

An Interview with the Author

1. *Your forthcoming short story collection will be your first book publication. Will you discuss the process of composing the work: collecting and arranging the pieces as well as finding a publisher?*

Lorraine—you're the one I owe the book deal to if I think about it! I had never been to AWP and you said that it was your version of living your dream, getting to run into your favorite writers, talk books, go to readings, commiserate and celebrate with writer friends. Of course you were right. I got to do all of that, and even got to participate in a reading panel because you're such a rock star and put together our hugely successful Las Mocosas Gritan reading. I met my publisher, Elizabeth Clementson of IG Publishing, there at the book fair. I noticed her table had some good looking books and one in particular caught my eye because it was a story collection about the Cuban immigrant experience. We started talking, we hit it off, and of course as they say the rest is history. Composing the book is a longer story but you know I started the book back in 2000 so it's been a long journey.

2. *Your collection, though due for release in fall of 2010, has already garnered the distinguished Maurice Prize in Fiction from UC Davis. What does this prestigious award mean for you and for the book?*

It meant the world to me. It gave wind to my sails in a time when I really needed it. The day of the event was a dream come true; Robin Romm the judge and author of *Mother Garden and Mercy* was there, John Lescroat the NY Times Best Selling author who endowed the fund in honor of his father was there, my friends, former professors including Pam Houston and Fenton Johnson were all there and I got to read a story overlooking the Tomales Bay at sunset, surrounded by champagne and oysters. If you know me, you know I was grinning like a Cheshire cat, ear to ear.

3. *"Quiet as They Come," a short story in your forthcoming collection, inscribes an intersection in a Vietnamese immigrant's life. This is a crossroads where his past and present converge in a volatile and dangerous narrative space. I am impressed by how deftly you weave together strands of memory and dread. What was your inspiration for this complex and surprising, yet utterly convincing story?*

It's the story of a lot of Vietnamese families I know, perhaps not the drama of murder on the high seas as happened with Viet in the story, but certainly ordinary people pushed to extraordinary circumstances. The example of pirates preying on these boat people because they knew they were easy targets on the South China Seas was commonplace after the Fall of Saigon in 1975. The part I really wanted to explore in the story is how so many men who were commanding and distinguished men in their old countries arrived to America and suddenly became

invisible to the dominant culture here. I wanted to think more about that—how to deal with the shift in identity, how do you then define self worth, masculinity, or success given this new playing field and do you adjust or die?

4. *Macondo Workshop provides writers of color a rich homeland, and among Latino writers, there are other organizations, such as Con Tinta, that provide opportunities to interact with and support one another. Have you experienced this community among Asian American writers as well? How are you influenced by or affiliated with other Vietnamese American writers?*

The Macondo community has indeed become my writing family and in many ways a second home. I will always be grateful to Leslie Larson for nominating me and of course to Sandra Cisneros for her vision and the birth of Macondo. I am happy with our camaraderie and I've enjoyed seeing the diversity grow within Macondo. I did my honors thesis in college on "Vietnamese Literature in the Interwar Years" and as a result got turned on to some contemporary Vietnamese writers including Linda Le, Duong Thu Huong, and Bao Ninh. I'd love to see more Vietnamese-American writers out there for the reading public. I'd even venture to say, they're hungry for these stories.

5. *You work fulltime and travel extensively for professional reasons. How do you carve the time to complete book-length projects and what advice can you give to emerging writers struggling under similar time constraints?*

Make time, figure out what works for you, and prioritize it. I once read that Hemingway used to wake up at 5am and write and I used to think if this hard-partying hard-drinking man can get out of bed and motivate at that hour, than I can too. That used to inspire me somehow—even as some friends recently argue it's pure myth, for me it works. More recently, Carolina DeRobertis told me that she has a spreadsheet where she tracks how much she writes down to the minute. So now, I've adapted the excel spread sheet model, I will think about what's going on that week, and prioritize how many hours I can get in given my commitments and shoot for the goal. But I also remind myself constantly that it's a lifetime commitment and I have years and years ahead to continue honing my craft. This helps me with the forgiveness part.

6. *Now that your short story collection is coming out, what's next for you in terms of writing projects?*

I am working on a novel based on Kim and Duc from my collection, *Quiet As They Come*. They appeared in at least three stories in the collection, and yet, even with that airtime, they kept on bugging me, scratching me, and whispering in my ear. I realized they had a bigger story to tell. The novel is a love story. He's an officer for the South Vietnamese Army turned prisoner of war and she's a socialite turned single mom ravaged by the war.

ANGIE CHAU BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Angie Chau was born in Vietnam and has since lived on three continents and two islands. She has a Master's degree in creative writing from UC Davis where she also taught undergraduate fiction and was the fiction editor for *The Green Belt Review*. Her work has appeared in the *Indiana Review*, *Night Train*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Slant*, and the anthology, *Cheers to Muses*. Her forthcoming short story collection won the 2009 Maurice Prize in fiction and is forthcoming from IG Publishing and set to release in fall of 2010. Angie lives in Northern California.

LORRAINE M. LÓPEZ BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Lorraine M. López's short story collection, *Soy la Avon Lady and Other Stories* (Curbstone Press, 2002) won the inaugural Miguel Marmól prize for fiction. Her second book, *Call Me Henri* (Curbstone Press, 2006) was awarded the Paterson Prize for Young Adult Literature, and her novel, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* (Grand Central Press, 2008) was a Borders/Las Comadres Selection for the month of November. López's short story collection, *Homicide Survivors Picnic and Other Stories* (BkMk Press, 2009) was a Finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Prize in Fiction in 2010. Most recently, she has edited a collection of essays titled *An Angle of Vision: Women Writers on Their Poor or Working-Class Roots* (University of Michigan Press, 2009).