

Featured Authors



Lucia Gonzalez - As a child in postrevolutionary Cuba, Lucía González would sit enthralled in the unelectrified dark as her great-aunt told stories. Growing up in Miami, she savored memories of that magic, which paved the way for her career as a children's librarian, storyteller, and writer. She's been reaching out to the Spanish-speaking children of South Florida and their parents since she started at Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS) in 1991, where an all-day storytelling workshop made her fall in love with children's librarianship.

Through her programs at the Imagination Factory (an MDPLS program promoting reading through storytelling), she encouraged Hispanic children to read and their parents to read to them. Now with the Broward County Library, she's developed bilingual children's story times for libraries, public schools, and daycare centers throughout the county. Her efforts to expand the library's Dia de Los Niños/El Dia de Los Libros (Children's Day/Book Day) helped the library win the prestigious Mora Award for 2007.

Her storytelling goes beyond the library, too. While living in Venezuela after college, González learned that many Venezuelan folktales, children's songs, and games resembled those with which she'd grown up. That inspired her to write those stories in English, to “pass them on to our children in the United States.” These became her award-winning books: *The Bossy Gallito* (Scholastic, 1994) and *Senor Cat's Romance and Other Favorite Stories from Latin America* (Scholastic, 1997).

REFORMA colleague Isabel Espinal admires González not only for the national impact her work has had but also for speaking out against her own Cuban American community to defend Alta Schreier's *Vamos a Cuba (Let's Go to Cuba)*, a book about Cuba that was banned in Miami schools. For González, it was simply her “duty to defend children's right to accurate information about Cuba”—and any other country.

That courageous act, and her outreach to Hispanic children, stem from her vision of public libraries as “powerful, inclusive community institutions.”



Sol Villasana - Author of *Dallas's Little Mexico* Villasana is a Dallas lawyer, mediator, and writer. Little Mexico was Dallas's earliest Mexican barrio. By the end of the 20th century, Little Mexico all but disappeared, giving way to upscale high-rise residences and hotels and the city's newest entertainment district. This book looks at the neighborhood's growth, zenith, demise, and its remarkable renaissance.



Esmeralda Santiago - Born in Puerto Rico, Santiago moved with her family to Brooklyn at age 13. Her first book, *When I was Puerto Rican*, is a memoir of her childhood, and was published in 1993 to great critical acclaim. She followed this memoir with *America's Dream*. Her most recent novel is entitled *Almost a Woman*.

Esmeralda Santiago was born in Puerto Rico, the eldest of eleven children raised by a single mother. When she was thirteen years old, the family moved to Brooklyn, New York. Within two years, she had learned enough English to be accepted into the prestigious Performing Arts High School. She spent eight years studying part-time at community colleges while working full-time, until she was accepted as a transfer student to Harvard University with a full scholarship and received her Master's degree from Sarah Lawrence College. Upon graduating magna cum laude in 1976, she and Frank Cantor, her husband, founded Cantomedia, a film and production company that has won numerous awards for excellence in documentary filmmaking. She has done extensive work for victims of domestic violence, including helping found a Youth Service Center and a shelter for battered women in Massachusetts.

Her first book, a memoir of her childhood entitled *When I Was Puerto Rican* appeared in 1993 to great critical acclaim. She soon followed this memoir with the novel *America's Dream*. Her most recent novel is entitled *Almost a Woman*. Aside from her achievements as a writer, Esmeralda Santiago is also an editor. Her work as an editor may be seen in *Las Christmas: Favorite Latino Authors Share Their Holiday Memories*. Currently, Santiago lives in Westchester County, New York, with her husband and two children.



JACQUELINE ZALESKI MACKENZIE, PH.D., is an author, speaker, and consultant. She is an expert in the education of Mexicans and the management of nonprofits. She is the first academic researcher to relocate permanently to a low-socioeconomic-status village in rural Central Mexico.

Her doctoral award from the University of Arizona included special education, bilingual education and sociocultural studies. Her Master of Science degree from Florida Institute of Technology is in Business Systems Management. She also has a BS in Business, a BA in Divinity, and an Able Toastmaster Silver distinction for her inspirational speaking. Her spirit of adventure led her to become an FAA Certified Flight Instructor so that she could visit an Inuit village and met fellow female trailblazer Astronaut Sally Ride.

Her passion is to offer educational opportunities to marginalized Mexicans. In her youth in New Mexico, Mexican immigrant mothers nurtured her self-esteem at a time when her own parents could not. Her mother, Rosaline at 20, was a strikingly beautiful cameo perfect olive-skinned woman of Scottish heritage and of Lutheran faith. She was 6'1" tall. Her father, Joseph at 24, appeared to be of Mexican heritage. He was barely 5'6" tall, dark-skinned, handsome, charming, uniformed (USAF) and wore a handlebar mustache. His entire life he was mistaken for a Mexican. His first language was Polish, his second English. He spoke excellent Spanish; he was the first-born son of a Polish immigrant and of the Roman Catholic faith.

People always remarked on Jacqueline's parent's physical differences. The couple told of their attraction, short 28 day court-ship then leading to their matrimonial goal of being the parents of six tall sons. Nevertheless, after six

years of trying, they had only one girl and no joint heritages, rituals, or family ties to strengthen their marriage. Additionally, Joseph had been totally rejected by his family for marrying outside the Roman Catholic faith.

Rudolph David Zaleski was born eighteen months after Jacqueline. Their overwhelming joy was very short lived. Rosaline developed Hemolytic disease. Their infant was large and appeared perfectly healthy, but died in only four days. Joseph and Rosaline were devastated, neither ever totally recovered. While Joseph had his love of work and spent his whole life as a workaholic (USAF and NASA), Rosaline branded herself a failure at life and sank into a deep depression by becoming an alcoholic; a state from which she never emerged.

Jacqueline learned, first hand, the value of preserving cultural roots and reducing emigration to foreign countries. Every day Jacqueline gives thanks to God for her many early Mexican mother role models. They inspired her life's work, to help those who are marginalized or disabled to be understood by those who face fewer challenges.



Brian Behnken - was born and raised in Houston, Texas. He attended grade school in the large and integrated Aldine Independent School District. After working in private and public jobs for several years after high school, he began taking night classes at the University of Houston. Brian received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1999 and was accepted into the Master of Arts program in the [Department of History at UH](#). I studied under Drs. Tyrone Tillery, Bob Buzzanco, and Guadalupe San Miguel. In 2000 he completed his thesis, "On Parallel Tracks: A Comparison of the African-American and Latino Civil Rights Movements in Houston." This study became the foundation for his later academic and scholarly

research.

In 2001 he and his wife relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area and Brian was accepted as a doctoral student in the [Department of History at the University of California, Davis](#). He completed his coursework under the direction of Drs. Clarence E. Walker, Lorena Oropeza, and Kathy Olmsted. His dissertation, "Fighting Their Own Battles: Blacks, Mexican Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights Movement in Texas," completed the research he began with "On Parallel Tracks." Brian received his Ph.D. in 2007 and took a temporary job at Texas A&M University. Shortly thereafter he was offered a position as assistant professor in the [Department of History](#) and the [U.S. Latino/a Studies Program](#) at [Iowa State University](#).

Today he teaches, writes, and does research as a faculty member at Iowa State, a fantastic public institution located in the idealic small town of Ames. After revising considerably, doctoral dissertation he was recently published by the University of North Carolina Press. [*Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas*](#) is the first comparative history of the black and Latino freedom movements in the United States. Brian is currently conducting research his my next book, tentatively titled "Brown and Blue: Mexican Americans, Law Enforcement, and Civil Rights," which examines police/community relations in the Southwest from 1850 to the present.



Joaquín Zihuatanejo – is a poet, spoken word artist, and award-winning teacher. Born and raised in the barrio of East Dallas, in his work Joaquín strives to capture the duality of the Chicano culture. Sometimes brutal, but always honest his work depicts the essence of barrio life, writing about a youth that existed somewhere between the streets of the barrio and the dream wanderings of a boy who found refuge in a world of stories and poems. Joaquín has been called by critics, “one of the most dynamic and passionate performance poets in the country, melding equal parts comedy, poetry, and dramatic monologue into a crowd-pleasing display of verbal fireworks...always thrilling, Joaquín’s

hilariously manic presentation is full of compassion and nuance, never sacrificing substance for style, leading many to call him poetry slam’s answer to John Leguizamo.” A National Poetry Slam Finalist, Grand Slam Spoken Word Champion, and HBO Def Poet, Joaquín has performed his poetry at universities, conferences and poetry slams all over the United States, Canada, Mexico and Europe. In 2005, Joaquín was featured on season five of Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry for HBO. Filmed in front of a live audience at the majestic Supper Club Theater just off Broadway in New York City, Joaquín performed in front of a capacity crowd and received a standing ovation for his performance. For seven years Joaquín was an award-winning English and creative writing public high school teacher for ninth and eleventh grade students inspiring a new collection of poems from the classroom entitled Stand Up and Be Heard. For the last four years Joaquín has taken a break from his teaching position to tour North America and Europe teaching workshops and performing his one man spoken word show at hundreds of colleges, universities, conferences and poetry slams. In his extensive journey as a professional performance poet, Joaquín has shared a stage with Billy Collins, Saul Williams, E. Lynn Harris, Alicia Keys, and Maya Angelou among others. He recently co-wrote and produced *of fire and rain*, a CD that is a spoken word collaboration with award-winning poet, Natasha Carrizosa. The project has been described as a testimony of life/love that spans from the barrios of East Dallas to the ghettos of the West Indies. Selections from *of fire and rain* were selected by Poetry in Motion to be published on posters on buses, light rail, and trains throughout The United States—the Poetry In Motion series attempts to capture the work of modern American poets alongside the work of the masters, other poets in this series included Wallace Stevens, Anne Bradstreet, and Seamus Heaney. Joaquín recently won the 2008 Individual World Poetry Slam Championship besting 77 poets representing cities all over North America, France and Australia. Due in part to this victory, Joaquín received a book deal with Wordsmith Press, to be published in the fall of 2010. Also, because of this victory Joaquín was the poet chosen to represent the U.S. at the 2009 World Cup of Poetry Slam in Paris, France, a competition that he won besting 13 poets from 13 different nations making him the number one ranked slam poet in the world on both sides of the Atlantic. He currently lives just north of his hometown of Dallas with his wife and two daughters. Joaquín has two passions in his life, his wife, Aída, and poetry, always in that order.