



# A Tribute to Marjorie Agosín

EDITOR'S NOTE: *excerpted from a tribute by Ruth Behar, Latin American Jewish Studies Association*

It is with a broken heart that I sit down to remember and praise my friend, poet and writer Marjorie Agosín who died on March 10, 2025 at the age of 69 at her home in Wellesley, MA. She suffered from cancer for close to a year, choosing to keep her illness a secret that she shared only with her husband.

Anyone familiar with the vast corpus of Marjorie's work will agree that we have lost a literary giant in the field of *Latin American Jewish Studies*. She was a key founder of the field of Jewish Latina writing and *escritura judía latinoamericana*, connecting homelands and diasporas.

In her many roles as a poet, storyteller, editor, scholar, educator and activist in the field of human rights and women's rights, Marjorie shone as a creative writer and brave thinker. She believed in the power of writing as a means of seeking justice and was recognized for her work in a rare and prestigious award from the *United Nations*, the *Leadership Award in Human Rights*.

Born in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1955, Marjorie grew up in Chile where she spent her childhood and early adolescence in the 1960s. At sixteen, she moved with her family to Athens, Georgia. After Augusto Pinochet staged a military coup, overthrowing the democratic government of Salvador Allende, the family knew they could not return to Chile.

She received her B.A. in *Philosophy and Spanish Literature* from the *University of Georgia* in 1976. She obtained her M.A. and PhD in *Latin American Literature* from *Indiana University* in 1982 and began teaching in the *Spanish Department at Wellesley College*, offering courses on Jewish women writers and on Latin America, eventually being named an *Andrew Mellon Professor in the Humanities*. She enjoyed teaching small seminars at *Wellesley* and getting to know her students. Yet, she never stopped returning to her beloved Chile, which awarded her the *Gabriela Mistral Lifetime Achievement Award*.

Marjorie wrote in Spanish. Always in search of home, a topic that informed all of her writing, it was in her native language that she felt truly at home.

She wrote in many genres, from poetry to memoir to essays to fiction to



children's literature. In her poetry she explored themes of memory, history, loss and exile and saw a connection between genocide committed by Latin America's dictatorships in the '70s and the Jewish victims of Nazi genocide.

Close to her heart were the voices and stories of her ancestors—her great grandmothers who had escaped Vienna and Odessa, and found a new home in Chile, and many others. Her memoirs, *A Cross and a*

*Star: Memoirs of a Jewish Girl in Chile* (1997; 2022) and *Always from Somewhere Else: My Jewish Father* (1998), are moving accounts of the life stories of her mother and father where she sought to express the crucial importance of bearing witness to Jewish trauma and resilience.

The many anthologies she edited are a testament to her efforts to build communities of writers and understand the stories of Jewishness told in different Latin American settings. In the volume, *Home: An Imagined Landscape* (2016), she brought together writers from places, including Greece, Hungary, Jamaica, and Egypt, each addressing the unique journey that led them to build a new home in the U.S.

In the last phase of her career, Marjorie dove into young adult literature, producing the beautiful novel, *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* (2012), for which the *American Library Association* awarded her the *Pura Belpré Medal*. She later brought out a stunning sequel, *The Maps of Memory: Return to Butterfly Hill* (2020), that takes on the complex subject of political trauma as it affects a range of young people trying to make sense of the past and the present in Chile. Before her death, she completed the third novel in the *Butterfly Hill* series.

Marjorie Agosín is survived by her husband, John Wiggins, son, Joseph Wiggins Agosín, daughter, Sonia Wiggins Agosín, her brother, Mario Agosín and sister, Cynthia Agosín and her family in Chile and a vast network of friends, colleagues, students and readers. The *Buena gente* of the *Esperanza Peace & Justice Center* join in mourning a giant of American Literature whose memory will live on. ¡Marjorie Agosín, presente!

NOTE: To read Ruth Behar's tribute in its entirety go to: [bit.ly/majorie-agosin](https://bit.ly/majorie-agosin)

