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.
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 MOVÍ 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
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 si 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.
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 pudonor. 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.
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 coach generations of families: he would coach 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 carnaval 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 for putting your 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 Teresa por tu poder y energía y ayudar siempre a tu familia.
Dear:

Your play touched my heart. Your commitment to your wife shows you love for her and your strong sense of relationality. You know what “para siempre” means.

Regards,

Adriana
Rodolfo se mando. Gracias Hermano

Fernando Jazuego
Para la Señora Tom.

Gracias por su Belito. Cuento. Por compartir Cigas personas y especial.

[Signature]
Loo -

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 I'm 14.
Una historia muy original.
Me ayudó a dejar ir el espíritu de mamá. "Hoy hace un año"
Y GRACIAS

❤️
THANK YOU KARL,
FROM ANTONIO
WE WON'T EVER STOP
Gracias por compartir experiencias e historias con nosotras, tengo 32 años y todas las historias me gustan.

Love,

Carmen
UR

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.
Srta. Teresita,

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

A la grief mucho,

Jéssica González
Thank you for sharing all your special memories. They've touched us in many ways! Gracias.

B.N.
Tere
Me gusta la historia
Sr. Rodolfo,

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

Janeth
We love you,

Elisa! 😊

— Mireles Familia
We love you so much, Erisa, and we miss you.

- Lily, Daisy and Cookie
Gracias por compartir su historia, por ser luchadora por en esta vida. Que Dios te bendiga siempre. Con Amor

Paola y Patricia
Gabriel,

Thank you for sharing your story.

Love,
Ben: It was so nice to meet you!
Thank you for your strength during the interview.
I wish you well—
Kelly Cembra
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!

[Signature]
LOS FELICITAMOS !

ESPERAMOS VER MÁS OBRAS
DE USTEDES. Y
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 sus 6 hermanos fueron abandonados por su misma. Mi madre tenía aspirations por su mismo. Se fue de su niñez, viviendo en las refugios. Se fue a los Estados Unidos, dejando atrás a sus hijos...
la Tropa Zapateros, no dijo.

sin Pedro, sin Libia, sin balance...

Por la gracia de los 10 tios

Eran reunidos.

Se hacía a él el corazón,

Espíritu que se llevó con el

Amor de las demás personas.

Amor que se llevó.
Gracias por compartir sus vivencias. Nos ayudan a mantener la continuidad de generación en generación, conectándonos con nuestras raíces y nuestros antepasados.
Pasando ayudando a los jovencitos y niños a seguir el ciclo.
La señora Deesita debió de ser artista, una verdadera cantante. Profesional. Nació con el don.
Thank you for sharing your stories. Everyone has their own story to tell. Thank you.
Fernando,

Thank you for sharing your story. Charity & Joyce

Liwan
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).

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