

The Malt House

By Kamala Platt

Dia de Los Muertos approaches on the wings of butterflies migrating southeast across Martin Street. The thirsty ones linger to nectar on the flowering Turk's Cap and Fiddlewood in my yard--a sign that something is right in this Trumpficated world. Even C/Katrina notices the mariposas when she waltzed in to study the Trumpfication of our towns. And upon her arrival, she heard about the Malt House right away.

The Malt House is on my mind, too, when I am not preoccupied by Chican@ Literature courses and online students evacuating from their hometowns as hurricanes and end-of-course submission deadlines loom. Yesterday, I read student posts via CoSA wifi while I listened to testimonios at the Historic Design Review Commission meeting. Milagro realism availed clarity of mind despite my multi-tasking & the latest escapades of both "Trumpcat," a mean neighborhood tomcat, and his namesake "Donboy Trump." Last week, Trumpcat's tooth pierced my fingernail, drawing blood through the cartilage as I pulled mi corazón kitty, Gabriel, away from his claws. When Trumpgato pounced on the yard kitties, confiscating their food just for fun, I knew Trumpfication was occurring among our sentient relatives, and thus that tomcat got a name... En sangre fría... Si, even in south Tejas, Trump sends chills and C/Katrina worries...

I gave up my comment time at the HDRC hearings, but wanted to say that one of the first times I had lunch at the Malt House was with David (Rudy's brother in real estate/affordable housing). I'd learned the loan company had redlined the Westside property I was planning to buy on Martin St. and was losing hope. I met David and his wife for lunch, chisme, and strategizing. That meeting was an important part of my initiation and bienvenida to the Westside.

My Malt House petition sheet included signatures from neighbors, outraged at the Malt House closing; most vehement is my next door neighbor and her adult children--the grandchildren of the family--whose house I did buy despite redlining. We've eaten at the Malt House together for celebrations, and other times, I've run down for an order that we all shared back on Martin Street. We all want a continuation of a high quality, affordable restaurant in the Malt House building, one that serves a community facing diabetes, and a planet facing manmade toxic fatigue syndrome.

I felt tears well up with some of the memory-cuentos yesterday, especially those that demonstrated that to destroy the Malt House would be to "rip the heart out of the Westside." I was in awe-conspeto of the 96yr old gentle-hombre, who built his life on the Westside (I heard "lively hood" in his word "livelihood"). I appreciated Tomas Ybarra Frausto's interpretations of the social-cultural-artistic historias; and my sense was reaffirmed that the Malt House is--in the most whole and holistic sense--a "high performance building." That is, the building holds memories that happened

there--and epitomizes our city's history-- our family and barrio histories that have been made there. And then Dudley Brooks nailed a critical aspect of this discussion with his 7/11 shopping bag show-n-tell presentation that spoke to nuestra futuro:

another 7/11 feeds chronic illness and untimely death for those from "my West Side of San Anto... and all Chicano neighborhoods ... / [where] somewhere... someone remembers..." (borrowing a line from Raúl Salinas' famous "Un Trip") The nightmare image of the Malt House interior turned into a 7/11 makes "my heart pump saccharine sangre" (thanks to Amalia Ortiz' ode to the Big Red Diablo in "Amor Peligroso," for that apt line).

Though I wanted to hear the story from the perspective of the family who has fed the Westside so richly over the decades, I felt ill, walked out and caught the #43 up Flores and the #75 west to OLLU where Sandra Cisneros was celebrating the release of the Spanish edition of

her memoir, *A House of My Own*, and her recent National Medal of the Arts award. She read from the Epilogue, explaining how she came to leave San Antonio for San Miguel de Allende in the wake of gentrification-inspired-fear and media "vitriol" "toward people who look like me." She felt fear in her own home. Cisneros writes, "The paradox is this: fear unites us, fear divides us." Afterward, I think about Sandra's paradox as I walk toward home through gentle, warm darkness, when a pick-up whooshes especially close to the sidewalk. I take a step back to balance myself and C/Katrina is there beside me.

"What do you think?" she asks.

Befuddled, I return the question. "What about you?"

C/Katrina says, "It would be a terrible thing for the Malt House to implode in this town's corporate colonial epidemic, but if that happens or not still lies en los manos de la gente--in La Comunidad--more than in Commissions: "Do they let a 7/11 offer more to the community than has the family who has fed them all these years?" I nod as I see the connections she is making and think "you don't just mean money, do you?" C/Katrina's continued: "How do we use our hands to feed our families and ourselves? Where do we spend our change? Do we use our minds and hearts to determine what feeds our souls and bodies?"

Epilogue: Tuesday, Oct. 12--Trump comes to town & tries to co-opt S.A.'s Spurs with praise, but C/Katrina will have none of it; she teams up with Huff Post to declare the Spurs "A Team That Rejects Trumpism In Every Way." Trumpcat mopes, watching the kittens frolic in the October fallen-leaf mulch.

—Kamala Platt, Oct 6, 2016

