



Senior Stories

Historias de la tercera edad

Cristal Gonzalez Avila

(Playwright's Notes)

The Senior Community Storytelling Project sheds light on the untold stories of Silicon Valley's elderly; a diverse group whose stories ranged from tales of abandoning the dreams of being a singer, to forbidden queer love sprouting from the pews of Sunday mass. The project explored themes of birth, life and death through individual interviews, each person painting a new picture through anecdotes, reflections, laughter, tears and pregnant pauses that spoke of longing without words; each story slowing time for me, filling a moment with a lifetime. I am grateful for the opportunity to have crossed paths with the authors of these stories, and I am privileged to be the translator/curator of the monologues you will see performed throughout the run of *Departera*. I hope you enjoy hearing them as much as I enjoyed writing them. Un abrazote.

KELLY

I ran out of gas three times in the past two months! (Deep breath) I knew he was going to be gone, but I didn't think it was going to be like this. That it was going to feel like this. Now, I notice all the little things he did for me. Like when I wasn't feeling good because of my diabetes and I couldn't lift my arms, he would brush my hair. (Holding back tears, laughs) I realized I don't know how to tie my shoe because he used to do it for me and during the week he would fill up my car with gas. You know, simple things like that.

(Giving into the feelings) I had been with him since I was 14 years old. My parents didn't like him for me, but when I turned 18 it was my choice. I wanted him. (Beat) He grew-up for both of us, he was from México, he wanted to take care of everything. He worked hard at work and even harder at home. (Making peace with herself) I have an altar for him at home, I feel him here, but I'm not ready to leave. I have sunrise

ceremony each morning (pause) I miss him and I know I need to sit with this pain. I'm not used to living alone in the house. It doesn't feel the same without him. He was always there for me, during the good and bad times. When I die, I know I will hear my ancestors sing. Only then, will I know it's my time to go. I am a native woman, I believe that.

BEN

I'm on the ground, on the ground, I'm on the ground.
I'm dying, I'm dead. It's happening, right now I'm
dying. I have to be because there are two good looking
women looking at me, and my wife, --- (Surprised) she's
crying. I didn't think she would cry. . . (Long beat)

The empty fridge, that's what did it for me. My sister
and I used to hide food during the week because we knew
that by Friday there would be nothing left to eat.
Shit, I wanna say that, that's where it all started.
Eating. Overeating. Drinking. (Beat) My father was an
alcoholic, abusive, de todo. I've gotten help to deal
with it all. I was a good dad, I think?! My son is
twenty years old now, I was fifty when I had him. My
son never felt hunger, I never drank in front of him...
I'm sure I screwed him up in other ways but I tried
really hard not to. Teatro and music found me and saved
me. (He laughs) Or whatever was left of me. I don't
know what that next place is going to look like. If I'm

going to see someone? But I'm not scared of death, I've seen it before. (Long beat) You know maybe we are all serpents and we shed this life, y la cáscara remains as evidence of our existence here and we are finally free somewhere out there.

LOU

(Lost in thought) I have a very complicated life. Coming out to my wife wasn't easy and it was even harder coming out to my kids. They all know, now. It's not a lie. My wife is physically dependent on me, I could never abandon her, I know that about myself. I will recognize that for better or worse, this truth is worse for her. But I accept myself for what I am. I can't be anything else than this. Life is complicated, there isn't anything simple about it.

I love her, I do. But few years ago I realized I was gay. And that's when it all made sense. It made me realize why my marriage life was so dysfunctional. Now she can finally stop blaming herself, that's important. As much as we loved each other it was never enough, I told my priest. I still go to church, I still pray, I still believe God loves me. (Silent smile.) That's where I met him, in Sunday mass, a friend of a friend brought him to church.

Oh he had this gorgeous smile. Life took me by surprise, no that's not right, he took me by surprise. There I was sixty something year old man, having feelings for a man. (Shocked) How could it be? But I gave in to the urge, his lips, his brown scarf that he wore most of the time. He was a model somewhere in Paris in the 50's, I didn't know it until his friend, the one that introduced us, brought out some photos of his younger days. He looked delicious. I looked at one of his pictures and thought, "I can be with him," (Covering his mouth, taken aback from his honesty.) He became my partner. Forgive me if I lose my composure, next week will be six months since he has been gone. You see, he set me free. I was there when he left, I held his hand until the very end. (Beat) Oh it was hard to see someone so beautiful, someone that had given me life wither away in a matter of weeks.

I want to believe life had prepared me for it: for his presence and his departure.

GABRIEL

As soon as my plane landed, I heard my name over the loudspeaker and I knew, I knew she was gone. I was instantly back home: Houston Texas. I could feel the heat of the sun sit on my skin, the humidity in the air. I could taste my grandmother's potato and macaroni salad, the fresh pound cake baked for no particular reason, the sound of catfish frying up in the kitchen, and I could see my mother. What a beauty my mother was. (Beat) I went to the attendee's desk, she handed me the phone, it was my sister, mother was gone. Oh my mother was great, I was very lucky. I remember, I told her "Mom I'm gay," I was eleven at the time, and she looked at me and smiled "Well about time you told me." Both my mother and grandmother supported me, (With a heavy sigh) my entire life.

I went to go visit her, I didn't know she was that bad, my step-father kept many things to himself, he was a private man --didn't show much emotion. I had been with

her for two weeks, then my sister would take over for two more weeks. I took off, my sister arrived, laid down to take a nap with mom. Mother didn't wake-up. She was waiting to see my sister so she could leave, I suppose. Guess you couldn't say she was living a peaceful life. She had been fighting cancer for some time and her spirit showed it. She's resting now, but I think of her all the time. (Beat)

I'm not a stranger to death, death has always been present for me. I'm not supposed to be living, according to the doctors. I was diagnosed with HIV when many people around me were dying-- it was an epidemic and I've always been the next one up. But here I am, living life and feeling fabulous. Two things you need to know about life, LIVE it and R-E-S-P-E-C-T! If you respect others, the world will respect you.

NILDA

Cómo es la vida y la memoria de uno. Hay momentos que nunca se olvidan. Mi madre nos arregló a mi, a mi hermana y también a mi hermanito y nos tomamos una foto familiar. Mi hermanito se sentó en las piernas de mi madre. Es la única foto que tengo de él. Esta foto y el recuerdo del blanco coche fúnebre que se llevaba la cajita blanca con mi hermanito adentro y las flores que lo acompañarían hasta el panteón.

Esa memoria siempre está aquí, el día del velatorio de mi hermanito. Yo tenía 5 años, él 4. Era una casa muy tradicional, los padres hablaban entre ellos. A los niños no se les explicaba nada. Era otra época en Argentina. (Long beat) Recuerdo el cajón, era blanco y pequeño. (Beat) Antes se podía velar a la gente en sus casas y ese mismo día se enterraban. Así lo hicimos con mi hermanito. Mamá movió todo de una recámara para prepararla. La gente llegó y no se quien pero me levantaron para poder ver a mi hermanito. (Beat. As if

seeing him) Lo besé en su frente, estaba fría.
(Emotional beat) El cuerpo se queda atrás pero el espíritu ya no está. Esa fue la primera vez que vi a la muerte a los ojos, en la cara de mi hermanito. Nadie dijo nada y nadie preguntó nada. Mamá no nos dejaba jugar mucho con él porque estaba enfermo. Aún así me dolió, algo se fue de la casa ese día y nunca se habló de su muerte. (Collecting herself, fighting back emotions) 10 años después mi madre tuvo trillizas! (Attempting to recover, long beats between phrases.) Entre yo y mis 3 hermanas son diez años. La familia creció de 2 a 5 niños. (Beat) Ella nos abandonó cuando ellas tenían seis años. Se fue y nunca regresó. Nunca supe porqué, nunca le pregunté. (Touching her heart) Pero eso sí me dolió. Una madre no hace eso. Mi madre y mi padre siempre discutían, peleaban mucho. Tal vez eso fue la razón por cual se fue, no sé. Ella murió, yo no fui. (Lost in thought) ¿Qué interesante, no? Las cosas que recordamos.

TERE

Yo soy de Irapuato Guanajuato. Mi pueblo era pequeño pero después de la inundación el pueblito creció y creció. La gente compró terreno en otras partes del pueblo y se hizo más grande con el tiempo. Eramos muy pobres. Yo tenía un hermano y él y yo nos íbamos a una difusora y cantábamos. Nos daban hilo para darle a mi mamá para tejer, nos daban boletos para el cine o zapatos. Después abrieron una tiendita y el patrón nos contrató. Nos pagaban 15 pesos diarios. En esos tiempos era un dineral. Se juntaba mucha gente. En casa mi papá tocaba la guitarra y mi mamá cantaba. A mi siempre me ha gustado cantar y a los 6 años me estaban pagando para cantar. Yo encantada de la vida. (Exaggerated smile, overwhelmed by happiness.) Una noche llegó un cinito y fui a ver la película, era de Pedro Infante. Antes que empezara la película escuché mi nombre por las bocinas. "Se solicita a la Señorita Teresita Vegas" (Suprised) ¡Ah! ¿Qué está pasando? Voy a prisa con el anunciador y me dice, "Aquí su hermanito dice que usted

canta muy bonito, ¿nos canta una canción?" (Flattered)
¡Ay pero Dios Mio porque abres la boca! Y les canté.
¡El público quería más y les canté 5 canciones! Eh, de verdad. Esa noche en mi casa hubo muchísima comida. Leche, galletitas, carne... yo bien contenta. Eso lo tengo aquí grabado, yo pude hacer eso para mi familia. Yo desde niña quise ayudar a mi familia. Quería seguir mi carrera y echarme a la cantada, pero pues mi papá no me dejó. Él decía "Ay muchos hombres adelantados. Mientras que yo esté aquí vas a salir de esta casa, casada." Mi mamá si me apoyaba pero mi papá no. Él tenía sus razones y yo respeté su decisión. Yo todavía canto, no en festivales o conciertos como un día imaginaba hacerlo. Canto para mi misma y eso me hace feliz.(To herself) Los sueños mueren y vuelven a nacer de otra forma, bueno si uno los deja nacer.

RODOLFO

La vida te puede dar mucho, pero si uno no está preparado de nada te sirve.

Mi padre biológico abandonó a mi madre cuando yo venía en camino. Y hasta este día no se cual fueron las razones porque se fue, pero desapareció como las estrellas lo tienden hacer durante el día. Él nunca regresó. Según mi mamá, él encontró el cariño de otra mujer y la dejó con 5 hijos. Mi madre tuvo la fortuna de conocer un hombre cabal de pies a cabeza que es mi ejemplo de padre y el ejemplo del hombre que yo seguí toda mi vida. Un hombre de mucha honradez y de mucho pundonor. Me enorgullece mucho que él haiga sido mi padre. Adición a la fortuna que tuve con mi padre, también tuve la fortuna de tener cuatro hermanos y cuatro hermanas. Mi Madre era una medalla de oro. Nací en 1930 y me crié en Baja California. Pronto la vida en la frontera me dio el conocimiento necesario para estar consiente que era esencial dominar la lengua de mi

patria pero aún más, sumergirme completamente en mi cultura. La comunicación es esencial para el hombre. Si quieres dominar otro idioma tienes que hacer lo mismo, conocer la cultura desde el fondo.

Otra gran suerte era que mi padre era matador de toros y mi vida se desarrolló dentro del ambiente taurino. En una época yo quería ser matador de toros, pero no es para todos. Llegué a torear casi por toda la República de México, pero yo quería más de la vida. Siempre he aspirado a ser una persona mejor. En la vida uno tiene que responsabilizarse de sus hechos. Aunque la vida consiste de altas y bajas. Cada experiencia que la vida te dé, buena o mala, hay que sacar lo mejor. Para triunfar en la vida se necesita determinación y tenacidad y se tiene que aferrar uno a eso. Constantemente decirse a sí mismo, ¿qué es lo que quieres de la vida? Sólo con propósito se debe vivir la vida, porque no estamos seguros si hay vida después de ésta.

KARL

With my dad it was a very simple duty. A few things I remember about my father, to be loyal to your family and friends, never let your shirt hanging out, it should be tucked in and buttoned, and whatever you do, do it with determination. He served in the air force, he got that discipline there and brought it home. My father left his mark in Delano, he worked on his knees the entire day in a rose nursery home and in the evenings, he coached the little league team. He coached for 37 years, so he would couch generations of families: he would couch you and your children. He taught more than baseball, he showed these kids how to be good citizens. Delano was a better town because of my dad.

My family was close to the Chavez family, I became aware of the movement at a young age. My dad went to middle school with Cesar Chavez, so that fight for la causa started at a young age. I was in San Jose State,

we had just come back from the march to Sacramento fighting for resources for the EOP program... and I cracked. I remember I saw the professor talking but the words didn't make sense-- I had a nervous breakdown. I should've focused just in school, but I couldn't, it was in my blood, I got too involved, too caught up in the lucha. The movement eats its own children, the revolution eats us alive because of the strain. The pressure to create change, the deadlines, the meetings, the disappointments, the politics, the deaths around you don't stop. (Beat) Then reality hits you and you might not live to see the changes you've been fighting so hard for. (Deep exhale) It takes a toll on you, emotionally, psychologically, physically. Look at me, it broke me, it killed a part of me, that's for sure, but I won't change the way I've lived my life. As my dad says "I did my duty."

FERNANDO

I came here when I was just a baby, in the forties. I was close to 2 years old. My Mother carried me in her arms, and my sister and brother holding onto her skirt. We landed in San José and at the time San José was full of agricultura. (Half smile) I remember the tree trunks were all painted white. I used to think, "Wow, that's nice, someone painted all the trees so they look alike," later I came to find it was pesticides splattered on each tree trunk. (Beat) My family moved with the crop, following the crop, there was always a new place to call home. By the time I had graduated from San José High School I had moved 16 times. The life of a migrant child: household instability. Never knowing where you would be living next, but knowing you would be moving.

During my last year in college, I took a trip to México, I hadn't been there since I was a boy. My roommates joined, (Laughs) it was one Mexicano and two

Anglos driving to México. As soon as we hit Caléxico y Mexicali the banda took over the radio and I was transported to my past. We pulled over, got a motel, the last one available that night, because to our surprise, there was a street carnival that was going to be taking place. We stayed there for a week, luego I left on my own to el D.F. I went to La Casa de Bellas Artes, Museo Nacional de Antropología that goes back 500 years in history, I went to the pyramid of the Sun and Moon, and then (Long beat.) una canción de Amalia Mendoza played as I stood there in the heart of México, I remember I got a knot in my throat. (Overwhelmed) It was the music my parents played when I was a boy, era parte de mis raíces. (Beat) You know you don't have to bury where you come from to be a good American. We need to know where we come from, and celebrate our history.

Thank you for sharing your story. It was very brave. I am glad for the time you had with your husband. It is clear he was a wonderful person and you were loved. I wish you the best.

Amazing work. To tell
the stories of our community
with such respect, love y

Sabor !!

Thank you all ^{Also}
for putting your ²⁰¹⁷
whole heart in
what you do!

Thanks for sharing your
stories &

¡Muchísimas gracias por
compartiendo a sus historias!

Thank you for sharing your
stories with us!

- Peter

Thank you for being brave enough to
share your stories with us.

They motivate me to continue striving
toward a better future, so that I
can 'give back' to my community.

I loved hearing your
Story of the water tower.

I especially can relate
to saying you didn't
Realize you were poor. I
Felt the same when I was ^{growing} up.

Gracias por compartir tu
historia, vida hermosa
llena de bondades y
felicidad

Gracias Teresita
por tu poder
y energía.
Y ayudar
siempre a tu
familia.

Amor
Vargas.

Lou:

Your story touched my heart .
Your commitment to your wife
shows you love for her and your
strong sense of relationality. You
know what "para niyo" means.

Regards,

Cedrina

Rodolfo se
Mandó. Gracias
Hermano —

Fernando Zazueta

Para la Señora Teresa

Gracias por su
Bebido. Bueno. Por compartir
algo personal y especial.

Elizabeth
Jung

LOU -

you are brave. Coming to know
equals happiness for everyone
around you.

Thank you, for sharing!

THANK YOU SO MUCH

FOR SHARING your

STORIES WITH ALL

OF US!

Dear Fernando

Thanks for sharing your story
my name is Kimberly and 14.

Una historia muy
original.

Me ayudo a dejar
ir el espíritu de

Mama. "Hoy hace un Año"

!! GRACIAS



THANK YOU KARL,

FROM ANTONIO

WE WON'T EVER STOP

Gracias por compartir experiencias
e historias con nosotros, tengo 32 años
y todas las historias me gustan

♡ Lore
carmen

U R ☺

Awesome!

TO: CRISTAL.

ME HUBIERA HABER
ESCUCHADO MI ENTREVISTA

NILZA

I feel like I have a connection
like you but with my mom
but thank you! ☺☺

— Karen

Thank you SO much
for share your experience
and stories with us

Gracias por compartir las
historias de su vida
muy interesante escucharlas
Dios los bendiga

Sra. Teresita,

Que sigan sus cantos
llevando los corazones de
todos sus seres queridos
y los de su comunidad.

Te quiero mucho,
Jéssica
González

Thank you For sharing of
Your special memories - They've
Touched us in many ways!
Gracias -

B.V.

Tere


Me gusta la historia

Sr.
Rodolfo,

Gracias por compartir
su historia. Tal vez, un
día viviré cerca de Tijuana!

Janeth

We love you

Elisa! 

— Mireles

Familia

We Love You so much

Elisa and we

Miss You

- Lily, Paisy and
Cookie

Gracias por Compartir
su historia, por ser
luchadora por en esta
vida. Que Dios le bendiga
siempre. Con Amor
Paola y Patricia

Gabriel,

Thank you for sharing your
story.



Ben: It was so nice to
meet you!
Thank you for your strength
during the interview.
I wish you well—
Telly Gamba

Thank you for sharing
your story. This helped
me share some life & three
death with my son.

Queridos Maestros,

Levantaron mi alma
esta noche.

¡Gracias!

Uyehua

LOS FELICITAMOS !!

ESPERAMOS VER MAS OBRAS
DE USTEDES. :)

Señora Linda Nilda,

Lo siento mucho por el dolor
que siente por haber sido
abandonada por una madre.
Solo Dios sabe por qué.

Entiendo su dolor. Mi mamá
y los 6 hermanos. Fueron abandonados
por su mamá. Mi mamá tenía 4 hijos
almas pequeñas. Empezó. Se fue la Sr. Anita.
por el Asteroide Unidos. Dejo todos sus
hijos →

en Talpa Zacapecas, Los de Jo.
Sin Plata, Sin Lucha, Sin Lomera.
Por la gracia de ~~los~~ los tíos
~~los~~ ~~reps~~ Fueron recogidos.

Se bucco en el corazon,
Esperanza se llena con el
Amor de los demás personas.
Amigas.



Gracias por compartir
sus vivencias. Nos
ayudan a mantener la
continuidad de generación
en generación, conectándonos
con nuestras raíces y
nuestros antepasados y →

~~pasando~~ ayudando a los
JOVENCIOS Y NIÑOS A
SEGUIR el ciclo.

La Señora
Deresita debió
ser artista,
una verdadera
cantante
profesional.

! Nació con el
don!

Thank you
for sharing your
stories. Everyone
is unique and has
their own story to
tell. Thank you. you.your

Ernando,

Thank you for sharing
your story.

Charlie & Joyce
Garcia

It's true. We should recall
our histories / our past and
SHARE all our stories, esp.
to this next generation.

Thank you for
Sharing yours.

- A.Q.
10/20/2018

About Cristal Gonzalez Avila

A company member with El Teatro Campesino and Baktun12, Cristal Gonzalez Avila is a first generation Chicana actress, playwright, poet and director from Watsonville, CA. She holds a B.A in Theater Arts from San Jose University and is a Reed Award recipient for Excellence in Acting and Oral Interpretation. Her recent work includes "*La Sombra*" (The Shadow) a solo performance, a full length play *PIERNAS: The Story Between Our Legs*, and her book of poetry *Sombra Mia* (January 2019).



**The Senior Stories project was made possible by
an Audience Engagement Project Grant from Silicon Valley Creates.**

