

An essayist for the border: Ysleta author Sergio Troncoso explores self

By Ramón Rentería \ El Paso Times
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Sergio Troncoso has navigated borders most of his life. Troncoso writes about transcending cultural, intellectual and linguistic borders in *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays*, a recently published collection of personal essays on diverse topics ranging from interracial marriage to fractured family relationships.

"I like probing people. I wanted to force people to think about what they're doing," Troncoso said in a recent telephone interview from his home in New York City.

Troncoso grew up in Ysleta on what was then the edge of El Paso. He has an undergraduate degree from Harvard College and two graduate degrees from Yale University.

He is the author of a novel, *The Nature of Truth*, and *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*, a collection which won the Premio Aztlán and the Southwest Book Award.

Troncoso will be in El Paso Sept. 24 promoting two new books, the essay collection and a novel *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*. Published by Arte Público in Houston, *Crossing Borders* is billed as a book which "reveals a writer, father and husband who has crossed linguistic, cultural and intellectual borders to provoke debate about contemporary Mexican-American identity. Challenging assumptions about literature, the role of writers in America, fatherhood and family, these essays bridge the chasm between the poverty of the border region and the highest echelons of success in America."

Sarah Cortez, a writer based in Houston, applauds Troncoso for his candid commentaries. "I admire Sergio both as a writer and as a man. He has figured out how to function with true integrity in a complicated world. He doesn't fall into the trap of stridently adopting simple solutions to complex problems – in his writing or in his life," Cortez said in an email. "The world could do better with more authors and citizens willing to think hard and deeply about issues, as does Sergio."

The Hudson Valley Writers' Center in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., is honoring Troncoso in November for his contributions as a former board member. Troncoso dedicates the book to his two young sons, Aaron and Isaac. He said he speaks to them and to future generations of Latinos so they can have a better understanding of the struggles and successes Hispanics have gone through.

"In some of these essays I don't come across as being so nice. I have a hard personality," Troncoso said. "I would rather have a complex character because that's who I am."

In one of the most poignant pieces, Troncoso describes how he and his father stopped talking to each other for three to four years. They have since mended their relationship.

"We're kind of the same individuals, kind of cut from the same cloth," Troncoso said. "He's very terco (stubborn). Sometimes I agree with him. Sometimes I don't."

He also devotes ink to writing about his wife, Laura, and her struggle with breast cancer. He describes her as "muy suavecita," more fluent in Spanish than some of his Chicano friends, and as a New Yorker who loves buying tamales at La Tapatia tortilleria and restaurant in Ysleta.

"When something awful happens, you have to persevere," Troncoso said. "It wasn't easy, believe me. But I'm a philosopher at heart. I believe in telling it the way it is. Too often, we criticize the world and what's going on and we don't talk about these gut-wrenching issues that everybody goes through."

Troncoso writes of the complications of interracial marriage, sometimes complicated even more if you marry someone who is Jewish. While some of his wife's family accepted Troncoso, his mother-in-law took at least a decade to fully accept him.

"I have to be self-critical. I'm not easy to get along with," Troncoso said. "When they would make a snide remark, I would shoot right back and argue."

Going to school on the East Coast, Troncoso suddenly discovered that other people quickly noticed his accent. He felt out of place for a while.

Troncoso of late is editing an anthology of border violence written by Mexican writers and other contributors. The book is scheduled for released in 2013.

"I put my heart into whatever I do," he said. "You get respect by fighting back when you see something wrong and by pointing out injustices."

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Meet the author Ysleta native Sergio Troncoso plans several events in El Paso to publicize his new novel *From This Wicked Patch of Dust* and a new collection *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays*. Troncoso is scheduled to participate in El Paso Community College's annual Literary Fiesta at 10 a.m. Sept. 24. He has also scheduled a reading and book signing for 2 p.m. Nov. 5 at the West Side Barnes & Noble, 705 Sunland Park, and at 5 p.m. the same day at the East Side Barnes & Noble, 9521 Viscount. He is a regular contributor to the El Paso Times Books page.