

*A Celebration of Life for Isabel Casillas Sánchez with words from Pablo Neruda and reflections from Carmen Tafolla*

*July 3, 2021 at Casa de Cuentos*

*When Graciela first asked me to say a few words for Isabel, OF COURSE I said yes. I could not say no. When Graciela asks, like when Isabel dreamed, there was no “No” in the world of justice. But I knew I did not have sufficient words to honor so great a woman as Isabel. I knew immediately that I would search for some great poem by Pablo Neruda, or Gabriela Mistral, that would express our grief, our loss, our joy, our celebration of her life.*

*But there was none. Nothing could say it all. So, I kept searching. Finding a line here, and a phrase there that said some of it. Finally, I pulled these lines together, con gratitud a Pablo Neruda, knowing that no one poem would be enough, so I gathered lines from-- not one but-- TEN of Neruda’s poems of love and loss and rebirth of life, versos en el español bello que ella apreciaba, and to complete them from our rinconcito of a perspective, a whispered dialogue in English, from me, on the right column. —Carmen Tafolla*

**SAYING A FEW WORDS FOR ISABEL SANCHEZ, *con gracias a Neruda, porque yo no tenia palabras para decirlo todo***

***Neruda excerpts***

Eras la boina gris y el corazón en calma.

En tus ojos peleaban las llamas del crepúsculo.

Y las hojas caían en el agua de tu alma.

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ojos adentro, adentro

del escondido resplandor,

callados

como una profecía

***Tafolla’s reflections***

*Yes, I remember you in your beret.*

*It was the early 1990s, at an event to help others, claro. That was you – always seeking to help others.*

*A quiet dove of grace,*

*emanating strength*

*your eyes were all sparkly with*

*care and passion*

*a deep and peaceful ocean of  
commitment and causa.*

\*\*

Ay que pasión la que cantaba  
entre la sangre y la esperanza...  
el mundo quería nacer....  
Se levantaron las ciudades...

*At every event, lending your presence,  
your support, your voice*

\*\*

*We knew the years were passing,  
life taking its tax on you, in your 80s,  
then your 90s, then late 90s,*

*but still you danced*

*modeled love, protested, gathered  
signatures, applauded, encouraged.*

*A pillar of strength on which we all  
leaned. So we did not care to, could  
not bear to... think of your death*

*until the day we knew comes to us all  
came.*

...tus ojos se cerraron como dos alas grises.

\*\*

... fue duro renovar

la sonrisa de la esperanza:

...y en verdad pareció imposible

rellenar de nuevo la tierra  
con tantos huecos que dejó  
la dentellada del desastre...

\*\*

...pero una permanencia de piedra y de palabra  
la ciudad como un vaso se levantó en las manos,  
un muro...de tanta vida, la rosa permanente.

...quedó la exactitud  
el alto sitio de la aurora humana.

*but even grief, even death  
could not diminish, the hope, you left  
within us all, the mark you made,  
the faith you lent.*

*My mind fills with the memory,  
just a moment on stage we had asked  
you to act, just cross the stage,  
pretending to be the Curandera,  
reaching out with her hierbitas,  
her huevo for the mal de ojo, her  
gentle hand extending over the sick.*

*"Just cross the stage," we said,  
"while the narrator reads the poem."  
But then you turned, before you left  
the stage, and faced the audience,  
and made the sign of the cross to  
them, blessing them,  
and we all stood dumbstruck,  
shivering at the power of the huge  
wave that rolled over us, at what  
we had received.*

*Your presence gave so much.  
What will we do now,  
with your empty chair?*

\*

Puedo escribir los versos mas tristes esta noche.

\*\*

*Pero Pablo, también puedo cantar  
puedo celebrar su permanencia.  
Aquí.*

Irás, iremos juntos por las aguas del tiempo.

*Yes, We will flow together  
through the waters of time, both  
death and time mere details  
in the universe of love  
and faith, gracia and esperanza.*

\*

Algo queda acercandonos en la luz de la vida

*We hear your voice, reassuring us*

\*

Voy a vivir otra vez...

me sonrío la boca:

me levanto porque

ha salido el sol.

*But, Hasn't Our sunshine left?*

Porque ha

salido

el sol.

*Our sunshine has risen. To a new day,  
a new way of giving us esperanza.*

*-Carmen Tafolla, July 3, 2021.*