about people voting straight Republican. He's counting on people splitting the ticket, as they say in political circles. When he talks to voters, Garcia offers up some familiar words about not wasting tax dollars and reforming how business is done in Austin. But it wasn't so much the promises as the sincerity that converted Republican Rockport resident Lynn Lee, a 70-year-old retired member of the U.S. Foreign Service. "He's honest," Lee says of Garcia. "We believe he'll do as he says."

On the stump, Garcia has been calling for more lawmaker accountability, a promise that might lead to some conflict in Austin. The Texas Legislature is one of the holdouts in this Electronic Age to rely mostly on voice votes, and not record votes. Year after year, lawmakers decide to hide in the anonym-

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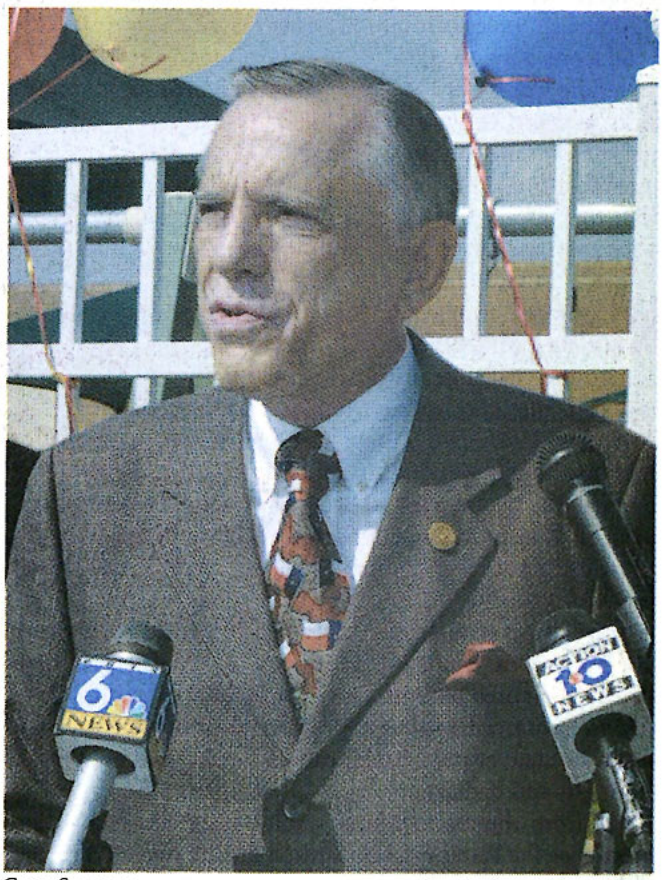

Gene Seaman *photo by Rachel Denny Clow*

In West Texas You Take Care of Your Own

BY STERRY BUTCHER

In Presidio County, you're a long way from anywhere.

The vistas are grand; the frontier is staggering in its raw, volcanic beauty. What does that mean, though, when your child has an asthma attack, or your husband suffers chest pains? How far is too far when it comes to medical care?

The border town of Presidio is an hour and a half drive, 90 miles, to the nearest U.S. hospital, the Big Bend Regional Medical Center in Alpine. Presidio has one ambulance, and it's just about kaput. Sometimes the ambulance crew calls ahead to Marfa, some 60 miles north, to arrange a midroute transfer. On the roadside, the patient is shifted to Marfa's EMS ambulance for the rest of the trip. Woe to you if you're Presidio's second emergency of the day and the ambulance is already out on a call.

With about 5,000 people, Presidio has one full-time physician and another who's there once a week. Up the road on Highway 67, Marfa has 2,400 people, two art foundations, a half-dozen art galleries and two bookstores, yet no physician or pharmacy. People with serious medical issues must travel to Alpine, 26 miles east into Brewster County, to see a doctor or fill a prescription.

Presidio County is 3,856 square miles of creosote, grassland, rocks, and sky. The northern Chihuahuan Desert is unforgiving country. The county is among the most unpopulated and underemployed in the nation. Most wages here are well below what they are in the big city, the teenage pregnancy rate is twice the national average, and 36 percent of the county's residents live at or below the federal poverty line. The drought that has nearly crippled the local ranching industry is slouching into its second decade.

Amid the challenges of isolation and poverty, a movement has taken shape to improve local access to medical care. In November 2003, two groups—one in Marfa and one in Presidio—began working to establish new clinics. Almost a year ago, the two merged to become Presidio County Health Services. A community-supported clinic in Marfa will celebrate its first anniversary in November; a new clinic is in the works for Presidio.

At the center of these efforts are two very different women: Kate Wanstrom, a nurse practitioner, and Marilyn Sanders-McCrory, a retired pharmacology professor. The hurdles these women have faced and the approaches they've taken say a lot about the state of rural health care in Texas—and even more about grit and dedication.

Wanstrom moved to Marfa several years ago to become director of the Rural Health Clinic, a facility operated by the hospital in Alpine, which is, in turn, owned by Community Health Systems Inc. (CHS), based in Brentwood, Tennessee. CHS has a small niche in the health-care industry—operating small, rural hospitals. The corporation owns more than 80 across the country.

By the fall of 2003, Wanstrom was chafing under the corporate management of the clinic.

"I wasn't willing to do more and more on less and less," she recalls.

Hospital executives insisted that the clinic—which wasn't breaking even—produce more revenue. Wanstrom complained that the facility was chronically and seriously understaffed. She believed that lackluster financial support had compromised patient care.

One busy Monday morning, the executives made an unannounced inspection. A couple of days later, they invited Wanstrom to lunch, where she expected a discussion about how to upgrade the place. Instead, the administrators gave her a list of 29 issues they wanted addressed immediately. Some action items were easy—throwing away the outdated bandages, for instance—but others, like the mandate to have a physician approve all sterile procedures, were harder. Over the next few days she began working on the list. Then she stopped, took a breath, and quit. "I could no longer reconcile working with such a corporate approach to medicine," Wanstrom said. The receptionist—the only other full-time staff member—quit, too, in sympathy.

When word spread that Wanstrom had resigned, her supporters organized a town meeting to talk about creating a community-owned health-care facility. The existing clinic offered no sliding-scale payment plan. Nor did it offer mental health care, alternative health care, or dental services. The building itself needed significant repair. If locals were in charge of their own clinic, the organizers thought, then locals could make choices that were best for the community.

The meeting was held in Marfa's AmVets Hall, a comfy old building with a stage at one end, a mural of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima at the other, and a cockeyed chandelier in the middle. It was packed. More than 200 people showed up, about a tenth of the town's total population. Hispanics, Anglos, old folks, new residents, and long-established families sat for two hours in polite, pin-drop silence as Wanstrom explained the idea of establishing a clinic. It was going to be hard, she said. A lot of work. And it'll take time. Who wants to volunteer?

More than 60 signed the volunteer sheets that night, including Allison Scott, the counselor at the local high school. She's credited with coining the catchphrase, "Better than nothing is not good enough," which became the volunteers' mantra.

Kate Wanstrom, Irma Leos, Iris Korus, and Marilyn Sanders-McCrory *photo by Sterry Butcher*

"All these people wanted to keep Kate here and provide better health care," Scott said. "Why should we settle? Why can't we ask for more? Why can't we build more? If we can have two coffee shops in town, surely we can have two clinics."

Wanstrom was overwhelmed. "My husband and I decided that if we had a meeting to gauge interest and 50 people came, we'd commit ourselves to trying to get a community clinic started," she said. "More than 200 came. I think a lot of people were fed up with their clinic being such a low priority."

During the same week as the AmVets meeting, a group of state and county officials was nearby talking Marilyn Sanders-McCrory, a retired professor, into a volunteer job that would eventually take over much of her life. The local officials and representatives of several state agencies were meeting at the courthouse in Marfa to focus on getting health services into Presidio.

Presidio sits across the Rio Grande from Ojinaga, Chihuahua, where the ocotillos come into their fiery, Dr. Seussian bloom in the springtime and the mountains loom blue all around. Poorer than Marfa, the community had long been on the radar of the state's health agencies. State and federal money was available and waiting, the officials told Sanders-McCrory. They saw the chance to set up a Federally Qualified Health Center (or a similar kind of clinic called an "FQHC-Lookalike") in Presidio. These clinics must offer comprehensive medical, dental, and mental health services, plus maintain a small, on-site

pharmacy. Unlike a physician's office or a run-of-the-mill clinic, an FQHC is eligible for 100 percent reimbursement for Medicare and Medicaid services, which greatly increases its chances of staying solvent.

"Presidio had always stuck out in their statistics as a place where this should be, but they didn't know anybody [who could] launch it," Sanders-McCrory said. Her flat Midwestern accent stands out in Presidio County, as does her scientific background, which includes academic grant-writing. Asked if she'd write a series of grant proposals to create a federal clinic in Presidio, Sanders-McCrory said she didn't know much about health-care delivery. "I'm not a provider. I'm a basic scientist," she recalls telling the officials. "I can research questions, I can write. They said, 'Terrific.' And I said, 'Gosh, what did I get into?'"

Wanstrom and Sanders-McCrory had met, and had talked casually about health-care issues. What followed for each of them was two years of grant writing, fundraising, research, anxiety, workshops, board meetings, paperwork hustling, and exhilarating moments of optimism. They checked in with each other frequently, puzzling their way through health-care regulations and complexities. Wanstrom is effusive, has a great cackling laugh, and tends to blast her conversations with exclamation points, as in, "Hey! Look! You've got a fever!" Sanders-McCrory is more tortoise than hare, methodically moving from goal to goal, meticulous in her attention to detail, from the aviatrix scarf at her neck to the statistical charts necessary for a grant application.

Eventually a small salary was secured for Sanders-McCrory, though she has yet to cash a paycheck. "The organization needed the money," she said.

Sanders-McCrory racked up enough state and federal grants to get the Presidio clinic open for a month last fall, but it closed for lack of a permanent, full-time physician or nurse practitioner. Though Presidio is undergoing a small economic and population boom, doctors and other health-care providers are not always attracted to a place so far from a hospital or urban amenities.

This fall, negotiations are in progress with Dr. Leo Altenberg, Presidio's solo practitioner. A physician's assistant who worked in the area a few years ago has moved back and is working at the Marfa clinic. When the Presidio clinic opens, he'll go there once or twice a week to help. The application for FQHC-Lookalike status is in process. So is an application for federal Department of Agriculture grant and loan money to build a large clinic facility in Presidio. And the city of Presidio has obtained a grant that will pay for a new ambulance, which should roll into town soon.

Fundraising for the community clinic in Marfa has been distinctly more down-home. Supporters of the Marfa clinic held a barn dance, bake sales, and monthly rock concerts, all conceived, organized, and attended by Marfa's young people. Five local families co-signed a $145,000 note on a former Baptist church that would become the clinic's home. Hordes of volunteers showed up to renovate the building, donating free demolition, and then wiring, plumbing, and painting. The white-and-blue, homemade lighthouse on the roof—a holdover from Calvary Baptist days—remains. A religious organization in town called the Faith Alive Cowboy Church donated enough used dental equipment to fill two exam rooms. A mental health counselor appeared on the scene. A dentist moved onto a place near Valentine and was interested in part-time work. The Houston-based Brown Foundation came through with grants totaling $75,000. And clinic organizers struck a deal with county commissioners to provide health-care visits to the county jail, which brought in enough money to pay the mortgage and give Wanstrom a small salary. (In lean months, said volunteer Scott, Wanstrom won't take any money.)

The Marfa Community Health Clinic opened last November. It offers clients sliding-scale fees for services as varied as treating the sniffles, doing "well-woman exams," and dealing with the afflictions that beset a population in which diabetes and lupus are common. A dentist and a dental hygienist are in the clinic eight days a month, and a mental health counselor comes regularly. The place is booked solid and has been since it opened.

As opening day at the Marfa clinic approached, state health officials suggested that the Presidio and Marfa organizers consider a partnership. A single, countywide organization with clinics in the north (Marfa) and the south (Presidio) would stand a better chance of getting federal funding, the officials said. The two groups became Presidio County Health Services, and a new board was created. "I think this is an extremely important economic and social benefit to Presidio County," said Sanders-McCrory. "There are a number of instances where businesses have wanted to come into Marfa or Presidio, and they haven't because of the lack of health care here. We can't afford to do that."

Meanwhile, in May the Alpine hospital closed Marfa's old Rural Health Clinic, where Wanstrom had resisted the "corporate approach." The hospital's new administrator is working with local officials on a deal that would pay Presidio County Health Services $4,000 a month to underwrite the Marfa clinic and other operations. (By law, the local hospital district has to maintain a clinic in Presidio County, an obligation that for years had been fulfilled by the now-defunct Rural Health Clinic.) Administrator Richard Grogan told the regional hospital district in July that there had been alternatives for the new contract in Marfa. "But we went with them because they do cover the entire county," he said. "They represent planned clinics in Presidio as well as Marfa." The monthly stipend, he said, "will speed up the process of getting a clinic in both communities."

One night last July, Wanstrom was among the crowd at a joint called Ray's Bar, Joe's Place, or Lucy's, depending on whom you talk to. Marfa had been temporarily taken over by an oddball group of Texas music luminaries in town to celebrate the 44th anniversary of legendary singer and artist Terry Allen and his wife, Jo Harvey Allen. The Allens, along with Robert Earl Keen, Guy

'This clinic is for the people and by the people,' said Wanstrom. 'It's affordable care. We work within our broken system, and we're working to maximize our health care.'

Clark, Joe Ely, David Byrne (the token non-Texan), and a bunch of others ran around town during the day and stayed up drinking and playing music with the locals until 5 a.m. They played two rollicking shows at Ray's Bar, with the $10 cover going to the clinic.

As Will Sexton warbled in the far corner of the bar, Wanstrom philosophized about the clinic. "This community owns this clinic," she shouted over the din. "Our goal is to empower people because they are our directors. Everyone should be able to get health care, everyone."

Terry Allen took over the microphone at the back of the room. He told a lame lawyer joke and challenged every attorney in the room–which at that point included criminal defense superstar Dick DeGuerin, Houston class-action lawyer; Marfa bookstore owner Tim Crowley; the county attorney; and others—to match the take at the door. The crowd caterwauled its approval.

"This clinic is for the people and by the people," said Wanstrom. "It's affordable health care. We work within our broken system, and we're working to maximize our own health care."

There is another hurdle: Finding a full-time doctor for Marfa. The clinic has been in touch with Dr. Adrian Billings, a Fort Worth physician who wants to open a practice with the community clinic after he finishes an obstetrics fellowship next July. Now the clinic is so full, there's no room for him. Clinic directors have raised the idea of taking over the lease on the building that housed the former Rural Health Clinic. If no space can be found, Billings said he'll open his practice in Alpine. But he wants to be in Marfa.

"I'm really proud to tell the story of Kate's group and the wonderful, altruistic thing they've done," Billings said from his home in Fort Worth. "It's a great, community grassroots effort of people coming together and having a long-term goal. It's a really neat thing."

Back at Ray's Bar, the party spilled outside at last call. In the back of the parking lot, Terlingua resident Butch Hancock hunched over a guitar playing song after song for a woman who stood nearby. All night, people had thumped Wanstrom on the back and asked her about the clinic: how it's going and whether they're going to get the funding from the hospital. She's still amazed at the direct connection people have to their clinic—the one their friends and neighbors helped make happen.

"They wanted something better for themselves," she said. "They did it." ■

Sterry Butcher is a reporter at The Big Bend Sentinel *in Marfa.*

Back to the Known Unknowns

Royal Masset, a Texas Republican political consultant who has been accused of being less than brilliant, recently had this to say about Karl Rove: "I think we actually like Karl a lot more now than we did when he was more active locally." He told the *San Antonio Express-News* he believed that Rove in Washington is remaining loyal to Bush while "fighting the good fight. He's fighting budgets. He's fighting wars. He's doing conservative kinds of things."

When Rove was in Texas, Masset continued, "there was a real sense of him being a total self-centered (person) who didn't care about anybody. He would literally destroy people who tried to oppose him."

Plenty o' food for thought in that. But first we should maybe figure out how to smuggle Royal out of the country with a fake passport.

The Bushies are having the hardest time trying to un-lie now. For example, at a press conference last month, the president asserted, "Nobody's ever suggested in this administration that Saddam Hussein ordered the (Sept. 11) attack."

How true: What Vice President Cheney in December 2001 said about links between 9-11 and Iraq was that it was "pretty well confirmed" that hijacking ringleader Mohammed Atta had met with Iraqi intelligence. On June 17, 2004, Cheney said, "We have never been able to confirm that, nor have we been able to knock it down, we just don't know. ... I can't refute the Czech claim, I can't prove the Czech claim, I just don't know."

In July 2004, the CIA's own report stated it does not have "any credible information" that the alleged meeting ever took place. The CIA said the whole concoction was based on a single source "whose veracity ... has been questioned" and that the Iraqi official allegedly involved was in U.S. custody and denied the meeting ever took place. The 9-11 commission had already concluded the meeting never occurred.

Let's have what we should have had at the beginning—as informed and unideological a debate as possible, with attention to the effects on our allies and the region.

Cheney has a consistent pattern of exaggeration on intelligence related to Iraq. The tragedy is that at least half the American people believed Saddam Hussein was connected to the 9-11 plot—and most soldiers serving in Iraq still believe this.

It's pretty embarrassing when the British intelligence services, MI5 and MI6, accuse the FBI of leaking like a sieve. British intelligence has a lengthy history in the leaking-like-a-sieve department—so that's some pot calling our kettle black. Nevertheless, they are making the point that our leaks about the "liquid terror" plot have pretty well bollixed up the case. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott was so annoyed he referred to the entire Bush performance in the Middle East as "crap." This truth-telling has gone too far.

Or, come to think of it, maybe it's just begun—and it's high damn time we got on with it. I'd suggest starting with the reality on the ground. Iraq is a disaster. The most credible estimate of how long it would take to fix it—if it is fixable—is another 10 to 25 years and a commensurate amount of dollars. Is it doable? Is it worth it? What are the consequences if we do or do not continue the effort? What are the consequences if the most likely result of our withdrawal—partition into three parts—takes place? (That's also a likely consequence of our staying.)

It seems to me that those who advocate withdrawal ASAP have just as much of a duty to make the arguments for doing so—and to admit how much they don't know—as those who got us into this mess five years ago with that titanic combination of misinformation and ignorance.

Let's start with what Donald Rumsfeld once described as "the known unknowns" and then see how far we get. Let's have what we should have had at the beginning—as informed and unideological a debate as possible, with attention to the effects on our allies and the region. Onward. ■

Molly Ivins is a nationally syndicated columnist. Her most recent book with Lou Dubose is Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America *(Random House).*

The Cut-And-Run Bushites

Karl Rove's red-hot buzz phrase for this fall's election is "cut-and-run Democrat." It's meant to be hurled at anyone who dares oppose George W.'s war of lies and failure in Iraq. The obvious response is that the Bushites themselves cut and ran long ago. When it comes to standing firm in Iraq, who's actually standing there? Not Bush's two daughters or eight nieces and nephews. They're all of prime enlistment age, but they chose to cut and run rather than sign up for their Daddy's war. Same goes for the loved ones of Cheney, Rummy, and any of the other ardent warmongers in Bush's top circle—they cut and ran, too.

Then there's Congress. A recent *New York Times* article practically wailed that Sen. Max Baucus' nephew had been killed in Iraq, saying it "showed how death and grief can invade the halls on Congress." His death *is* horrible, as are those of the 2,900-plus other Americans who have been sacrificed in this wretched war. But let's not forget that Congress continues to throw our young people, our public treasury, and our global reputation into the wasteland of Iraq—yet of 535 members of Congress, only six have close relatives whose lives have been put at risk there. The loved ones of the other 98.9 percent of lawmakers have chosen not to take a stand in Iraq. The same is true of the right-wing media blatherers, the military contractors profiting from the war, the Wall Street financial powers, and the other elites who damned sure aren't volunteering to have their kids become "boots on the ground."

If Bush's war is not worth putting their families at risk, it's not worth the risk of any family. Rep. Charles Rangel has a bill that confronts the hypocrisy of these cut-and-runners.

To learn about his Universal Service Act, call 202-225-4365.

BUSH'S HOMELAND HOKUM Trying to puff up his bad poll numbers and give his beleaguered party a political boost for this fall's congressional elections, George W. keeps wrapping himself in the bloody flag of 9/11 and posing as America's valiant defender. For example, he scooted over to the National Counterterrorism Center last month for a PR tour and photo op, declaring solemnly to the cameras, "We're doing everything in our power to protect you."

If only. While the Bush-Cheney-Rummy Axis of Incompetence and Insecurity has dumped nearly a third of a trillion tax dollars and more than 2,900 American lives into its disastrous war in Iraq, it has deliberately left Americans exposed to more attacks by failing to take some of the most basic security steps. Port security, for example, is so sloppy that only a small percentage of shipping containers coming onto our shores is screened. The Bushites are screening every single American getting onto a plane to check them for shampoo, but—because the Wal-Marts don't want the stuff they bring here from China delayed at our ports—thousands of containers are merrily waved through each day without inspection, despite the real possibility that a nuclear or biological weapon could be tucked into them and detonated here. Speaking of shampoo seizures, the technology to detect and protect us from liquid explosives has long existed. Yet Bush & Company failed even to test detection technology that Japan gave to our government early this year. They also tried to divert $6 million that was budgeted for development of such technology—instead using it to provide more security for federal officials. W.'s perverse preoccupation with Iraq has sapped money and focus from real protection here at home, leaving us vulnerable to real threats.

WILD WORLD OF SPORTS "The House That Ruth Built" will be replaced by "The House That Greed Built." Yankee Stadium is to be bulldozed and dumped on the altar of money, replaced by a $1.2 billion baseball palace. With shovel in hand, Yankee mogul George Steinbrenner took part in the groundbreaking. "It's a pleasure to give this to you people," the billionaire boss said.

Give? New York taxpayers are the ones doing the giving. In a deal rammed through the city council without even giving the public a chance to speak, New Yorkers are putting up about $400 million so Steinbrenner can erect this edifice for his own profit. Also, the Yankee owner will be given a pass from paying real estate taxes on his sprawling new business property. Well, says George with a regal wave of his hand, the replacement stadium will be "much better for the fans." That's another shovelful of BS. George's place will have some 7,000 fewer seats than the House that Ruth Built. Real fans also might not think it's "better" to have to pay higher prices for tickets, which are to rise from an average of $50 each, already the most expensive seat in the league. Ah, but George has added some seats for the customers who really count. He is tripling the number of luxury suites, which will cost about half-a-million bucks each, allowing corporate executives and clients to sip cocktails and watch the game on TV while sitting in splendid isolation above us riffraff. Also, George will pocket millions from corporations paying to put their names and logos on every wall, gate, ramp, and other piece of this publicly funded, private palace. This deal shows how the rich get richer—they rip-off the rest of us. ■

Jim Hightower is a speaker and author. To order his books or schedule him for a speech, visit www.jimhightower.com. To subscribe to his newsletter, the Hightower Lowdown, *call toll-free 1-866-271-4900.*

—Garcia, continued from page 9

ity of voice votes, which help protect incumbents from political opponents looking for campaign fodder.

One legislator is all it takes to require a record vote, and Garcia says he'll be that legislator–every time, for every vote, for every amendment. "Any member–even a freshman member of the out-of-power party–can call for the full recording and documentation of votes. On my watch, every vote in the Texas Legislature, every measure will be documented and put online in real time," Garcia says.

Garcia says he's not willing to wait several sessions before having an effect in the House, and he doesn't care whom he makes angry in the meantime. He says he is not willing to go through proper channels, follow accepted rules of freshman etiquette, and wait 15 years to do something positive (perhaps a loosely worded jab at Seaman) while more kids drop out of school and lose health insurance.

So far in the campaign, Garcia tries to sound like he's speaking from the heart. Part of that means sticking with the nice-guy image, even when he talks about his opponent. One of his often-repeated tag lines goes like this: "I'm not running against anybody. I'm running for something."

Garcia even declines to talk about a recent, potentially damaging revelation about Seaman. Earlier this month, news broke in Seaman's district that could threaten his re-election. The *Corpus Christi Caller Times* reported Seaman paid his wife rent from his campaign funds for an Austin condominium that she owns. The couple also took tax exemptions from properties in Austin and Corpus Christi, the newspaper reported. Seaman spokesman Mac McCall told the paper that Seaman's wife was figuring out the "mistake."

The race has been relatively polite until now, but it won't stay that way. As Election Day approaches, Corpus Christi voters can expect some aggressiveness soon from the Garcia camp, especially considering the reputation for negative campaigning of Garcia's main consultant, San Antonio-based Christian Archer, who ran successful races for Houston Mayor Bill White and San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger. Archer may soon target Seaman's record in Austin, if a recent conversation with him is any indication. The ads could be ugly, considering he describes Seaman in terms that include "whore of the insurance companies" and "punk" and "rubber stamp for [House Speaker] Tom Craddick."

Seaman, 76, an insurance man who has a head of slicked-back hair and impressive skills on the racquetball court, most recently served as the vice chair of the Insurance Committee and vice chair of the powerful Calendars Committee. His second-seat role isn't just reserved for committees. Seaman rarely can be found leading debate on the House floor. Instead, his preferred perch is against the brass rail at the back of the chamber, where he chats with other members and reporters. He is a strong advocate for the petrochemical plants in and around Corpus Christi. In recent years he has lobbied his colleagues for better and earlier training in public schools to fill jobs at the refineries in the region.

Yet without doubt Seaman's most infamous moment in the House came in March 2005, during a floor speech that more than one blogger has called "creepy." (See www.geneseamaniscreepy.blogspot.com and "Gene Seaman's Erection" on www.youtube.com). The Internet has allowed Garcia backers to look back and laugh at Seaman's infamous speech in which he talked about giving older people a discount on Viagra. In his embarrassing presentation, Seaman threw his shoulders back and stood "erect," as he put it, before the House and promised to go "limp" if he didn't get the votes. The Garcia campaign might take the high road on the Viagra issue, but the footage has taken on a life of its own on the Internet and in e-mails.

If District 32 voters can manage to shake any memory of the Viagra speech, they might also hear the Garcia camp talk about Seaman's less-than-astonishing tenure in the House, including his inability to earn a committee chairmanship. As Truan puts it, "I would have thought that Gene would have been a more prominent member of the House, or at least would have achieved more significant legislation."

Seaman rejects the ineffectual-legislator argument. He says he hopes to earn a chairmanship in the coming Legislature, but adds, "That's up to the leader." Seaman notes that fewer experienced Republican chairs are returning, most notably Rep. Kent Grusendorf of Arlington of the House Public Education Committee. Seaman says that if he is re-elected, he will be the only senior South Texas member of the House.

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by BOB AVAKIAN Chairman of the RCP, USA

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Democrats love him, but can Garcia connect with Republicans?

photos by Tim Eaton

Will Juan Garcia take state Democrats down the road to victory? *photo by Tim Eaton*

If money is any indicator of the success of a campaign, then Garcia might soon be sworn in to take his seat next to Rep. Patrick Rose (D-Dripping Springs), Rep. Rafael Anchia (D-Dallas), Rep. Mark Strama (D-Austin), and other eager, young Democrats in the House—a farm team poised to enter the major leagues. The résumé of the Navy pilot-turned-would-be-politician could earn Garcia an instant voice in the group. His ability to raise money might propel him further.

In the first half of 2006, Garcia collected more than twice as much as Seaman, bringing in $205,140.95, compared with Seaman's $89,956. Seaman somewhat sadly notes that $59,435 of his opponent's money came in the form of an in-kind contribution for television ads. Overall, Garcia's contributions came from about 400 individuals, including former classmates, former White House Fellows and Navy buddies stationed around the world.

Garcia's campaign touts the candidate's proclivity to raise out-of-district money, which Seaman has criticized. The challenger's total war chest rivals Seaman's $261,671.74, which Seaman took 10 years to accumulate. Asked about his opponent's impressively large bank account, Seaman complained Garcia was able to raise cash while lawmakers labored through special sessions, during which fundraising by legislators is prohibited. Of his own campaign cash, Seaman says, "I'm very happy with my financial situation. Don't tell the lobby that."

In a recent interview, Seaman attempted to use Garcia's star power against him. He argued that if Garcia gets elected, he won't be in the Legislature very long. He's hoping District 32 voters are not interested in continuing to elect new members to represent them. Clearly, Garcia has thought about higher office, as evidenced by his considering and bailing on a possible run for the U.S. Senate when Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison flirted with a bid for governor. He also considered running for mayor of Corpus Christi, a seat most politicos in the area agreed was reserved for then-Councilman Henry Garrett.

"I've flown airplanes long enough to know whenever you don't focus on what's ahead of you, that's when you put one in the water," Garcia says of the charge that the House would just be a stepping stone for him. "I'm going to keep my eyes on the prize."

Whether Garcia heads to Austin when the Legislature convenes in January, or he makes some money with those Harvard degrees, many people expect to see a lot more of him in the future. After all, even if he loses this race, there will likely be others. As we've seen with President Bush–a man with a far less impressive résumé–an early loss doesn't represent the end of a political career. ■

Tim Eaton is an Austin-based freelance writer. He used to live, work, write and report on politics and other matters in Corpus Christi.

—PIs, continued from page 5

Austin conference in early September, he prefaced his remarks by saying, "I am John Sharp. I am from Victoria, Texas, and I've been scared of you ever since I met you."

Sharp isn't on the ballot this election cycle, and that wasn't the only departure from the IAF's usual practices. Organizers billed the event not as an accountability session, but as a "legislative issues conference." Nonetheless, the four main gubernatorial candidates were invited to give short speeches and answer questions. Only Democrat Chris Bell and independent Carole Keeton Strayhorn agreed to run the IAF gauntlet.

When Strayhorn, the self-styled, tough-talking grandma, appeared before the group, she promised to support IAF issues ranging from raising the minimum wage, to universal health care for Texas children, to a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Carried away with enthusiasm, Rev. John Bowie of True Light Baptist Church in Houston even gave grandma a hug. After the session, Strayhorn presented a different face when she met with reporters; she criticized the state practice of offering in-state tuition at state colleges to illegal immigrant residents.

Bowie's fellow leaders insisted that he also hug Bell, who appeared the day after Strayhorn. As one said, "Once you hug one, you have to hug them all." Though the IAF doesn't endorse candidates, in order to win Bell needs strong support from its roughly 300,000 members, and he embraced their agenda. "You're my favorite kind of nonpartisan organization," he told them. When it came to the questions, Bell had all the right answers. Asked whether the immigration debate should involve more than just securing the borders, Bell made a pitch for a more comprehensive approach. "People talk about building a 20-foot wall," he said. "Well, all that will do is create an incredible market for 21-foot ladders."

The crowd responded by giving Bell a warm reception, and then he was told his time was up. ■

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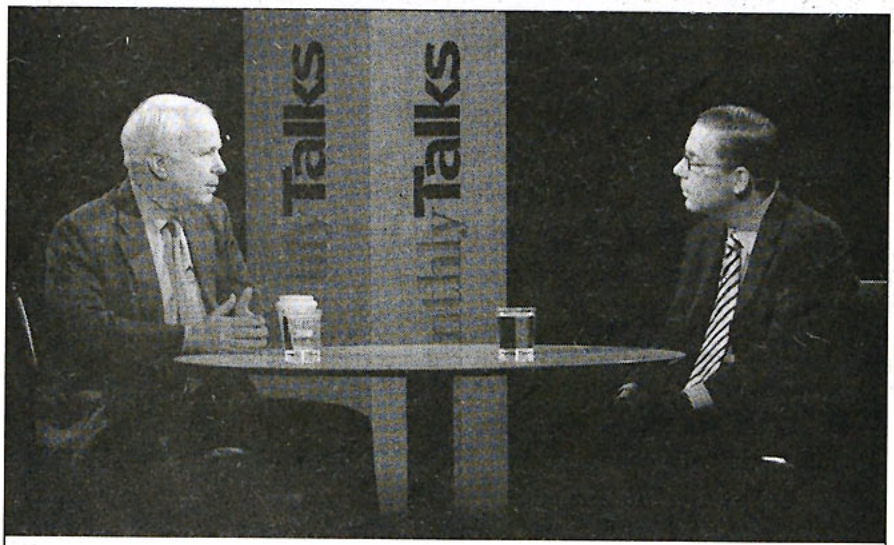

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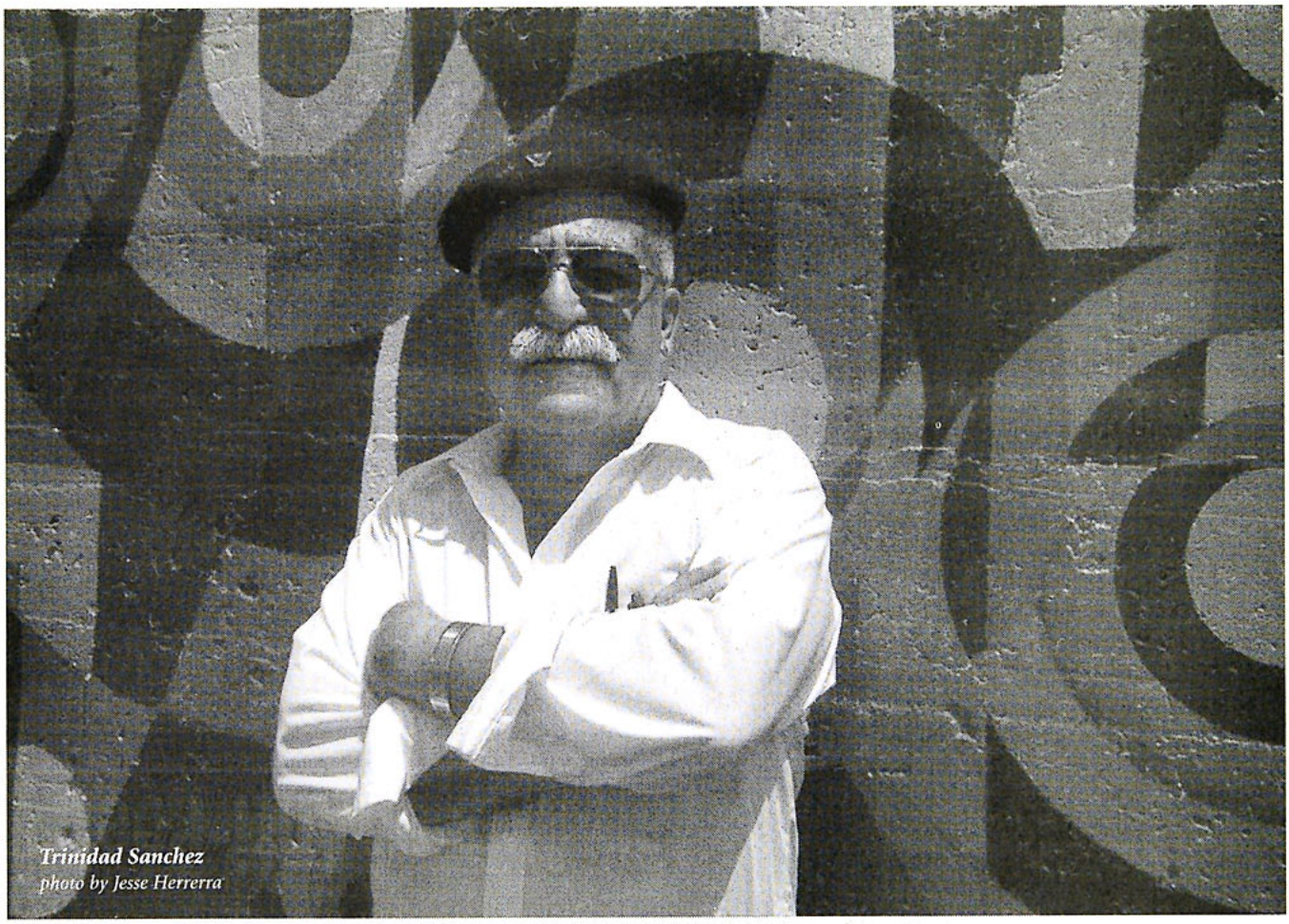

Trinidad Sanchez
photo by Jesse Herrerra

Para Trinidad Sanchez, Chingón Chicano Poet. Author of Why Am I So Brown? *and* Jalapeño Blues, *among others*

Why am I so brown? Why am I so blue? The day you left for that great gig in the sky, Las lenguas de las campanas de Guadalupe, cantaron "Estas son las mañanitas…", a comet set all South Texas aglow, tlacuaches dropped to their knees, cuervos bowed their heads, los muertos broke out the George W. piñatas and good tequila, giving gracias to the chingón Chicano poet, who kicked ass, with the red gummy bear heart con su alma de arroz y frijoles, who never forgot who he was even in the face of the onion breath people.

Why am I so brown? Why am I so blue? The day you left for that open mike in the sky, "La cucaracha, la cucaracha" ya no quiso bailar, las hormigas got drunk and rowdy and marched up Cesar Chavez Avenue, shaking their fists, shouting, "Stop the madness, Stop the madness," and Eva Longoria went desperately to confession. With strands of comet's tail and beads de las estrellas, nopales prayed the rosary, for the poet with the tears in his voice like the wail in Santana's guitarra y el ritmo de sus palabras como las tambores de Tito Puente.

Why am I so brown? Why am I so blue? The day you left for that great gig to the right hand of the Father, the earth got a little lighter and my heart a lot bluer. ■

Poet and writer Jesse Herrera lives in Laredo.

EULOGY FOR A DEAD BEAT DAD

"Women's traditional support systems
support women being vulnerable:
men's traditional support systems
support men being invulnerable."

"...When a man fails as a wallet,
we put him in prison; when a woman fails
as a mother, we offer her social services."

—Warren Farrell: Father And Child Reunion:
How To Bring Dads We Need To The Children We Love.

Today, someone asked about you. The question...
How to distinguish you from the dead broke dads
since both of you are in need of jobs & hard cash
and your life is in a spiral direction downward and
maintaining the hope that life will get better
becomes more difficult with each step you take.
Funny, sometimes the answers aren't readily there
when we need them...later in the day it came to me
"If these fathers are dead, why not, let them rest in peace!"

To make it official this Fathers Day we are planning
a stateside funeral for all the dead beat/dead broke dads.
The Department of Human Services social workers,
from the Division of Families and Children,
& Child Support will be invited to bring their
Deadbeat/dead broke case files to throw inside the coffin.
We will bury you with the fathers that raised you
The ones that kept reminding you "You are no good."
your alcoholic fathers, the ones that beat you for no reason
leaving the scars to heal in the rain, and anger's heat.

Not to worry, deadbeat & dead broke dads
are not being invited, will not appear on the scene,
after all, they've been dead too long. They will be
buried with all the illegal, illegitimate, illicit,
criminal dads of our community and our state.

Yes, we understand dads are important to the family.
This funeral will be to remind us that the real question is
about identifying, celebrating fathers/ men who are ALIVE
struggling to be fathers for their children, men who really
want to be good fathers without any real lesson plans
men, who live in a world that takes a criminal approach
to men and a social services approach to women.
We will celebrate you and the fathers we carry in our souls
The men living, struggling daily to be good fathers and men.

"Now that Trino is dead, he is coming back in each one of you." —Raul Sanchez, Trino's brother.
We mourn the July 2006 death of our beloved brother-poet and passionate community activist Trinidad Sanchez, Jr. in San Antonio. All donations in honor of Trino may be sent to his wife, Regina Chavez y Sanchez, 2803 Fredericksburg Rd. #1215, San Antonio, TX 78201—Naomi Shihab Nye

Small Victories: Real Journalism

BY CLAY SMITH

Letters to a Young Journalist
by Samuel G. Freedman
Basic Books
184 pages, $22.95

I haven't read all the titles in Basic Books' "The Art of Mentoring" series—there are also *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, *Letters to a Young Artist*, and *Letters to a Young Mathematician*, to name a few—but I doubt there is a single volume among them that so unabashedly urges its protégé readers to think of themselves as moral crusaders. The days when the public thought of journalists as crucial and brave passed us by some time ago. The tide will turn one day, but to have words like truth, justice, integrity, idealism, dignity, and empathy pop up now in a book about journalism is bracing, comforting—and odd. The author doesn't use those words ironically: Anyone "who doesn't enter journalism believing it is a moral enterprise might as well move straight on to speculating in foreign currency or manufacturing Agent Orange," he writes.

Samuel G. Freedman has a reputation as a demanding but revered professor of journalism at Columbia University. An education columnist at the *New York Times*, he is the author of six books, including last year's *Who She Was*, a son's moving and painstakingly reported biography of his mother, and *Small Victories: The Real World of a Teacher, Her Students, and Their High School*, one of the hallmarks of immersion journalism that reveals why a beleaguered teacher returns to teach every year despite the educational system's prejudices against her poor, minority students. At a time when many journalists are understandably nervous about declining readership, the growing attention paid to unedited bloggers, and the Bush administration's skill at putting the press on extended public trial, the task of shoring up the young troops runs the risk of seeming quaint.

Freedman is aware that few, if any, journalists would recognize the field as he sketches it in *Letters to a Young Journalist*, but it is the work of a mentor—and the pleasure of someone who loves journalism as much as Freedman does—to prescribe its lofty tenets. "As a reporter, you will be tacking...between the shores of truth and justice, trying to hold your direction true north," he writes.

Freedman wants his readers "to celebrate moments of human achievement and unearth evidence of human venality," but how often does the world offer up clear proof of either? "What we sell is something good and precious, the most incisive and artful rendering of human events that we can produce," he asserts, but when readership (and viewership) are steadily declining, how long can you persist in feeling proud of something people ignore?

Three-quarters of the way through the book, Freedman acknowledges that the world he has portrayed in *Letters to a Young Journalist* is imaginary. "It is a world without resumes, rejection letters, boring assignments, newsroom budget cuts, backbiting colleagues, and tyrannical editors," he writes. "It is a world that does not exist."

But it is an alluring and intermittently attainable vision. There is the chilling and courageous prospect that "your friendships and family bonds may be strained or even broken" just for being a good journalist. As an example, Freedman uses the late *New York Times* editor and reporter Jeff Schmaltz, who was living with AIDS as he covered the disease and the politics that surrounded it in the late '80s and early '90s. Schmaltz was covering the funeral of an Act-Up leader who had died of AIDS when a TV reporter thrust a microphone in his face. "Are you here as a reporter or as a gay man with AIDS?" he asked Schmaltz.

"I didn't respond," Schmaltz wrote in an essay about the incident. "People in the crowd moved closer; they wanted to know the answer. I wanted to know it, too. Finally, it came out: 'Reporter.' Some shook their heads in disgust, all but shouting 'Uncle Tom!' They wanted an advocate, not a reporter."

When your profession calls on you to depict other people honestly and publicly, those people often forget that journalism has anything resembling a noble purpose. "As relentlessly social as journalism can be, in this respect you're going to have to prepare yourself for a certain kind of loneliness," Freedman writes.

His insistence that journalism has a thoroughly moral grounding inevitably forces him to confront Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer*, her trenchant examination of the "psychopathology" that exists between journalists and the people they write about. Malcolm focused on the controversy that occurred after journalist Joe McGinniss portrayed Jeffrey MacDonald as a killer in the bestseller *Fatal Vision*. MacDonald, who was convicted of killing his pregnant wife and two daughters, had given McGinniss complete access to his defense team in exchange for a share of the profits from the book. Among journalists, at least, Malcolm's opening salvo is notorious: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse."

Freedman goes to town with Malcolm's condemnation, pointing out that Malcolm was once sued by one of her subjects; the federal jury that saw the case found her guilty of libel. A year later she won a reversal, although that jury determined that she had invented

two quotes. "Every journalist probably does, at some point or another, leave behind a source who feels aggrieved, undressed, abandoned," Freedman writes. "But admitting there are flaws in the system is far different from saying that every journalistic encounter inevitably, inexorably leads to betrayal." *Letters to a Young Journalist* can be read quickly, but because Freedman surveys so many of the issues a journalist faces in such a clear and insightful manner (he even confronts the sometimes academic debate about whether to use a tape recorder or the old-fashioned notebook), the book lingers in the mind far longer than it takes to read.

Freedman manages to parse long-standing moral debates about journalism as well as the apparent inconvenience of entering journalism when there has been "a series of despairing studies of public attitudes toward the media." He cites a study, conducted in 2005 by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, showing that 40 percent of Republicans believe the news media are damaging democracy, while 54 percent of Democrats responded that news organizations are "too soft" on the president. That poll followed another Pew study, half of whose respondents "believe little or nothing" in their daily newspaper.

Freedman entered journalism during the Nixon administration, when public confidence in the press was at an enviable 85 percent and journalist heroes were plentiful. Freedman cites Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein, Tom Wolfe, and Seymour Hersh in particular. "[T]hey made reporting look not only courageous but cool," he writes, noting that because he started out in the early '70s, he is "accustomed to an adversarial relationship between government and media." Inevitably a lot of people entered journalism precisely because they were lured by the cool factor Freedman mentions. It seems like a particularly glamorized era to have become a reporter. I bet that a good number of people who became reporters thinking that investigative journalism was sexy—when it really requires mind-numbing patience and diligence—eventually hightailed it to other professions.

Isn't it possible that a generation of new journalists is apt to produce work that, in the long run, is stronger? Prognostication is a murky science, but if you're entering journalism now, when the public thinks of you as biased or irrelevant or traitors, isn't it more likely that you're rooted to the profession? The public's current distaste for the press has an unexpected benefit that this book, however inspiring and thoughtful it may be, can't equal: The public mood, and the Bush administration, have managed to winnow the wheat from the chaff. ■

Clay Smith is the literary director of the Texas Book Festival.

WRITE DIALOGUE

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The Real Facts of Life

BY EMILY RAPP

Some Fun
By Antonya Nelson
Scribner
256 pages, $22

Antonya Nelson *photo by Erich Schlegel, Dallas Morning News*

In Antonya Nelson's novella *Some Fun,* a mother instructs her teenage daughter in the facts of life: "There is no equal relationship. Either you love him better or he loves you better. Either you're getting dumped or doing the dumping... The other fact is: everyone has a secret life. It's the only thing you absolutely have to hang on to. Someone's always trying to get at your secret life. Don't let them. Those are the real facts."

No matter their age, socio-economic circumstance, or geographical location—each character in the latest collection from Nelson, a professor of creative writing at the University of Houston, has a secret life that routinely eclipses the life they long to create or the life society might choose for them. It is this secret existence that both sustains and destroys, from a young girl's stealing habit and her first impulsive sexual experience in *Some Fun;* to a woman's addiction to alcohol and a family secret in "Heart Shaped Rock;" to an artist's odd but healing relationship with a homeless young woman in "Eminent Domain;" to a teenage boy who believes he is guided by his dead mother's ghost in "Flesh Tone." Nelson's unlikely heroes and heroines often get stuck in the mess of their secret lives and remain there, flailing—but not unaware and not entirely unhappy. When teaching her son the facts of life, a mother is careful to remind him "that heartbreak was part of the package." In this collection, there is plenty to be had.

Throughout this brilliantly written book, Nelson communicates this: In these dull, depressed, terrible, and sometimes unremarkable moments in our secret lives, we are most human, most alive, and most honest about the truth—the facts—of life. Although her characters occasionally break out of their carefully constructed private worlds, most retreat inside the restricting walls they've created—out of habit, comfort, and even a strange kind of love. They get close to their demons and look them in the eye, and choose to live with them rather then send them away.

In "Dick," Ann Ponders, a woman in her mid-40s, is moving her family from "the toxic beauty" of Los Angeles to Colorado. While Ann clings to her 12-year-old son Cole, he is busy clinging to other things: in this case, Dick, a boy from "the blue-collar world of his father, who installed heaters and cookers in addition to breeding dogs." Cole's attachment to his slightly off-putting friend threatens his mother's hold on him. When Dick disappears one day and never returns, an inconsolable Cole assumes that Dick simply lost his desire to live. Together with Cole, Ann feels the loss of her son's innocence, an innocence that had sustained her in a dull, passionless marriage. "Had Cole arrived at his insight concerning Dick because he shared the opinion of turning twelve, because he didn't find life, anymore, all that worthwhile? Ann couldn't bear to think so; she squeezed her eyes shut and hoped—it seemed a weak thing, *hope,* and it was all she had—with all her heart not." Ann realizes that Cole has become more of a grown-up when he has insights that he cannot share with anyone else—his tormented thoughts, his secrets, are his alone.

In all these stories, the characters ruminate over the departure of loved ones, who evolve, separate, or die, as with Evan's mother in "Flesh Tone." For all of Nelson's biting prose and her ability to render a boy's thoughts of suicide darkly humorous ("He looked nonchalantly upon railroad tracks and busy intersections, curious about his fate before the pill bottles in the medicine

cabinet, the knives in the drawer, the car in the garage..."), there are still touches, sometimes blasts, of magic. "This happened. He and his mother might carry on a conversation as if commenting on a film or a stage performance, as if Evan were in her world instead of his own." The reader senses that the author believes her character's delusions, if only for a moment. Evan, on the verge of puberty, must literally give up his mother's ghost before he can become a young man, but not until he takes from her valuable lessons that would seem to communicate Nelson's credo about how to survive in the world: "His mother had taught him the beauty of a secret life, the one unmeasured by others, and if unmeasured, then also unjudged, unknown in the most fundamental way, something held close as a heartbeat, a phantom voice near the ear, that most intimate of places."

In "Strike Anywhere," Ivan waits for his father outside a bar in rural Montana with a box of matches for entertainment. As he watches a drunk weaving down the street, he realizes this is what his father will be like in a few hours. He does not shrink from this realization, but notices it unfold in his mind as if he could watch the idea take shape from afar. Even as he takes action—"His fingers trembled on the horn, ready to alert people in the street, who would turn and rescue him from his nightmare, this desperate drunken figure"—Ivan is deeply aware that he will not be saved. This story is so strong because it feels as though it were generated by a snapshot, a fleeting image of a boy in a truck, parked outside a bar in the rural West, chewing on a book of matches. Like many of the characters in this collection, Ivan holds his breath and braces for the worst—when the worst has already occurred.

In "Eminent Domain," Paolo, a visiting artist in Houston, develops a strange relationship with a privileged young woman who has become homeless as a form of rebellion and as an experiment. "She'd grown up in West Texas, tough from her childhood ranch rearing and larger-than-life father. Pampered in a peculiar way, she was expected not only to perform all of the typical female functions but to cultivate an additional set of skills, the bawdy, tolerant sense of humor, the whiskey voice, the distinct and disarming impression she left of knowing your weaknesses in advance... Texans: they were a breed apart." This young woman's courage to strike out against the traditional life prescribed for her forces Paolo to question his own existence as a middle-aged man, living in a garage apartment, looking forward to this time spent with a pill-popping teenager instead of with his university colleagues. He looks around at others his age and wonders, "Would his life ever resemble that life? House, pool, wife, routine?" But his secret, benign conversations with a punk girl half his age are what sustain him most of all—not the idle chatter of other patrons of the arts and women his own age. He finds courage—and a renewed sense of hope—in this entirely secret encounter.

We tend to develop our secret lives as we near adulthood, and Nelson is at the top of her form in her rendering of adolescence. The novella *Some Fun* spans one year in the teenage life of Claire, beginning with "a desiccating June desk in El Paso, Texas; sweat dries before it has a chance to surface." Nelson has a gift for describing the swings and turns of adolescence. In one moment, Claire "wanted her brothers' company; during the night, she had taken the baby monitor from the night table by her mother and put it beside her own bed, listening to their wheezing and sniffling over the humming white noise." In another, she needs to steal things. "In the moment of theft, it seems imperative to possess them. Having them, the urgency evaporates. Stealing is an impulse like eating sweets: afterward, she can't quite account for the greedy need, in fact feels a little ill."

Despite the title, no one is having much fun. Claire lives in El Paso, a city she despises with "its brown emptiness and its clutter, its poverty and despair, its smoky yellow sky." Her mother, Eve, is a barely functioning alcoholic; her Aunt Lolly recently shot herself at home with her own handgun; her father has moved to a new house where "he lives with a Christian cheerleader, doing yoga." For entertainment, Claire and her friends take painkillers and watch the graffiti artists decorate the neighborhood; she takes driver's education with classmates who drop Vicodin before they get behind the wheel. As Claire aptly states, "The advantage of El Paso is precisely that: you can't sustain high expectations of anyone's private life."

Yet Claire does have a secret life. Without her mother's permission, she crosses the border to Juárez, the place of her mother's private nightmares: "It used to be a place where the family went on Saturday afternoons to shop for piñatas and masks and spices, to hear mariachis, to eat dinner at their favorite fancy restaurant. But now it is a place where hundreds of young women have been discovered in shallow graves..."

After her first drunken sexual experience in the back of a van in Juárez, Claire returns home with a new perspective on her parents' relationship and its demise. She believes she has learned something about love: "Eve has lost her ability to charm him; he has been transformed, and she is therefore reduced. Beauty is in part reflected, Claire sees, something perceived and beamed back to the object of delight."

The true facts of life, brutal as they are, still have moments of grace. Grace surprises the characters in a Nelson story when, instead of trying to change their situations, they embrace them. These are men, women, and children who sit in the middle of the mess they've made—and claim it as their own. In a lesser writer, it would sound like cynicism and bitterness. But Nelson's frank treatment of the human condition is never cynical or bitter, but strangely uplifting. These are characters who hold their sins, their mess, and their secret lives together by a feeble hope, "as close as a heartbeat." ■

Emily Rapp is the author of Poster Child: A Memoir, *which will be published early next year by Bloomsbury Press. She is a 2004 graduate of the Michener Center for Writers at UT-Austin.*

'I Was Armed with my Dignity Intact'

Poet, professor, human rights activist, and well-known Austinite Raúl Salinas is the author of two new books: raúl-salinas and the Jail Machine: Selected Writings by Raúl Salinas, *edited by Louis G. Mendoza (University of Texas Press); and* Indio Trails: A Xicano Odyssey Through Indian Country *(Wings Press). As poet Joy Harjo has written, raúlsalinas "is a troubadour of justice" who "makes his way through our generation's history with his songs of truth. Some songs are elegies, some love songs, some are howling at the moon, some pure witness." (Inspired by poet e.e. cummings, Salinas writes his name in lowercase letters.)*

Born in San Antonio in 1934, Salinas grew up on the East Side of Austin. From 1957 to 1972, he spent approximately 12 years in four of the nation's most brutal prisons—Soledad State Prison (California), Huntsville State Prison (Texas), Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary (Kansas), and Marion Federal Penitentiary (Ohio)—after several drug busts . The prison years marked his remarkable transformation from individual alienation to rage to political resistance that reflected the social movements taking place inside and outside prison walls in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1980s he has run a bookstore, Resistencia Books, and a small press, Red Salmon, in Austin. He has lectured and taught at universities throughout the country and currently teaches at St. Edward's University in Austin.

The following is an excerpt from a recent interview:

Texas Observer: *In a letter to human rights lawyer Michael Deutsch you explained how "prison was a backyard form of colonialism." Can you talk about "backyard colonialism" and the prison rebellion years, and how political education was related to movements outside of the walls, emerging from experiences you had with other inmates inside the walls?*

Raul Salinas: Well, the prison rebellion years were very exciting times, even though they were very physically brutal and mentally devastating. We weren't just challenging the state in an irrational, inane way, but we were very clearly outlining our arena of struggle and what we had to deal with. The fact that people were becoming educated, helping each other to go into higher learning, to read books critically, to become writers and painters and prison barristers or, as they're more commonly known, jailhouse lawyers.

So those times were very exciting, very frightening, because there was a transformation taking place. And this was happening throughout the country—no doubt about that—but we were focused on our arena of struggle, which happened to be the federal joint at the time—Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, and later Marion. It was a time of organizing and turning each other on to new materials that we had never had the opportunity to hold in our hands, much less read.

New languages, new concepts, new paradigms that began to make it clear that it was part of a colonial mindset: This is the captives. This is the renegades. These are the ones who will not conform to the reservation or the plantation, and we must deal with them. So how did the state deal with us, the Feds in this case, but the state overall? The way the state deals with any captive, military or otherwise. It's about brutal physical assaults to mental pressures that go into the clinical, which go into the mind-altering drugs, which go into the attempts to deprive one of one's senses and shake up one's sense of equilibrium.

They tried to domesticate us, to pacify us, to control us, to render us helpless, powerless, but they didn't succeed.

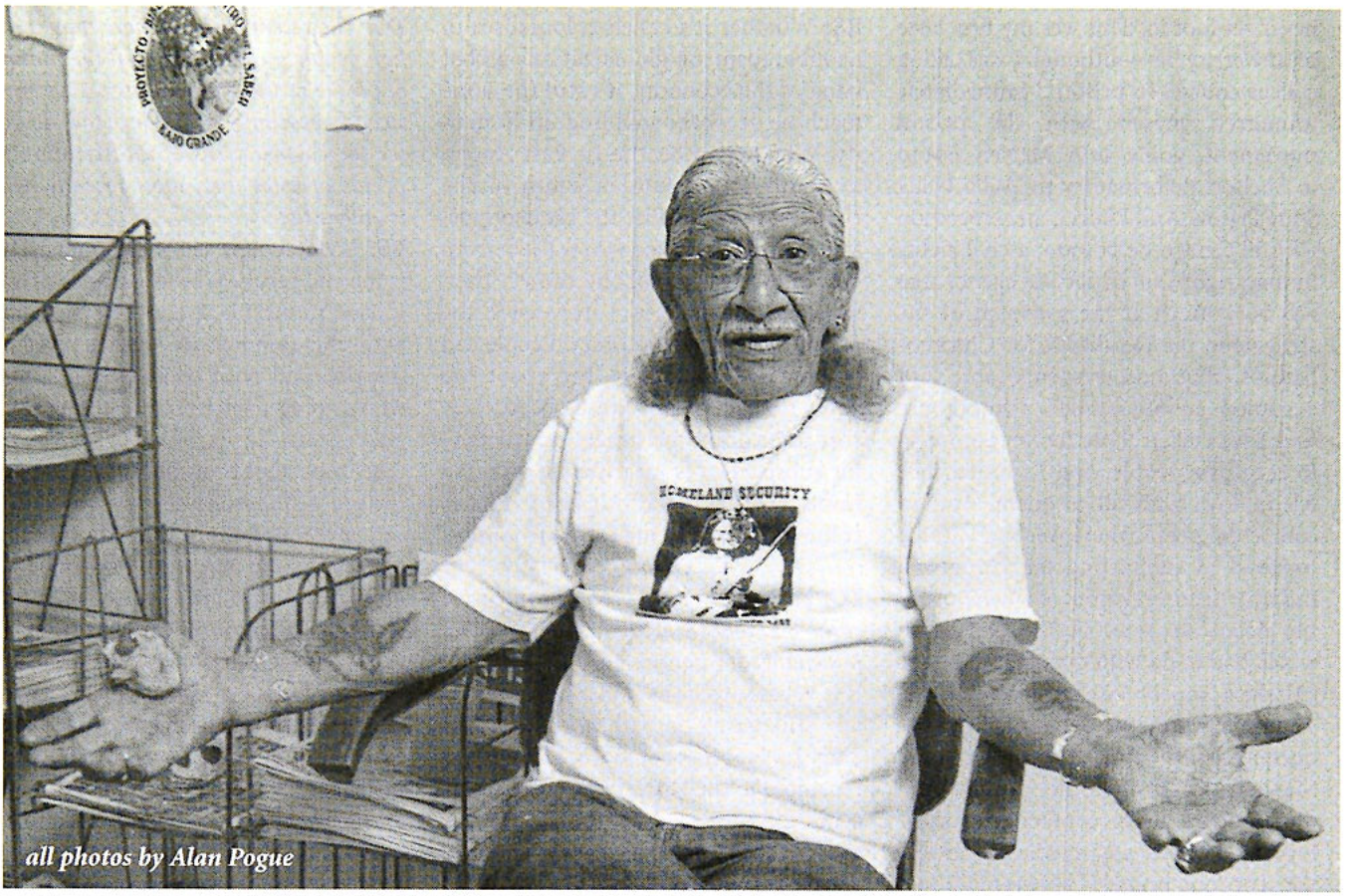
We began to look at this society and the individualistic nature of this society and how it's dog-eat-dog, every man for himself. The first thing we learned was there is no such thing as being self-taught. I would be so grossly negligent—aside from being a damned liar—if I fall into the trap and agree when people say I am self-educated. I am not. I was educated by some brilliant, brilliant minds, and they all gave me something of themselves, as I am sure I gave to them.

TO: *And then you were released. When you talk about "seeking out like-minded people" on the streets, what do you mean? What did you take with you from these experiences—from organizing with Puerto Rican Independistas at Leavenworth, with other Chicanos, blacks, American Indians, from Marion, where you were a plaintiff in Adams v. Carlson, the case that challenged the arbitrary long-term punishment of isolation, sensory deprivation, and behavior modification?*

RS: Oh my God. What did I take with me? I felt that I was prepared to live as a totally different man that I had lived when I first went in, that I could contribute to humanity. So I brought with me a wealth of information and knowledge, some loyalties, some undying friendships that are alive and well to this day, those of us who survived…

TO: My Weapon is My Pen *ends with a final dedication and declaration: "In honor of those who did not survive the 'prison rebellion' years, and in solidarity with those prison fighters who continue to struggle, I commit the remainder of my life to exposing the inhumanity of the jail machine. La lutta continua." When you were released from Marion, where did you go? How was that another part of this process of transformation?*

RS: Well, I literally went into exile. And I say that in the most non-rhetorical manner because people have problems with the term "exile," or they think exile means being cast off in an island by



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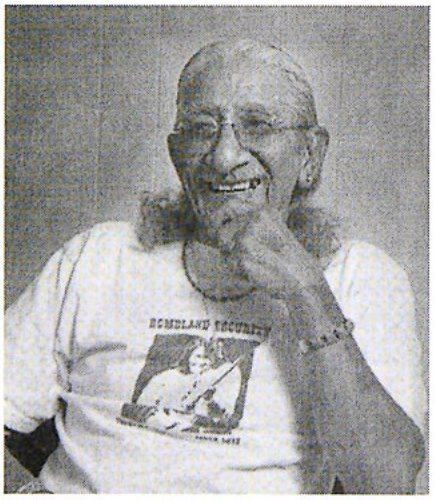
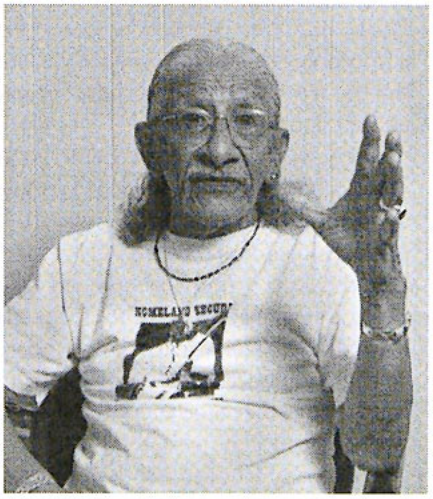
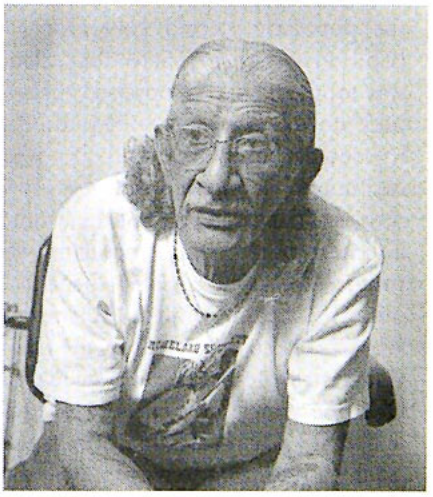






yourself somewhere. The true sense of *exiliado* is also *desterrado*, to displace you, to remove you from your homeland. And since I could not return to Texas because the Rangers were waiting for me—the Texas Rangers not the baseball team—and California had a life-top on me, just for doing what Willie does every day and gets praise in the press for it, I went to Seattle.

Through my writings, through my poetry primarily, *Trip Through the Mind Jail* specifically, I had established some correspondence with graduate students and professors at the University of Washington. And they were doing prison work at McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary. So it was a natural connection, and they began to correspond with me, and they asked me what they could do for me... so they helped me obtain my release: the late Dr. Joseph Sommers, along with Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, now retired from the Rockefeller Foundation, and historian Antonia Castañeda. They were very instrumental in getting me to Seattle and enrolled at the University of Washington. A city and state that I had never been to, a university the likes of which I had

never set foot in. This was my first taste of university life—although I was taking college courses in prison. I immediately immersed myself with the prison movement, going into McNeil Island, to Shelton Reformatory in Walla Walla State Prison. And I began an association with El Centro de la Raza, a civil rights, human rights, social service agency that was very much at the forefront of the struggle in the Northwest for Chicanos, Latinos, migrants, students, and they occupied an abandoned schoolhouse. And I was taken there by Dr. Sommers to meet the people, and I immediately fell in love with all of them. And of course the people there were very much involved in supporting the [American Indian] fishing rights struggles and the Asian struggles in the Northwest, which had to do with organizing unions [Alaska Cannery Workers] around the salmon fisheries. So we began to involve ourselves with anti-Marcos[Ferdinand Marcos] work—Filipino youth. And that brought us in contact with these folks who were engaging Marcos directly. We sent four brigades between '75 and '80. And then in Nicaragua. In 1973 the popularly elected government of [Chilean President] Salvador Allende was toppled, and we opposed that. We took on the ITT stockholders meeting in Seattle and disrupted it. While continuing our local work, we moved into solidarity with another union, a union of African Americans, very progressive, which later became a minority union: United Construction Workers. Then as a result of the fishing rights struggles, I became acquainted with the American Indian Movement, and that's what I devoted my time to up until returning to Austin, where my work is now mostly youth-oriented, arts work, immigration, environmental.

TO: *In 1999, Seattle was again on the world stage with the mobilizations against the International Monetary Fund, bringing up many of these same issues you are talking about: the analysis based on local conditions, anti-capitalist, the inspiration of movements abroad—across the land borders or across the oceans or the street. How are these movements related?*

RS: Whether it's called colonialism or neoliberalism or globalization, globalizing of the economy, it's still the same machine at work, gobbling up humanity. Whether in Seattle or East Austin or south of the border, south of the river, we're up against the same opposition. I think all we can do is learn from how they treat us all the same, "they" meaning the state, the university, the prison system, the military. People can quibble and talk about "but aren't you being harsh?" Seems pretty clear to me that some grandma fishing on the river for subsistence is no different than an immigrant taking all kinds of risks to come to make a living for their family.

TO: So you come back to Austin in the early '80s, and we are now in 2006. What has changed, what hasn't?

RS: What stayed the same is that people are still going to jail from the East Side. In Austin, very few Chicanos are recruited to the University of Texas. It's a building we look at from across the great divide. So that hasn't changed. What has changed is the onslaught of gentrification invading the West Bank, our West Bank. Condos galore. Affordable housing for anybody except for the natives that lived there for over 60 years.

There was a new movement, so to speak. New faces, new language, new concepts to learn. And so I wanted to learn. And so I aligned myself with people who knew. Young people, and that being a struggle in and of itself because I wanted to work with young people. Young people wanted to work with me, but we have that big generational divide that both sides perpetuate.

A lot of old fogies think youngsters have nothing to contribute, and a lot of the youngsters think they were immaculately conceived and nothing was here before them. I'm 72 years old, I have not been broken by any system, and I reiterate: I commit the remainder of my days to helping expose that machine that almost ground me up, that tried to grind me up, and that has ground so many of our people up, and that continues to grind them in larger numbers each year.

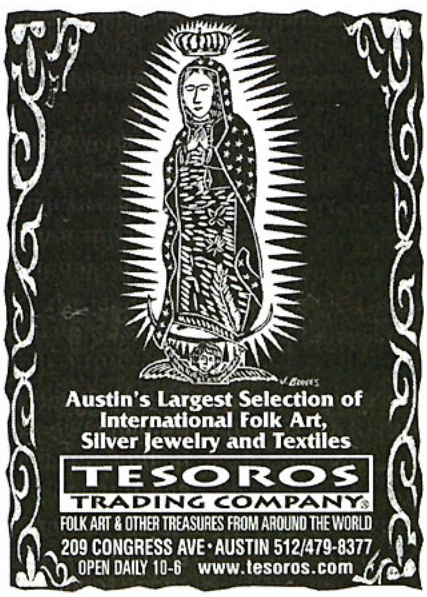
TO: The recent count is more than 2 million people incarcerated, and the number of people in the criminal justice system is steadily reaching 7 million. How do you see the current crisis of incarceration for people of color and, most recently, with immigrants?

RS: A whole new set of prisoners. That is the end result. Who is going to prison today? Young black and brown people with the number of women ever on the rise, and poor white people. That's who's going to prison and filling these jails.

One important thing about the war and torture is that every day we are finding out more and more that the methods of torture and the whole introduction of torture as another tool of repression are U.S. imports, imports from U.S. prisons. Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and Bagram are all products of yankee-doodle penology. Standing on that barrel with the hood, brother you tell people in Huntsville about that one. Ours was a barrel you stood in. Handcuffed to the bars all the way up to your tiptoes.

So that's what I meant, I guess to answer your initial question. That's what a backyard form of colonialism means to me. ■

Alan Eladio Gómez divides his time between Austin and Ithaca, New York. Originally from Corpus Christi, he is an assistant professor at Ithaca College.



For Texas and Chile, an Axis of Anti-Poetry

Diana Melendez, Karen Villarreal, and Nicanor Parra *photo by Alvaro Corral*

Forty-one years ago, in July 1965, I made my first trip to Chile, as part of an exchange program suggested by Vice President Richard Nixon after his car was stoned in Venezuela in 1958. This State Department-sponsored program matched universities in South America with U.S. universities to create good will and better mutual understanding. But after a couple of years, only the exchange between the University of Chile and the University of Texas at Austin continued, lasting from 1959 to 1968.

Before leaving on what would prove a life-changing adventure, I flew with our group of 15 students to Washington, D.C., to be briefed on political issues, perhaps the hottest among them being the recent U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. Most of our group was made up of "student leaders," like Kaye Northcott, editor of *The Daily Texan* [later editor of the *Observer*], and Ricardo Romo, the University of Texas track star who is now President of UT-San Antonio. In previous years, Carole "Grandma" Keeton Strayhorn and Lloyd Doggett had participated in this same exchange program. I had been the editor of *Riata*, the UT student literary magazine, and was probably chosen partly because a few years earlier Oscar Hahn, now considered one of Chile's leading poets, had come to Texas in the program. My role was basically to demonstrate that Texans, too, were "into" poetry, including the poetry of Chile.

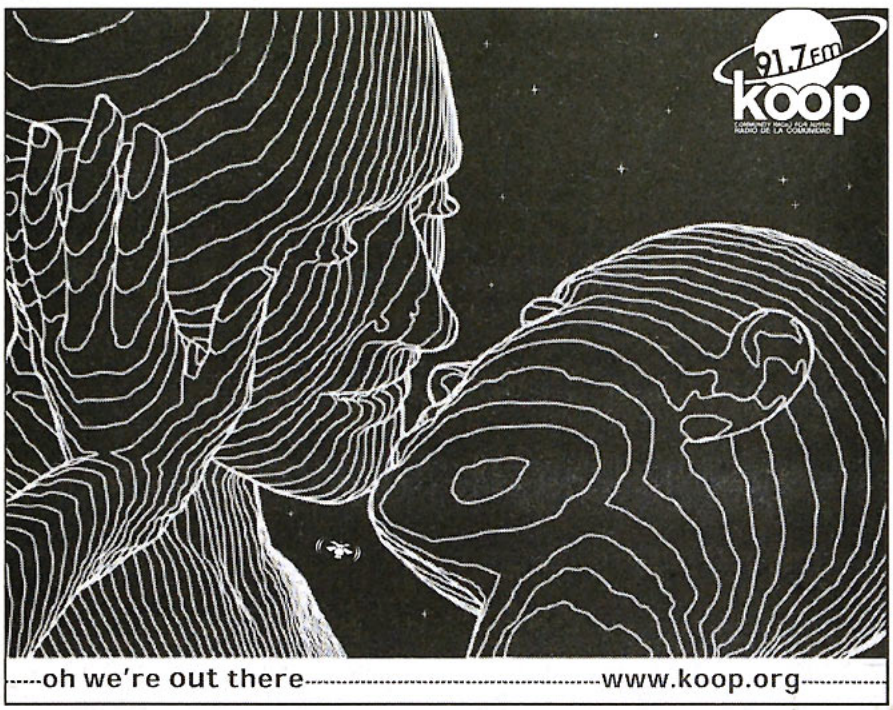
Little did I suspect that four decades later I would not only still be "into" Chilean poetry, but that I would be taking a group of UT students to study Chile's grand tradition of world-class poets *in situ*. But thanks to the three-year-old "Maymester" program, in which students from UT-Austin travel abroad with a UT professor, I was able to help another group of Texas students come to know this long, thin land, to read its

epic poets—including two Nobel Prize winners, Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda—and actually to meet the revolutionary Nicanor Parra, former physics professor and winner of international renown for his "anti-poetry," published in translation in New York by New Directions Press.

After my first trip to Chile, I returned the following year and formed a deep and abiding relationship with the country when I married my Chilean wife, María. Over the years we have returned to Chile numerous times, and I met with Parra several times. It was my special wish that the students who accompanied me to Chile on my most recent trip would have the unique experience of visiting the anti-poet, who on September 5 turned 92. Happily, they were able to visit Parra's home on the Pacific Coast, listening to him as he recited from memory a Mexican border corrido and as he spoke of his great love of Shakespeare, whose *King Lear* he has translated into Chilean Spanish.

While we were reading Chile's poets, the country's secondary students were engaged in a nationwide protest over the conditions under which they are being educated. Paralyzing parts of the capital, Santiago, students marched with banners proclaiming their discontent with everything from bus fares needed to navigate the far-flung city, which exceeds New York City in area, to the inequality among schools that do not receive the same level of funding—reminiscent of our own Robin Hood controversy. Some of our group found the protest the most exciting part of the trip, though they soon decided that it wasn't so safe to be in the line of fire of the so-called *guanacos,* water-spouting police vehicles named for the Chilean animal that spits at its opponent. It was clear to our group that Chile's form of democracy allows for such protests, in which students take over a school and close it, under the protection of Chilean law. University students also shut down their campuses in symbolic solidarity with their high school fellows, which meant we were unable to visit classes at the Universidad Metropolitana.

We did, however, meet with a group of Chilean students from the Universidad de Desarrollo who were intrigued by the fact that we were studying their national poets. They felt that their own countrymen did not recognize fully the value of their own literature. This, I pointed out, is perhaps the case universally, even though it does seem that Chileans are quite aware of their country's impressive poetry tradition—even taxi drivers know who Parra is. It is perhaps ironic that Chile has produced so many fine poets with international reputations by denigrating the traditional view of poetry as beautiful, if useless, language. As Parra has written, "poetry for the older generation was a luxury, for us it's an absolute necessity," even if he terms it "anti-poetry."



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After two weeks in Santiago, we moved our base of operations to the coastal community of Reñaca, a popular beach area during the summer season, but pleasantly relaxed in late fall. Nearby, our classes were held at the Universidad Marítima, where professor German Vogel and a number of his law students welcomed us warmly. As they listened to the sound of crashing waves, the students worked on their poetry papers and began to look forward to their visit with Parra. As many Chileans told them, they were in for a special treat. (Two teachers, who gave my students classes in Chilean slang, told them that they were envious and wished they could come along and meet the famous anti-poet.) Before the visit, we read some of his typical poems, like one that says "Let the poets come down from Olympus," meaning that they need to deal with the real world. Parra is concerned about ecological destruction, and has declared, in the voice of God, "If you destroy the Earth, don't think I'll create it again."

At nine in the morning on June 9, we and our wonderful guide, Paula Olguín, departed in a van for Las Cruces, a small fishing village located next to a spectacular bay. To escape the polluted capital, that's where Parra lives. After we arrived, the anti-poet took us to a grassy area on the side of his house and began to talk about *The Taming of the Shrew*, comparing it with a work by a Spanish writer of the 15th century. From time to time, with gusto, he would quote Shakespeare in English, but when he noted that all but one of the students were Mexican-American, he launched into a long corrido about a Mexican who crosses the border and finds a tragic end. The students were duly impressed; one, Karen Villarreal, told Parra it was her father's favorite song. Parra then commented on the current Chilean students' protest movement, suggesting that the name "penguins"—as the students were referred to in Chilean newspapers—probably came from the fact that this bird with wings too short for flying has to claw its way along to get where it wants to go. He then invited us to walk along the beach. The students were hardly able to keep up with this 91-year-old anti-poet, who, they noted, had nothing about him that suggested his age, no wrinkles, no stooped back. He declared his secret was to take megadoses of vitamin C. His fisherman's hat, sweater, baggy pants, and lace-up boots were, as he has revealed, all secondhand, even though he has won nearly a million dollars in literary prizes. As Parra explained, his only interest is his writing and the artifacts that he creates, including the white plaster statue in his house of a Greek goddess with his ironic sign that reads: "I'm frigid. I'm only moved by profit-making."

Parra is famous for his dislike of cameras, but he allowed himself to be photographed with several students. For me the visit with the anti-poet was the highlight of our trip. It was a dream come true to share with another generation of Texas students the land of the highest mountain range in the Americas and of the grandest tradition of poetry in Latin America, with Parra for my money the most original and brilliant poet in the 21st century. ■

Dave Oliphant's latest book, Jazz Mavericks of the Lone Star State, *will be published by the University of Texas Press in 2007.*

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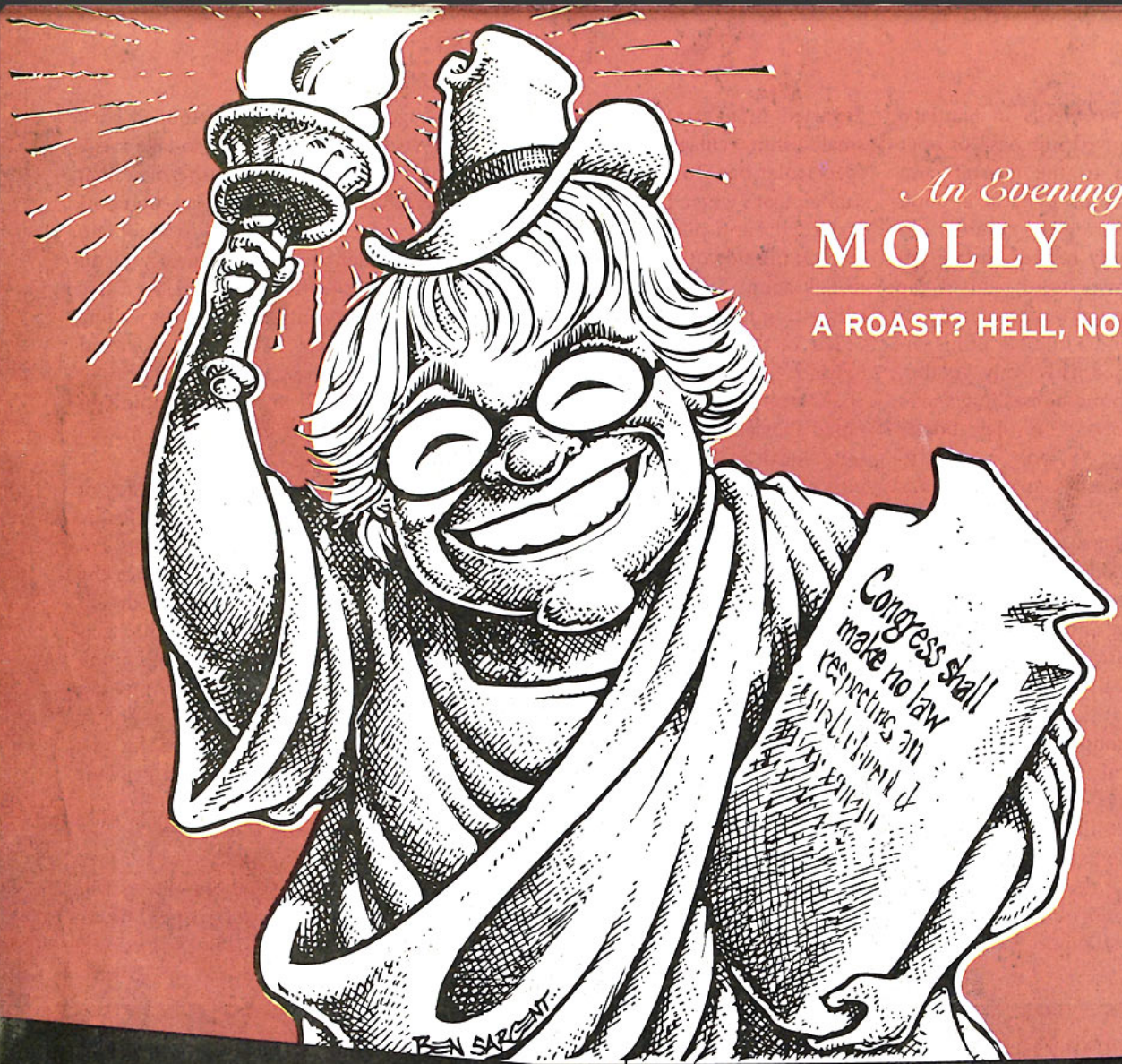

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