

# *Mother Tongue/Idioma Materno* Introduction

## Gemini Ink Readers and Writers: Today and Tomorrow Writers in Communities

**Anisa Onofre**

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*Program Gemini Ink, a San Antonio-based literary arts organization and the only independent literary center in South Texas, nurtures writers and readers and builds community through literature and the related arts -- UTSA  
March 2013*

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**T**he Writers in Communities (WIC) Program at Gemini Ink in San Antonio sends professional writers into diverse community settings—from shelters, schools and neighborhood centers to detention facilities and halfway houses—to work alongside students of all ages, needs, interests and abilities. These workshops—always free to participants—focus on oral traditions, reading, and creative writing. The majority of the workshops result in a published anthology representing for many their first acknowledged success with writing.

WIC programming is set apart by the excellence of its faculty, all of whom have

at least one published book or the equivalent. In most cases, their work has been recognized by established critical sources. They have extensive experience teaching creative writing to students of all ages.

Some examples of WIC's programming include the Children's Storybook Program that gives incarcerated pregnant teens, or homeless mothers in transitional facilities, the opportunity to study children's stories, then write stories of their own; Testimonios, where writers and artists work with Latin American youth awaiting deportation; Zine projects in middle schools where children learn about publishing, editing and writing; poetry projects in halfway houses, drug courts and homeless shelters, and memoir projects in senior community centers, to name a few.

WIC's innovative programming has been recognized and written up in *The New York Times* and *San Antonio Express-News*, and our projects have been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Youth Commission on the Arts, the Alice *Kleberg Reynolds Foundation*, Rackspace Foundation, and others.

For more information about the Writers in Communities program, and Gemini Ink contact: 513 S. Presa, San Antonio, Texas 78205, toll-free 877.734.WORD, [geminiink.org](http://geminiink.org)



*From Mother Tongue, pg. 8*  
*Top image: Mother's hands in writing process.*  
*Bottom image: Child at table with writing utensils.*

# Excerpts from *Mother Tongue/Idioma Materno*

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## Letters to My Parents

*Mary Morales*

Dad,

So, how's it up there?

Is it the way people say, with pearly white gates? So, have you gotten to see God or Jesus yet?

If you have, tell them I said 'Hi' and that I need a car so badly. Miracle hates the sun, so I need a car for my baby.

Dad, are there real angels up there? Well, I better go,

I'm tired.

Oh, P.S. I miss you, Daddy.

Hey Lady, What's up?

It's me, your daughter Mary. Remember me? So, I'm just checking on you to make sure you're still alive. Well, as you can see, I am. I just want to let you know that your granddaughter is doing well. She's going on five months and is already eating baby food. She's so big!

I like being a mom. Why didn't you? Why did you become a mom and not act like one? Why weren't you ever there for us? I can't even imagine not being a mom to my kids. What's wrong with you?

So, anyways, I was even able to spend Easter with my other kids. I had a great time. I can say it over and over: I love being a mom. It's an awesome feeling. My kids give me a feeling inside that fills me. I thank God for them every day. Do you know, because of what I went through with you, I have a lot of problems to deal with now? Why don't you change? You're already old. Stop that crap before you die.

## **A Political Face-Off**

*Jessica González*

Why is there fear?  
Why is there hunger?  
Why is there poverty?  
Why do you cry? Why did he die?  
Why does she bleed?  
Why are we divided?  
Why does he bear a different flag?  
Why do I fight my brother?  
What are we doing to each other?  
What is a DMZ?  
Why is it there?  
Why do you point the gun at me?  
Why are we occupied?  
Why am I alone?  
Why do I hear death calling?  
Why do their bombs drop?  
How did I die?  
Why am I dead?  
Why won't the Americans leave?

## ***A Mother's Love (excerpt)***

*Sonia Marzo*

It's the first of October, and I'm seven months pregnant with Luke.

Here, I decided to write this book at an eighth-grade level, and I'm also going through a hard time in my life. I was born in San Antonio, TX, where I still reside. I love San Antonio. It's a beautiful place to raise a family. One day, I would love to buy a house out in the country and enjoy my life, raising my children and just enjoy everything in life, because I believe that I can live for one hundred years. But if I don't do something that makes me happy in life, then it's all just a waste of years.

I also have a fourteen-month-old son named Benito, who I miss dearly. When Benito was born, I just melted. It was love at first sight. After three days in the hospital, I finally took Benito home. I just couldn't take my eyes off of him, he was so perfect and beautiful. I could not imagine putting him down for a second. I would always rock him to sleep. I would watch him sleep and be right there when he woke up so that I could hold him, and just have him close to my heart. We bonded so well, like a mother and child should right after birth.

I left Benito's father when I was 3½ months pregnant and decided to just raise the baby on my own. The father didn't want any part of our lives and never showed any responsibility for me or the baby. I loved my child and I was going to be the best mother I could be to my son. I had no work and was struggling to make it, but my son always had what he needed. I had to get food stamps and other government assistance, but I had what I needed for Benito.

Before I got pregnant with my son, I went to prison for 4 ½ years. I finally came out in 2007 and started looking for work. It wasn't easy, but I found a housekeeping job with minimum pay. I was happy to have a job, and with a prison record it's not easy for people to hire you, but I did good. Then, after three years, I got pregnant with Benito.

I had this little person whose eyes would light up every time he saw me, and all I could do was thank God for him. I always made sure Benito was well taken care of. I never wanted to put him down. I was always rocking him—if not that, just holding him in my arms always. When it came to putting him in his crib, I felt so alone. I just like the feeling of my baby close to me.

Well, my problems started when my son Benito fell off the bed. Benito was 5 ½ months old. He was learning a lot of sounds and grabbing toys. I also enjoyed every minute of it.

I remember that morning in December, when I got up to feed Benito his oatmeal—he loves that stuff. I also had a bowl of oatmeal, plus a scrambled egg that morning. I had woken up a little tired, because I wasn't feeling well from a cold. I didn't want to drink any medicine that would get me drowsy. I just stuck it out and drank plenty of fluids and soups.

That morning, I woke up and fed the baby. I was feeling a bit tired because I couldn't sleep the night before. My cold was getting worse. My throat was also sore, but my cold wasn't so bad that I couldn't take care of things in the house—I was just tired and needed some rest.

After me and my son had breakfast, I went into the bedroom with the baby and turned on the cartoons because he used to like the sounds and laughter on TV. I also put some toys on the bed where I was going to lay with him and play for a while until he napped.

After an hour of playing, Benito was feeling tired and was ready for a bottle. I picked him up and went to fix him his bottle. I went back into the room and lay down with the baby. After rocking him, he fell asleep and I lay him next to me. I stayed on the bed with my baby, watching him nap. I would never fall asleep with the baby on the bed, but this time I must've dozed off 30 minutes into Benito's nap. I believe Benito had slept about



45 minutes, and I must've fallen asleep for the last fifteen minutes of Benito's nap. Within that time, my baby had worked his way to the edge of the bed. I felt him at my feet when I woke up and immediately tried to grab him before he could fall, but I couldn't reach for Benito in time, and he turned over and fell. Since he was only 5 ½ months old at the time, he was so delicate and fragile. Immediately, I picked him up and made sure he was all right.

I cried so much that day, 'cause I couldn't believe I had fallen asleep and that my son had fallen. I just wanted to know he was going to be fine. Little did I know it would turn out to be a nightmare.

*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed*

2 Timothy 4:17...(NIV)

My nightmare continued at the hospital, where I took Benito to get him checked and make sure he was fine. After spending all day at the hospital, I had to talk to an officer that the nurses had brought in and tell him what happened.

Then Child Protective Services (CPS) was brought in, and I also had to tell them what happened and how it happened. I have a prison record and have also used drugs in the past. CPS looked into my background and found a way to remove my child from the home. They made the report, and then the nurse sent me upstairs to have Benito checked and tested through some head-scan/body machines.

By this time, I was tired and my baby was tired, too. He was crying the whole time he was under those machines. He was also hungry, and these people at the hospital wouldn't let me feed him until he was done with the testing. Benito was feeling uncomfortable and was

crying for me to hold him. Finally, I got to feed my son and rock him to sleep. By this time, I was also tired and hungry.

The next day, the CPS person came into the room where I was and told me that I wouldn't be able to take my son home. I asked him why, and he answered that since I had a prison record, they had to stay with Benito until further investigation. I wanted to cry and beg them to please not take my son from me. I stood in a daze. I was in shock. I was in pieces, hurt, destroyed, and didn't know what to do. I was raising my child on my own, and I didn't know what to do next.

I stayed in the hospital with Benito, because he had hurt his head from the fall and had to stay for testing. After all the testing that night, me and my baby were exhausted, so I rocked him to sleep. I also tried to get some rest, but I just couldn't sleep.

After two days, the doctor came in the room to examine Benito and told me that Benito was going to be fine and heal very well from his injury. I told the doctor that, if everything was fine, why couldn't I leave with my son? He said he didn't know why CPS was still around. I just had so many unanswered questions and was so scared of losing my child. I felt so alone.

*You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later on.*

John 13:7

God sees the end from the beginning. We only know what we know, but God knows everything.

I stayed with my son at the hospital for three and a half days, not because Benito wasn't doing well, but because CPS wasn't going to

let me take my child home. By that time, I just wanted to take my son home! Later that day, a man from CPS came in and told me I could go home now. I looked at him and begged him to please let me take my son home with me. The CPS worker took my son and was going to place him in foster care.

At that moment, I felt like dying.

I kissed Benito and held him real tight and told him that I loved him and I was going to get him home soon.

I left the hospital hurt, destroyed and in pieces. I rode the bus home. I was dazed and felt like I was dreaming and couldn't wake up. I never thought I would be going home without Benito. When I got home, I opened the door and saw all of Benito's toys and bottles, diapers—everything in the house reminded me of my son. I started missing him more. I fell to my knees and started crying uncontrollably. I just wanted to die right there. I couldn't handle the pain of not having my son. I leaned against the wall, with one of Benito's bears, and I just cried. I couldn't sleep at all that night—seeing all of my baby's things laying around the house made me feel worse because he wasn't with me. I only had his things to remind me of him. I couldn't handle that pain.

The next morning, I put all of the baby's things away, from the bottles to the toys, diapers, baby food—everything that was Benito's. I did this because the pain of not having my son was killing me inside.

*If we wait upon the Lord our strength will be renewed and we will be able to run and not get weary.*

Isaiah 40:31

Soon after that, I started self-medicating.

I didn't want to be awake and feel the pain. I missed Benito waking up at night. It was music to my ears. I missed rocking Benito and the good feeling of just holding him.

I got a letter a month later and had to be in court for Benito. I'd never been through this, so I didn't know what to expect.

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life.*

Psalms 27:1

*The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.*

Daniel 11:32

I got up that morning and went to court. I waited for hours, it seemed, but I finally got in the courtroom where I met my attorney. The CPS people were also there. After everything was said, the judge ordered me to take classes and admit myself into rehab. I just wanted my child home that day, but they weren't going to give Benito back any time soon.

With no money to take the bus and go to these classes, I was a bit worried. I finally got into rehab and stayed there for only 2 and a half months. I had gotten a job as a cashier and, the following month, got my apartment, hoping that CPS would see that I had a job and a stable place for me and my son.

While attending these classes I met all these wonderful women in recovery. These women became my second family. I was blessed just by getting into the Alpha Home and being part of these classes. I had to attend several classes every week and, since I had just started working, I didn't have any money yet to ride the bus—and it was in the middle of July and August, the hottest months in San Antonio, I had to walk 3 and a half to 4 hours to be at my classes. Here I was, asking God to help me make it there. I could feel my lips cracking and my mouth so dry from thirst. I was also so hungry, but that wouldn't stop me.

I had to do this for my son and for myself. I would never stop fighting to get Benito home.

In the long run, this would all be worth it. These women in recovery shared their stories and gave me hope and strength not to give up. I got the chance to share my story and the pain I was going through. They were facing struggles and changes in their lives, too. These women knew what I was going through, and they were there to help me through the steps of recovery.

I wanted to stay clean and sober. I didn't want to use drugs.

I didn't want to lose myself or my son, and I really needed this help.

Every week, I looked forward to attending these meetings and classes. I just made it a part of my life and part of my healing.

*The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

James 5:11

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I  
will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Ps. 23:6 (KJV)

*AUTHOR'S NOTE:*

*First, I would like to thank our Lord Jesus Christ for inspiring me to write  
this book. I give Him all praise and all the Glory. Thank you, Lord.*

*I also want to thank the Assistant Director and the Executive Director here  
at the Guadalupe Home, where I am currently living. Thank you so much  
for your love and support, also for always reminding me that, no matter how  
hard life comes at me, I should never give up. Thanks for all the encouraging  
words you always had for me. I'm blessed to be here at the Guadalupe Home,  
where God's love shines through us.*

*Thanks to my friend and editor, Elly Ramsey*

## **Mi vida**

*Mary Morales*

Once upon a time, there lived a long, blond-haired girl who had a hard life. Her life was like a confused puzzle that needed to be put back together. Her mom was a bad drug abuser who also had a bad life. The young girl was raised by her older sister, who adopted her. The girl could not ever get over the things she went through as a child, so she turned to drugs for comfort.

She was not young anymore.

The years passed, and she got tired of her awful life. All she wanted to do was change and not follow her mom's footsteps, so she called drug-treatment program after drug-treatment program until she was accepted. So she stayed for 60 days until they closed down. Then she decided that she was not ready to be out in the world on her own.

She called another drug-treatment program and was there for 45 days until she was ready. She soon became stronger and stronger, to where nothing could get in the way of her starting her life all over again.

This young girl is now going on 33 years old and almost one year sober. Clean sobriety. She is now a new mother, very happy and blessed.

This person is me.

# Dedication to Reviewer, Robb Jackson, for *Mother Tongue/Idioma Materno*

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*\*Note from Editor Cristina Kirklighter*

*Although including a review from a reviewer in a journal may seem highly unusual as you'll see below, we believe it is appropriate given some circumstances. Dr. Robb Jackson, a colleague and friend of mine at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, passed away this past February. As described in his award as an Outstanding Islander at our university, Jackson "has spent countless hours as a journaling and poetry therapy facilitator in mental hospitals, juvenile halfway houses, substance abuse treatment centers and jails sharing a process which has been shown to help people better cope with traumatic life experiences." He was originally from Sandusky, Ohio, but he spent almost thirty years in South Texas helping communities with the most need in empowering them through writing. Willma Harvey, our Assistant Editor, took his last class with him and remembers how he enjoyed talking about his writing workshops with Corpus Christi's prison inmates. He had these inmates think about their favorite music and lyrics as inspiration for their writing. He told the class how these writings made the inmates feel human. Nelly Rosario who edited Mother Tongue/Idioma Materno said this about his review: "Though I never got to meet Robb Jackson, I was positively affected by the earnestness of his review, which gave me a stronger sense of purpose as a writer." Dr. Vanessa Jackson, his wife, said this about the review appearing in our journal: "I'm happy that this will appear in Reflections. This kind of practical and ongoing vision of community work was very much a passion of his." We will miss him.*



## Dedication to Reviewer, Robb Jackson, for *Mother Tongue/Idioma Materno*

Cristina,

I think *Mother Tongue/Idioma materno* is an excellent prospect for inclusion in *Reflections*. In my estimation, the Writers in Community Program at Gemini Ink embody the principle of community service in all the very best ways. They don't just talk about doing this work; they do it. I think it would be an excellent project to include as a CD with *Reflections*. I'd also suggest that someone from the group write an introduction to the CD in your magazine itself. What is the vision and mission of the Writers in Community Program? How do they organize and fund their work? What sorts of activities do they support when they work with their community partners? What sorts of arrangements do they make, and how do they see their community partners? Are they willing to consult with other like-minded groups? What sorts of spiritual or intellectual resources do they find beneficial in generating this kind of work?

An essay/introduction to this organization's work might well encourage your readers to undertake similar projects in other locales, building their projects on the success of this one. If the essay explains how this work is envisioned, situated, and executed, other groups pursuing similar projects might benefit by this group's experience, and this kind of work can be undertaken by other groups elsewhere. If this kind of work is generalizable, why reinvent the wheel?

I think this kind of publication will inspire readers of *Reflections* in these difficult times. This Mother Tongue work is both heartening and inspiring to me, and I'm positive it will be received by your readers in the same way.

Thanks for sharing this work with me!

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