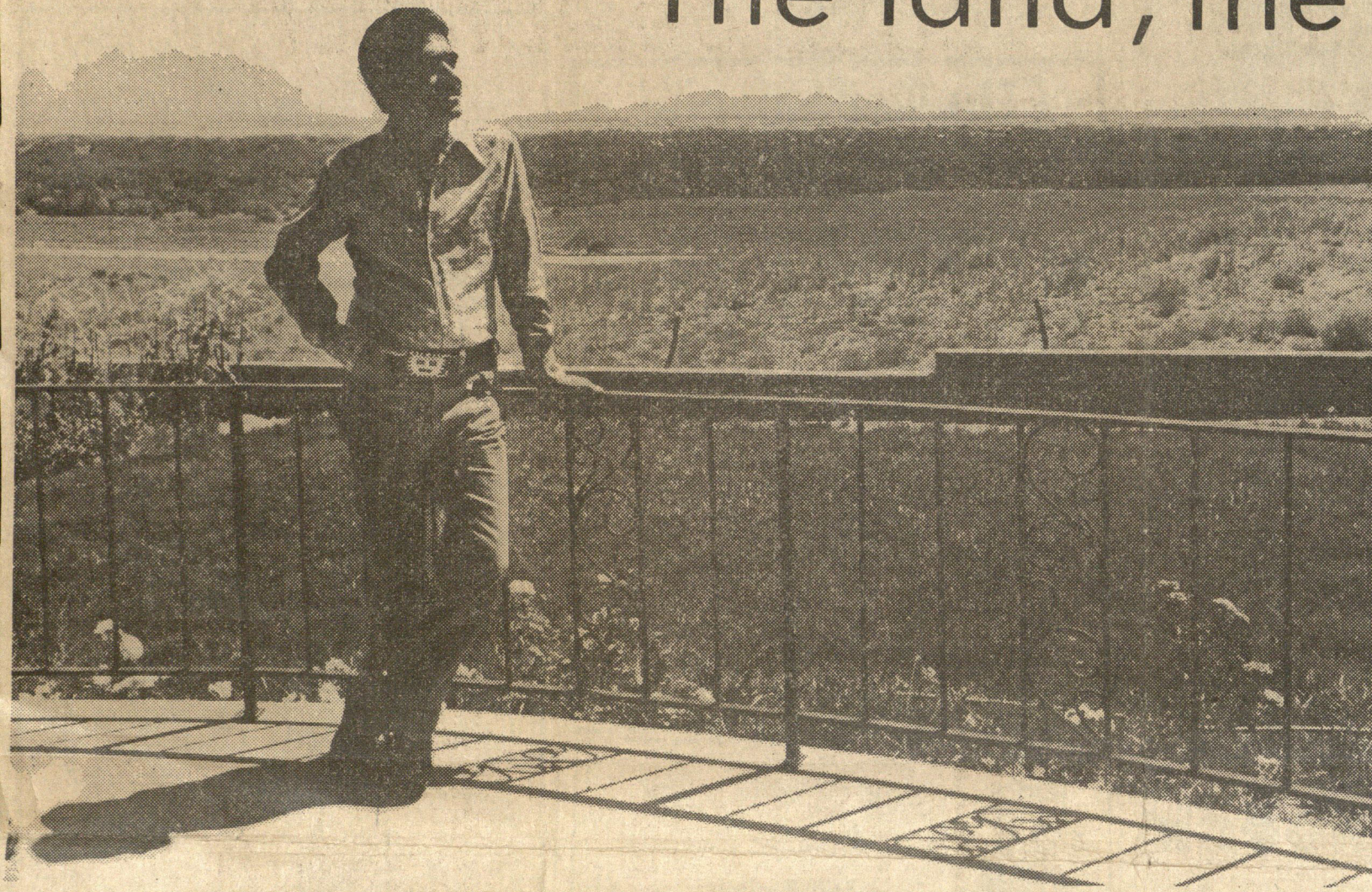


The land, the man, his work



(Staff photos by Norm Bergman)

Rudolfo Anaya, growing up in rural New Mexico, had a dream. He wanted to be a writer, and a writer he is. His books tell of life as it has been lived in New Mexico for centuries, and of the legends that give structure to that life. He talks of families on the llano and in the barrios, of the richness of their culture and the beauty of their beliefs.

By CHARLOTTE BLACK
Tribune Accent Writer

Growing up on the *llano*, in the small rural village of Pastura, Rudolfo Anaya felt little need for possessions. "We were poor by a lot of standards, but if you're not concerned with things you don't miss them. Home. Family. Love. That's all I needed then."

As the boy, the man. "I don't write for a living," says the author of the highly successful "Bless Me, Ultima." "I write to create works of art. You should confuse that as little as possible with money."

WHAT RUDOLFO ANAYA as a boy shared with his nine brothers and sisters may have been more valuable than money.

Pastura, at one time a large village, had been the home of the owners of many cattle and sheep ranches. It was also a train watering station. But the train quit stopping, the ranches grew big and the town got small. But still there was the *llano*—the open spaces.

"We were very imaginative kids. We played outside a lot. We went to the river. We went fishing. We did a lot of things for ourselves.

"I SOMETIMES WONDER today if we are allowing children to use their imaginations enough. So many things are spoon fed."

Anaya's father, a *vaquero*—cowboy—finally brought his family to Albuquerque. Rudolfo attended Albuquerque High School and the University of New Mexico.

Like "Bless Me, Ultima," the story of a small boy growing up in eastern New Mexico, his second novel, "Heart of Aztlan," appears to parallel part of his life, that period of time just after they arrived in Albuquerque.

HE HAS BEEN, since graduating from UNM, a teacher of English, at Harrison Junior High, Valley High, and the University of Albuquerque. He is now assistant professor of English at UNM.

"Bless Me, Ultima" is now in its 7th printing, has sold more than 70,000 copies. "Heart of Aztlan" was on the Albuquerque best seller lists for several months.

Anaya, it would appear, is a successful writer. What does he tell his students who are trying to learn the craft?

"IT'S NO GOOD in the world to tell them how to write.

It's not abstract. Writing is a doing thing. I like to go directly to the students' work, deal with that. We use a minimum of textbooks, theories.

"I never discuss writing with people who say they're going to write. It's a waste of time. They can bring me the roughest kind of draft if they like. But stories in the abstract, stories they're 'thinking' about writing. That doesn't mean a thing."

"I try to get the students into the habit of writing daily. I tell them, 'Don't worry if it isn't too good in the beginning. Some day it will be.'"



Rudolfo Anaya

CAN ANYBODY THEN become a writer?

"You've got to have something to say. Once you have that the craft can be learned. By writing constantly you can learn the technique. But you've got to be convinced that you do have a story to tell.

"The one thing we know about stories is that they've all been told before. But I tell them, I say to them, 'Tell it to me like it's never been told before.' That's where you can help them, point out where they can improve."

WAS "BLESS ME, ULTIMA" autobiographical?

"Every writer uses incidents, characters, from life. People who are the prototype of his characters. They have qualities that you can extract.

"I heard many of the stories as I was growing up. And I like to use New Mexico as a place, a locale.

"I think the key word, though, is how do you transform all that into fiction. My life as a child was not nearly as interesting as Antonio's. I could make him be anywhere, see anything, do anything I wanted. To make fiction of it you have to work on it so it stands on its own, as a work of art."

BUT WHAT IS IT that makes a person decide to become a writer?

"That is the hardest question there is to answer. Every time someone asks it I give a different answer.

"There's a natural impulse—in all of us I think—to create, to create beauty. And we all ask questions of life. The writer is the one who sets out to give it all form.

"But what's really interesting is why a writer chooses that form. Why a novel instead of a symphony or a sonata?"

"I THINK WE'RE all artists, all trying to give some sort of form to life. In writing we can let the character's trials and tribulations speak for us.

"Sometimes we want to give them more depth than appears on the surface. We all have emotions, drives, desires, longings.

"The writer wants to show that those longings are not only emotional, but rational as well, and he wants to find answers and reasons for them.

"He's always wondering what makes people tick. He's not necessarily a gifted person. Everybody does this, asks questions. But the writer and the artist try to give them form.

"THE WRITER DOESN'T STOP at the first step. He chooses the proper characters, setting, style, to explore the question. That's where he's different. He is willing to sit down and do all that hard work.

"And he has to have a sort of built-in stimulator, be sort of bull-headed, egotistical enough to feel that what he has to say is important to the world.

"If you don't you'll give up. It takes many years to perfect your craft. I wrote a lot of manuscripts, had a lot rejected. I didn't have my own particular style. Now I think the story through a lot longer—so there won't be so many manuscripts lying around in trunks."

RUDOLFO ANAYA is now almost 40. He and his wife Pat, a counselor at Cibola High School, share a handsome home built high on a bluff on the West Mesa. Has he made a lot of money?

"I never discuss money with people, never talk about my books in those terms. It's an idiosyncrasy of mine. What I like is to have people write to me about them. I like to get a favorable reaction from my friends. That's why I never discuss money in regards to my books."

"BLESS ME, ULTIMA" was presented as a play this summer by Reader's Theatre of East Los Angeles Community College. Anaya has also had several movie offers.

"One is pending right now that seems interesting. But you have to have a very special group of people, writers, to work with, but that doesn't mean that a good movie can't be made."

ANAYA TENDS TO guard his privacy, to let his books speak for him. One can't help wondering, though, about the scar on his chin. Surely there is a story to be told?

"I met the devil one night and got in a fight with him. I was minding my own business too. But he came out and challenged me. He left a scar in that encounter. I think he got the best of me."

DOES HE THINK that people are mainly good or mainly bad?

"One of the guiding metaphors for writing is that mankind is inherently good, but that there is darkness in his soul and life. It's a matter of walking as much as possible out of that darkness.

"My philosophy? It's too hard to describe my philosophy. I can't do justice to it in one answer. That's why I write. I let my characters describe it for me."