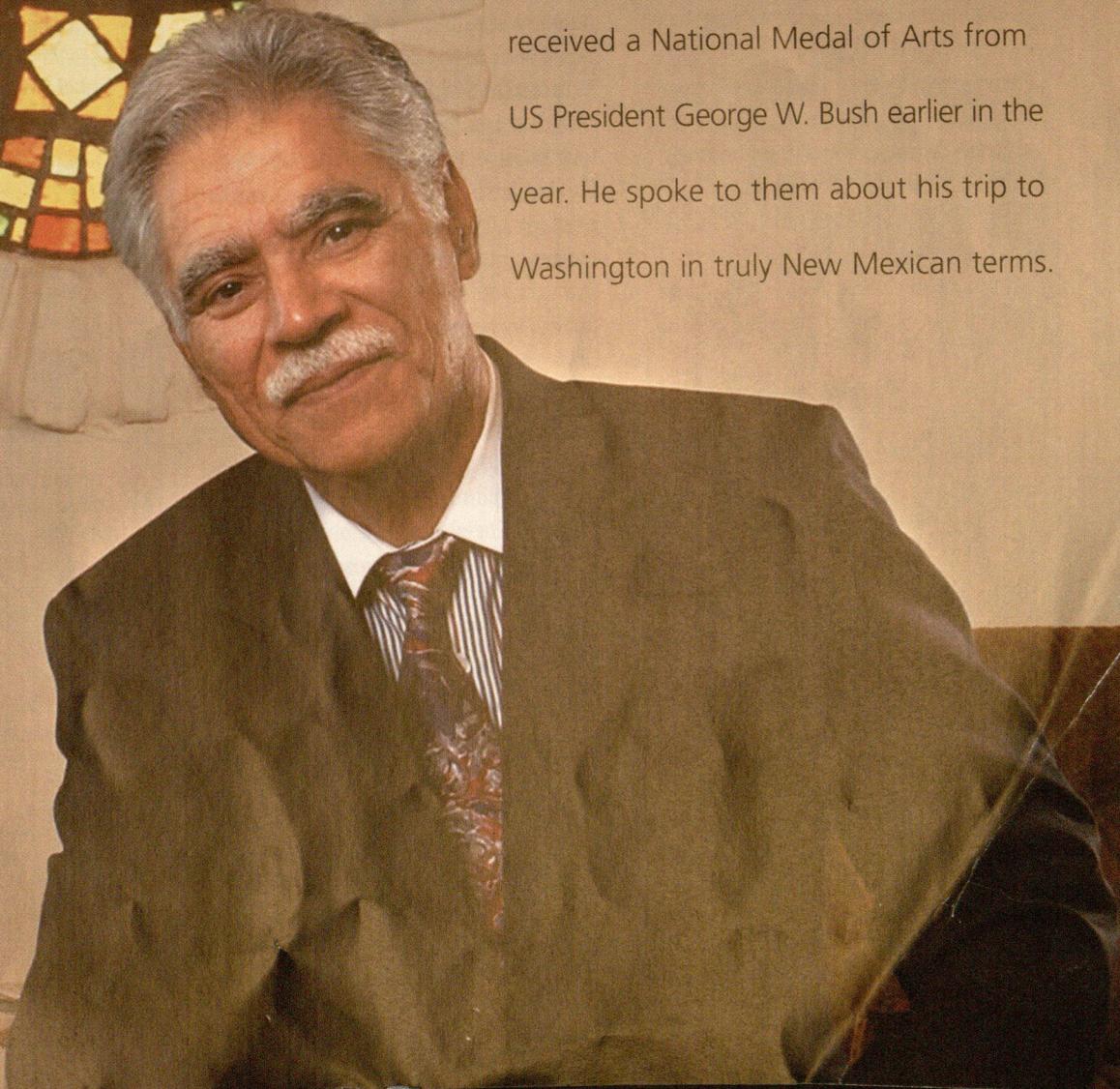


The *Inocente*

BY RUDOLFO ANAYA

Colleagues and fans gathered at a reception last fall for UNM professor emeritus Rudolfo Anaya who had received a National Medal of Arts from US President George W. Bush earlier in the year. He spoke to them about his trip to Washington in truly New Mexican terms.



It was only in a speck of an outpost off the high road known as Llano de San Juan that Ketchum caught a break. A teacher there said the man in the photo resembled her fourth cousin. "But, she said, 'He doesn't live in Córdova. He lives in Los Córdovas, way up north,'" Ketchum says.

He got back in his Matador and drove 70 miles across the mountains to Los Córdovas, seated near Taos on the desert plateau below the range. It was there that a man looked at the photograph and pointed over Ketchum's shoulder toward a house. Although Ketchum didn't know it, it was the house in which Alicia Chávez's father grew up. The young boy with the devilish smile was Gabriel, standing next to his big brother, Blas Jr.

"You can see someone typing away in Washington DC, saying, 'Sanchez, Chávez, what's the difference?'" says Ketchum. The difference, it turns out, was the distance between anonymity and the father of a UW-Madison colleague. The short stroll to Alicia Chávez's office—and to her father's name—might have taken Ketchum a few minutes at lunch one day. Instead, it took 58 years.

Ketchum, who by this point in his work has grown used to coincidences, is flabbergasted by the bizarre circuit that led back to Madison. After being led to the Chávez house in Los Córdovas, Ketchum caught up with Alicia's uncle Miguel, a former master craftsman who now owns a vacation rental business in Taos and carves angels from cedar in his free time. Miguel helped Ketchum identify his relatives in the old images. Blas Chávez Sr. evidently was a favorite subject of Collier's, and with Miguel's help, Ketchum unearthed more than a dozen photographs of the Chávez family, taken during two separate

visits. Casually, Miguel asked Ketchum, "What university did you say you're from?"—and thus was fit that last elusive puzzle piece that reveals the image.

The Same Rascally Look

"We don't have photographs of our family," Alicia says later. "That was a wealthy person's thing to do." Looking at the photograph of her father as a boy, she smiles. "He has the same rascally look on his face as he does now. I think he must have been born with that look on his face."

Some years after posing for Collier, Gabriel Chávez became a lieutenant colonel in the US Air Force, serving in the air defense command. After retirement, he moved back to the ranch, where he now tends sheep and takes care of the many elderly people in his extended family and community.

After her grandmother's death, four months after Alicia first saw the family pictures that she had not known existed, Alicia joined her father one morning as he strode purposefully up from the valley and onto the plain, taking in the same vista captured by Collier's camera. They walked silently, hoping to spot the family of coyotes that frequents the land, and enjoying the solitude of the desert. The altitude and the chill made the air as sharp as needles. The sky was so blue, Alicia says, that it hurt her eyes.

Gabriel told cuentos as they walked, recalling his parents and the forays he made as a child into the looming purple peaks. After a while, he fell silent, tending to his private thoughts. Alicia didn't pry or try to fill the open spaces with idle chatter. She was just happy to be home.

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Angela Martinez, '86 JD, has joined the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center as general counsel.

Christen Coburn, '87 AABA, has been promoted to senior vice president and trust officer at Los Alamos National Bank.

Jack Newsom, '87 MA, has joined HAS Commercial Real Estate in Albuquerque as senior vice president of finance/development in the corporate real estate services and PrimeCare divisions.

Richard Rolston, '87 MD, has been named chief executive officer of Lovelace Health Systems in Albuquerque.

Alison Stallcup, '87 BSED, '89 MA, and her husband have a company in Englewood, Colorado, called "People Honoring People." It focuses on honoring the sacred nature of relationships everyday, everywhere.

Camille Flores, '88 BA, is now managing editor of *The Taos News*.

Eileen Iles, '88 BABA, '92 MACT, has moved to Sugar Grove, Illinois, where she is senior manager with Crowe Chizek and Company, LLP.

Abel Ponce Montez, '88 BA, is now director of student affairs at Fordham University School of Law's Lincoln Center campus in New York City where he is responsible for academic advisement and counseling and providing other necessary services to fulfill the school's academic mission.

Rob Spaulding, '88 BUS, and partner Mark Campbell are the new owners of Maria Teresa Restaurant in Albuquerque's Old Town.

Lisa Dettweiler, '89 BA, of Albuquerque, is the new area vice president and general manager of Comcast Cable Communications, Inc., in New Mexico.

Linda L. Ellison, '90 JD, has opened a law office bearing her name in Albuquerque. She lives in Los Lunas.

Lorenzo Brizeno, '91 BABA, is self-employed as an enterprise management consultant in Round Rock, Texas.

Kevin J. Fernlund, '92 PhD, is assistant professor of history and secondary education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Howard Geck, '92 BUS, last year graduated from the US Army Psychological Operations Officer Court, received an MA in organizational management from the University of Phoenix, and was promoted to the rank of major. He is residential advisor for Lambda Chi Alpha at UNM.

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We have in our culture an oral tradition of a character called *el inocente*. Estevan Arellano has written a wonderful portrayal of the village *inocente*. *Inocencia, que no escarda, ni siembra, pero siempre se come el mejor elote*. (Innocence, which neither reaps nor sows but always eats the best corn.) We jokingly say of the *inocente* “*que le faltan tuercas*” (he’s missing some hardware/wingnuts). In the contemporary idiom, it is a person “whose elevator doesn’t go all the way to the top floor.” The *inocente* experiences life differently than ordinary people.

What does it mean to be *inocente*, and why do I feel that the writer must be *inocente*? For me, the *inocente* is constantly in contact with the marvel, the beauty, and the mystery of life. So it seems that with the passage of time I am each day more in awe of the creation. The simplest experiences take on a marvelous aura that reveals a deeper reality. It is that reality I try to capture in my writings.

Where does it begin? It begins in childhood, in dreams, in memories, in feeling that a divine spark animates the world and the cosmos. To be *inocente* means one feels a transcendent power working in our ordinary lives. The world is as much spiritual as it is material.

A large part of the life of a writer and of the *inocente* is lived in memory and dreams. I remember the river of my childhood as if it were yesterday. There I heard voices, spirits moved at dusk—not only *la Llorona*, a spirit I really feared, but other powers. Powers of place. The river was alive and it

spoke. I tried to capture that experience in *Bless Me, Ultima* and some readers were surprised. How can the river be alive? they asked.

I thought everyone had heard the presence of the river speak, its natural soul revealed. I heard the groans of the giant cottonwoods, those ancient grandfathers. The sky at sunset spoke volumes, not only of the weather but of the history of the people. The stones of the hills were as animated as the animals that roamed there.

It’s fantasy, some said. It’s real, I replied.

Now, today, in this hall of Zimmerman Library, I feel not only your presence but I am surrounded by the lives of those who once walked on this hill. The old people of the Tiguex pueblos, Mexican shepherders who walked here long before there were buildings. Professors who taught here and are gone, students who studied here. They hover nearby. I am here not only as I am today, but as I was as

METTLE OF A MEDALIST: Rudolfo Anaya suggests following the way of the *inocente*—who “talks to the good soul in all of us”—as we deal with difficult times.

Janice Eisenman Lincoln, '92 MA, has retired after 31 years of teaching in Montana Public Schools. She lives in Kalispell, Montana. The Council for Exceptional Children awarded her the Professionally Recognized Special Educator certificate for special education teaching in 1993.

Brian R. Moore, '92 BS, '96 MD, is senior associate consultant physician in pediatric emergency medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, as well as instructor of pediatrics at Mayo Medical School. His duties include those of pediatric medical director for Gold Cross Ambulance in southeast Minnesota.

John B. Edward, '93 MBA, has an insurance and real estate services firm in Albuquerque. He also hosts a radio show on 1310 KBTK-AM radio on business, music, policy, economics, and not-for-profits.

Clara Ann Padilla-Silver, '93 BUS, '96 JD, has been elected president of Icon Real Estate Companies, Inc., Las Vegas, Nevada.

Trevor D. Thielbar, '93 BABA, of Richley, Florida, is co-owner of Pavement Services, Inc., which manufactures machines for road construction.

Beth Ulibarri, '93 BABA, '98 MBA, and husband Rick are the owners of Newport Furnishings, an Albuquerque discount furniture store that sells upscale furnishings.



Thomas Hammill, '94 MA, received a doctorate in clinical psychology from CCU in 1999. He lives in New York City.

Paul Owen, '94 JD, has become a shareholder in the Albuquerque law firm of Montgomery & Andrews, PA.

Rohit Ranjan, '94 MBA, works for Citicorp as country head-channel sales in Mumbai, India (formerly Bombay). Visiting Lobos are encouraged to get in touch at rohit.ranjan@citicorp.com

a young man who matriculated here. I left something of my self here.

You see, everywhere we go we leave part of our souls. I am sure each one of you carries memories of the past, places that were magical to you, people you loved. Part of your soul is there with those people, in those places. The *inocente* understands that. The soul is not only in our bodies, it is everywhere we have been.

Each morning I look at the rising sun and give thanks. I offer a blessing at sunrise: I bless all of life. My wife fixes breakfast and I am startled at

afternoon sun, and each blade of grass shines with its unique character. Every flower sings its song. Clouds, like marvelous and gorgeous women, move across a transparent blue sky. I marvel at the beauty and diversity of life.

For this I got a medal? I was asked to tell you what it was like receiving the National Medal of Arts. We flew to Washington DC for the ceremony. Patricia, our granddaughter Kristan, and I got on a plane and flew to the capitol. Maybe I should write a story about our experiences. "An *Inocente* Goes to Washington."

The *inocente*, even though he is in pain and he knows there is suffering and poverty in the world, smiles. He sees the quality of a corresponding goodness in people. We all have that innocent quality. Inside. Deep in the soul.

And I told the President, "*No nos estén fregando tanto*. (Don't irritate us so much.) Lighten up. Take care of *la gente pobre*. Help the kids get an education." *Pues*, I really didn't say that, but the *inocente* in me thought it. The way I looked at him, he knew what I was thinking.

I was very civil to the First Lady. She told me she had read *Bless Me, Ultima*. I said, "thank you," and I thought to myself, there's hope. If we read good books there's hope for us humans.

I am always thinking. People from the past come to visit me. Those are the spirits of the ancestors. They are here with us. I speak to them and they to me.

What are characters in our stories but spirits who want their stories told? Sometimes my characters are more real than real people. And all my characters are *inocentes* at heart. All are learning that there are many secrets hidden in our souls. We have to bring them out. We have to not be afraid to speak to each other as *inocentes*.

I know there are gente in the world who are *muy cabrona*. Somebody always trying to get the better of somebody else. Tyrants of all sorts making people suffer the worst atrocities. But if we *inocentes* get together, we can be stronger than the bad guys. Let us practice that virtue of innocence in our souls. Let it shine. Let the power of this place and all the spirits who inhabit this place make us strong. I think this medal they gave me in Washington DC is for all of us. Especially for all the *inocentes* who have enriched my life.

To be inocente means one feels a transcendent power working in our ordinary lives. The world is as much spiritual as it is material.

the beauty of our relationship and how the very act of eating fills me with thanksgiving. The *inocente* is a person constantly saying Wow! Look at that! *¡Mira!* Sun and clouds. Geese flying south. Apples hanging on a tree. Flowers going to seed. *¡Mira!*

Inocentes sense the divine spark that illuminates the simplest acts of the day. The *inocente* knows this intuitively, for that is how he lives, that is how he is most alive.

I look at your faces and see beauty: I see beneath the skin a psyche that shines with innocence. I smile. They say the *inocente* goes around with a silly smile on his face. For me, that smile is a sign of wonder. Let us practice going around with silly smiles on our faces. Let us slough away the pretense of what we should be and be who we truly are. *Inocentes* on the road of life, friends to each other.

In our *jardín*, under my ramada in the back yard, Patricia and I sit in the

They got us together in a room, and we met Johnny Cash. Yeah, I went up to him and said, "Hello, Mr. Johnny Cash. I'm Rudolfo Anaya from Albuquerque and I want you to know I love your songs. New Mexicans love you. Here's my wife and granddaughter."

You see, that's an *inocente* talking. He talks to the good soul in those he meets. Some people say, "You didn't tell Johnny Cash that, did you? *¡Qué pendejo!* Don't you have manners?"

What are manners to the *inocente*? We deal with the soul in the person, the daimon that drives us, the essence. Forget the formalities, go for the spirit. Tear down the fences that separate us. That's what the *inocente* teaches us.

And we met Kirk Douglas. And I said the same thing. "*¿Cómo 'stá, don Kirk?* What an honor. I like that movie you did with Burt Lancaster where at the end you plow the train into Mexico. I also liked 'Spartacus.' Here's my wife and granddaughter. We love your movies."