

RG: I suppose that anyone's history is complex enough it can't be readily summarized in a phrase or even a sentence. Certainly "Butterfly Boy" is about coming out of the closet, just like the butterfly emerges out of the cocoon, but it's also about migration, maturity and education. I like to think of my story as a part of a larger one — a person within a family within a community within a country — but as lived through a young man who seeks out the freedom to be himself.

In Latino families, especially in working class ones like mine, gender roles are critical because it's one of those things we feel we have control over. We are powerless in so many other ways. So when a young boy defies or challenges those expectations, this affront is not dealt with gently. And then there is also the role of the Catholic Church to contend with. But nowadays I don't have to say much about religious hypocrisy since priests are doing such a fine job of it on their own.

Q: The power of this book will appeal to a variety of queer and non-queer readers, but it feels like it will be especially powerful and encouraging for young queer Chicanos or Chicanas. In your opinion, are things getting easier or more difficult for young gays and lesbians in Latino communities and in general?

RG: I am constantly amazed at the resources available to young queer people today through the internet, the mass media, the library, etc. Kids are coming out sooner and

part of the reason is that queerness doesn't seem as threatening or foreign as it once did. When I travel on lectures or book tours, I make it clear I'm a gay man because I know how important it is to have role models and to see someone else be comfortable with their sexuality.

But, I wouldn't have to do that if it were easier nowadays to come out. So, I suspect that despite the familiarity with the lifestyle, it's still a difficult step to make. All the rest of us can do is keep being visible and supportive.

Q: The way you so evocatively describe your relationship with books as a child, the imaginary space they provided, hint a little bit as to how you came to writing. Tell us about the process of becoming a writer.

RG: In "Butterfly Boy" I explain that I became an avid reader as a way of attaining some privacy, not only from my crowded household but also from my secret, my sexuality. What a surprise to suddenly feel the urge to write and not simply read! I suppose it was out of respect and admiration for this skill — yet another way I could affirm my individuality. It's actually a very small leap from reader to writer.

I started taking writing seriously in college, where I also learned about the MFA programs, where writers learn about the profession and the possibility of a career as a writer. Part of that training is to explore writers who want to keep you writing. For me it was the Chicano poets Lorna Dee Cervantes, Francisco X. Alarcón, Pat Mora, Gary Soto and Alberto

Ríos. Not only were they my favorite poets, they also became my teachers and mentors. I came away from college an artist with politics and passion.

Q: As a writer you've worked in some really diverse genres. Do any of your other books explore similar territory to "Butterfly Boy?" Also, what can we expect from you next?

RG: My poetry book "Other Fugitives and Other Strangers" is a companion piece to "Butterfly Boy" in that it engages the complex love-hate emotions between gay lovers in a complicated relationship. The pieces alternate from the voice of the victimizer to the voice of the victim to the voice of ambiguity, because sometimes we play both roles in a dysfunctional relationship. I also have a forthcoming book of stories, "Men Without Bliss," in which a number of the protagonists are young and gay, but quite different, I hope, from the young man in "Butterfly Boy."

I'm now working on a second book of non-fiction about grief and loss: There is a chapter in there updating the father-son thread in "Butterfly Boy" (my father was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease about five years ago and that has strained our relationship in another way), a chapter on my love life as an adult gay man and a chapter about one of my literary heroes, Truman Capote, the queen of wit, but also of sadness. ♣

info:
"Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa"
 by Rigoberto Gonzalez
 University of Wisconsin Press, \$24.95



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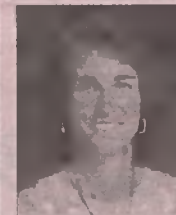
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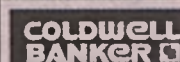
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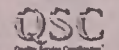
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