

Thomas Ralph Keene

February 12, 1935 – January 29, 2022



Poetry Reading at the Esperanza

Tom Keene, friend and ally of the Esperanza, ended his earthly journey at age 86 as the new year was completing its first month. A teacher, poet and activist who put roots down in San Antonio in 1964, Tom contributed poetry regularly to the Esperanza's monthly news journal, *La Voz de Esperanza*, and was often seen at rallies, protests and cultural events of the Esperanza as well as other community

venues through the years.

His poems graced the pages of local publications like *Huehuetlán Journal* and *El Placazo*. They also appeared in *The Texas Observer*, *Voices de la Luna*, and *Latinamerica Press* in Perú as well as the *National Catholic Reporter*, *San Antonio Express-News*, *Harmony magazine* and *The Palo Alto Review*. His anthologies included *Poets of the Springs* and *Poets of the River* (audiotape), and more recently *Sensing Transcendence* and *Flowers for Lovemakers, Peace-builders and Godseekers* (2008). *Latitudes Press* published his first book of poems, *The Waters of Becoming*, in 1989.

In 2008 the Texas Society of Poets awarded him the \$400 *Therese Lindsey Prize* in their annual contest. He also won first prize in the internationally judged 4th annual *Dancing with Words Poetry Contest*.

Tom Keene, the scholar, held graduate degrees in Theology, Applied Theology, and Psychology. He worked as a community organizer, advocate for the handicapped, freelance writer, university professor, consultant on nonviolence for the Archdiocese of San Antonio, and as a therapist for at-risk children and their families in the Alazan-Apache Courts for the San Antonio School District. He was also a founding member of the San Antonio Archdiocesan

Justice and Peace Commission and a founding member and officer of the San Antonio Community Radio Corporation, a parent organization of Texas Public Radio and station KSTX.

From 1981-1986 he served as coordinator for *Latin America Assistance (LAA)* which The San Antonio Light described as the city's "premier" advocacy organization for Central American issues. LAA was part of the original Esperanza/Interchange Network in the 80s at 1305 N. Flores, the original home of the Esperanza. Besides Tom's activism in solidarity work related to Central America and Cuba, he was ardent about labor issues and

staunchly anti-war having completed his military duty as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division during the Korean War. In the 1990s, he presented a weekly social commentary for San Antonio's Catholic Television speaking on a wide variety of issues.

Tom retired as a professor of Religious Studies Emeritus at Our Lady of the Lake University after serving as professor and assistant to the Dean at OLLU. He continued to be active with multiple community groups and was involved in many forums related to themes of peace and social justice.

Tom's generosity of spirit, his compassion and his ardent belief in the connection of all living and non-living beings

will continue to be accessible to all through his poetry that can be accessed at his website: <http://www.tomkeenesmuse.com/> There, his poems are archived for us in a website he described

as being for "lovemakers, peacebuilders and godseekers..."

The Esperanza Center staff, board and Buena gente are saddened by Tom's passing and extend our sincere condolences upon his passing to his family, friends and especially to his wife, Marilyn. A celebration of Tom's life is being planned and will be announced on Esperanza's website, www.esperanzacenter.org

Tom Keene, siempre presente! Tom Keene, rest in power!

To Be One With All

What could that be?

To see the baby in her mother's arms
and say to ourselves,
that is me?

To look into the faces at the old folks home
and tell ourselves
that is me?

To read names on cemetery markers
and find ourselves feeling
that is me?

Something within me
feels it is taking wing.

—Tom Keene, 2016



Voces Cósicas, poets who gathered at Deco Pizza, was one of many groups Tom was part of thru the years. He stands in the center with Barbara Renaud González to his left who remembered Tom "when he stood up at an anti-war press conference at the Esperanza with Antonio Cabral and myself and talked clearly and cogently about the government's history of lying to us, as happened with Vietnam." She added, "What a great man!" Photo Credit: Fernando Esteban Flores