

# LOVING—LUCI'S DEFAULT SETTING

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Luci Orta, aka Lucia & Little Bear, became a favorite Buena gente volunteer at the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center in San Antonio. She made many friends in the short time she lived here—leaving us suddenly on June 1, 2024 at the tender age of 64. A native Austinite, from Montopolis, Luci earned a place in our hearts in SA.*

When we were young, loving was Luci's default setting. She gave expression to all love's modes: warm, accepting, mellow and soft-hearted. She held special spaces for the youngest nieces and nephews; for her Nana who she visited in a nursing home (although it would break her heart); and for her nerdy friends. She was empathetic, affectionate, fun-loving (pool, softball, dancing), trustworthy, flirtatious, righteous in the face of injustice, and funny. She loved a good joke. She was fiercely loyal to family and friends of the inner circle.

Luci loved to fall in love. Understandable – what to do for a dopamine lift out of the everyday to set up a loving vibe? How do you elevate your reality?! How do you conjure up a grand adventure?

You double down, hell, you triple down on what you got. You fall head over heels and against all logic, common sense, or wise counsel and fall in love.

You can't just make this happen. There is a seasonal aspect to it. It depends on a careful hormonal balance, or maybe it's an imbalance, I'm not sure. There are protocols and of course there is the object of your obsession (I mean attentions).

When we were young Luci liked pretty women with big smiles and eyes that carried a twinkle of amusement; black straight shining long hair; round faces smooth-complexed with at least a blush of the indigenous goddess; and strong bodies that could bear and nourish a nation (if you get my drift).

Luci loved all women. They were like flowers to Luci. But it was a certain flower that called to Luci when she was feeling like a butterfly. Like a butterfly she could suss them out. She found them among what seemed to me an unpromising heterosexual clientele of an East Austin beer joint; at (to my eye) an overwhelming white lesbian concert; at a carnival by Auditorium Shores; and in droves at South Austin softball games.

"She's so pretty. She's nice. She has beautiful hair," she'd say in a dreamy voice. I knew the target had been acquired. The outcome was predictable. Luci was charming and a catch. She had a job. She enjoyed good nights out but was not married to the bottle. She was courteous and well-mannered. She came from a well-regarded family. Who

could resist the attention, the river of compliments and chivalrous behavior?

That followed with the season of fireworks and picnics.

Being in love was a different matter. It required skills that I never learned, and for Luci, the obligations felt like a burden. The object of her affection did not always cooperate; and Luci would move on.

Luci established a network of friends and acquaintances among her exes. No, hard feelings on Luci's part without damaging her default setting.

I know Luci loved me because I could always bum a cigarette. She would dance with me even if I could not dance. She forgave my inability to shoot pool. And she would tell me 15 times a night when we'd go out and get plastered at the Hollywood.

This was when we were young. In my long years away, we exchanged late-night calls, texts, or memes. Luci came up from San Antonio when I was visiting Austin last fall. We drove around commenting on all the changes. Luci seemed unperturbed by my loss of speech. Communication seemed easy between us. She knew the answers to questions I need not even ask. It was a short visit and it ended with a promise to see each other again. I know Luci loved me.

—Jesse Johnson, poet



Lucy at Hemisfair Park in SA



Lucy prepping for an exhibit & for Dia de Muertos.