

Literary Ofrendas para

Amelia Cirilo May 23, 1925—July 1, 2019

By Dennis Medina

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Condolences to the family of Amelia Cirilo, in particular to Dennis Medina, her son who is one of the contributor's to Queer Brown Voices and has been a long-time activist in Texas.*

My mother exhibited a lust for life throughout her time on this earth. She was born in 1925, in Parks, Texas, the daughter of Constancio Cirilo and Guadalupe Guerra; and she was raised in Weslaco and Houston, Texas. Sometimes, she told the story of how she got into a fight in elementary school because bullies made fun of her flour-sack dresses, which she had to wear during the Great Depression, due to the family's poverty.

Education was her life cause. She earned a B.S. in Education at North Texas University in Denton, a Master's degree at Kingsville A&I University (Now Texas A&M University- Kingsville), and a Ph.D. at Texas A&M University, College Station. She taught many subjects, especially science and math, at all grade levels from elementary, junior high, high school, adult education, to community college and university, including a few years as a bilingual kindergarten teacher. She also founded her own educational consulting firm, named HERMANA (Hispanic Educational



Research Management and National Association), where she served as Executive Director.

Proclaimed a "Doer" by the Corpus Christi Caller Times newspaper, Amelia achieved many accolades during her lifetime. At various times, she was active in LULAC (League of Latin American Citizens), Women's Political Caucus of Texas, Women's Shelter of Corpus Christi, Goals for Corpus Christi Committee, Methodist Home for the Elderly (Weslaco), Dallas County Adult Literacy Council, Texas Constitutional Committee (Brazos County Advisor), Fiesta Bilingual Toastmasters, and many, many other organizations, too numerous to list.

She raised four children, and participated in numerous hobbies, such as ballroom dancing, stand-up comedy, para-gliding, and butterflies. In 1996, at age 71, she ran as a contestant in the Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant in Dallas, Texas.

Amelia was cremated in accordance with her wishes. Her ashes will be spread around a tree.

WHAT I WANT TO BE

If I could choose
What I could be,
I'd be a tree.
A beautiful, beautiful tree.
So when I'm gone,
And completely free.
Spread my ashes
Under a tree.
A beautiful, beautiful tree.
—Amelia Cirilo

My Sister as Persephone

At her open grave,
I wear a black polyester
thrift store skirt, a black blouse
from Family Dollar.

We bury my older sister
on the ridge above the river
the morning of the equinox.
She died from cirrhosis of the liver.
We leave daffodils, early phlox.

Five years on at the Methodist
Conference, activists gather
for their annual witness
at the Ordination Service.

In remembrance of queer
candidates denied their pastoral
calling, we wear severe black outfits
with bright rainbow stoles.
Each June, taking the black skirt
and blouse from my closet,
still without money
for anything new,
I pack my mourning clothes.
In this way, though she was not
a seminarian, her presence
in the pew a distant memory,
my sister returns late each spring
from her own dark closet,
an unpunctual Persephone.

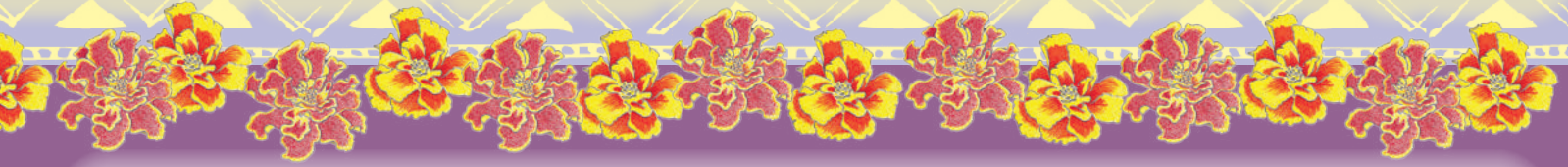
—Rachel Jennings



My sister's full name
was Julie Naomi
Jennings.
She was born on
December 14, 1962,
and she died on
March 17, 2014.



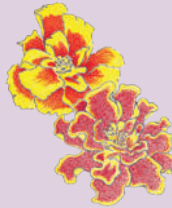
Dia de los Muertos 2019



Fridita

Dark eyed little sister, braids woven into the crown of a queen, fierce as a matador, your soul brandishing its red cape daring the bullsh passes of death, to steal from you the day Paints ground from the riotous pigments of the Life that colors your virgin canvas giving bloody birth to self-portraits, confirming the pulse the breath, the heartbeat, the passions of your body, though it betrays you, as it's eaten alive by the famished cannibal of your perpetual pain La Artista, Mi Hermana, Mi Gente, La Reina fervent, ravenous, glorious, creative, woman what dreams came, as you lay upon the altar of your bed, what imaginings, that fed your beast that drove your hands, to create, even as the chair claimed you captive, how bitter the salt of your tears, swelling your tongue, hopes dashed upon the ground, each time your womb fell empty Ah Fridita, cry not, for your children yet live immortal, dressed in their glorious finery of canvas paint and stretcher bars, niños, who will never die

—Randi Romo



Shrines

These poles with ghost bikes trussed to them— piles of teddy bears, cards candles with the Virgin's image— flower offerings looking like brides' bouquets— now desiccated. The bouquet the girls' bike rider will never catch. I know about some of them. That girl whose bike's now spray painted white was hit by a drunk driver as she rode out of the University gate. She had the right-of-way, cold comfort now. That was on the late news. And the two girls—

Marigolds by Carla Rivera

graduating high school seniors, in the spiffy new convertible— they were hit by a truck after they threw eggs at the driver at 4 A.M. One of the mothers said “They were only having fun.” Their pole stayed festive, gay like a Mardi Gras float for over two years before it was stripped clean. Someone from the county, no doubt.

—Marilyn Wallner



La Despedida De Mi Querida Madre Maria (Neva) Mora, R.N.

By Rosemary Reyna-Sánchez, neé Martínez

Mi Mama, Neva, received her RN Nursing Degree at 56 years young, the first in her family and proving that no one is too old to learn. Her parents (Apa and Ama) migrated from Mexico in the 30's; mom was the 3rd of 7 children, growing up in an abusive environment, where she was “the punching bag” for her dad as she put it. It took her many years to share this with me. When she was 9 years old, “Apa” decided to take the family for a drive and wound up downtown where he parked in front of a bar where Mi Tierra Mexican Restaurant now stands. He instructed the family to stay in the car and not get out, or else; while he went inside to drink with his buddies (typical Machismo). After a couple of hours, mom and my Tío Beto decided to sneak out of their Model-T, despite the warning. They crawled under the car to the other side, where there was a Christmas tree vendor stand. When the vendor wasn't looking they snatched a tree, dragged it underneath the car, then promptly loaded it onto the back floorboard just as “Apa” was coming out of the bar and heading towards them. Hijole just in time! When they got home,



they snuck the tree inside and placed it “EN LA SALA” and started on their decorations utilizing pieces of paper, foil, bottle caps, whatever they could find. In the morning the kids all gathered around and admired its beauty. Mom said that was the first and best Christmas the kids ever had! (Nowadays, so much is taken for granted; folks should pause and give thanks for what they have, instead of what they don't.) After she passed away, I found a ceramic bell in the shape of an angel among her possessions. I brought it home and hung it securely on our Christmas tree. Early the next morning I heard the bell ring on its own and of course I was in denial, so I followed the ringing to LA SALA and found the angel on the floor by our tree, where it had fallen upright, without breaking. Lying next to it, I found a small note that read “Rose, I love you and will be near you no matter the circumstances”. My mom rang the bell communicating beyond the grave to show me the note that she left for me! Unbelievable! The Love of a Madre never dies, it transcends! I love and miss you mom! LOVE CONQUERS ALL, LOVE CONQUERS DEATH!