

más+menos

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cíee

seville

ROAMING THE STREETS





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IMAGE ON COVER AND ON PAGES 4-5: RAFAEL SEGURA'S TAXI / ANTONIO PÉREZ

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contents

Shades of Iris	
Kamilah SMITH	06
Angels Among Us	
Caitlin JAYNES.....	10
“By the Grace of God, I am Here”	
Abeni HILL	12
Style Wars	
Jennifer NELSON	14
Change of Act at ‘Don Quixote’	
Megan ZIEGLER.....	16
‘Casa del Pumarejo’, A Constant Presence in a City of Change	
Grace MARTIN.....	18

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Oscar Ceballos

This is, more or less, how we make our magazine

“*Less is more*”, Mies van der Rohe, German architect (1886-1969)

Although this is nothing complicated and our process has hardly changed over the past ten years, some friends occasionally ask about how we create más+menos. So, here follows a brief explanation.

Our magazine is the final project of the course ‘Magazine Reporting and Writing,’ one of two core courses at the ‘Communication, New Media and Journalism’ program. The first day of class, once we’ve introduced ourselves, the students and the professor start discussing what they’d like to make a magazine about in Seville.

In the following weeks, while we try to keep that discussion alive, we devote our time to the initial projects of the course. We start exchanging stories amongst ourselves: first our own, those of our families or friends, and then stories of people whom we invite to come to our class or that we go and visit.

All stories deserved to be told. So, our task during the course will be to analyze the methods that we can use to capture our readers’ attention for the ones we’re going to tell them.

During these first few weeks, we debate a lot about why telling stories is so important, about the way in which we configure reality based upon memory, about the knowledge implicit in each story, and about how beautiful life can be if we observe it up close. At this point, we talk very little about the magazine, but we remain alert with eyes and ears wide open for you never know what you might find.

After completing these preliminary exercises based on narration, description and transmission of voices, we turn our full concentration to the magazine. It is mid-semester and we have just enough weeks to turn it out. This self-imposed limitation on time is our way of making the magazine through a brief,

but intense effort, avoiding unnecessary delays in our preparation and our execution. So, we resume with extra energy our initial debate about the topic of the magazine, though now we’re more concerned about the specific stories that we’re going to tell.

We make a map of each of them and we imagine a possible narration, which later and almost inevitably, changes once we come into contact with reality. First comes calling the protagonists of our stories or the people who will help us make contact with them. Email is of no use, as we need to get closer to people by hearing their voices and letting them hear our own. And in the meantime, we’re researching: local newspapers, videos, web pages, statistics, municipal laws, studies, analyses, neighbors, friends...

Inevitably, however, this contact with reality also brings the first problems. We’re no longer in the protected environment of the classroom and we find that some people don’t answer their phones, that some stories don’t end up clicking in our minds, that days go by before someone can meet us for an interview, that some interviews don’t go well or that some maybe do, but we don’t understand what they answered, that a protagonists withdraws at the last minute, that we miss a bus, that a photo doesn’t come out well or that we get somewhat scared not knowing exactly why... Are we going to be able to write our articles and, more importantly, on time?

We need to remind ourselves that we can’t afford any shortcuts. We’ve committed to not talking about ourselves or explaining why this or that seems interesting, exciting or moving to us. What we try for is to let the voices of the protagonists tell their stories, while we contribute by showing the context and the space in which each one of those voices finds its echo.

Little by little, we start writing: we discuss what’s been written and we rewrite, we search for more information or we make another interview or another phone call.

And we’re always supported by the many people who will not feature in the magazine. Each new issue of más+menos broadens our network of friends in the city and makes us a useful knot within it. The work that we make and the people whom we meet today will quite probably help other students or will be the basis for new stories in the future.

We’re reaching the end... Once the final texts have been handed out and the search for images has started, our Spanish and English-language editors and our collaborators, the local students who will help us polish the Spanish version of our texts, commence their work. More revisions and corrections. We need to shorten or to restructure some of the articles, change a title or discard a photograph, and any of these losses may not be easy to accept.

Hardly three weeks have gone by since we started to work on our stories. Now three or four more days for the designer to put the publication together and for the last revisions to be made on paper and the magazine is sent to the printer, just over two weeks before the end of the semester.

Then, if there are no religious holidays or general strikes in the country, the magazine will be printed and delivered to our study center the last Monday of classes. And of course... we still have to grade each of the articles.

So, good luck to our contributors for this Fall 2012 semester... though they already know that they’ve done a great job. Thank you all!





Kamilah Smith

Shades of Iris

Iris, a transgender prostitute in the Alameda de Hércules, relays the story of her life as her neighbors express their respect for her and the local government tries to eradicate all forms of sexual trade.

Standing at about five feet ten inches withraven black hair, a few grey strands peeking out at the hairline, her thick eyebrows and deep oak brown eyes unwavering as her full red-stained lips open, Iris proclaims: “When you die, you die. Period.”

“Hell is this,” she says, looking out toward the orange trees and cars in the distance. “This is hell. After you’re born, you’re living in hell,” she says in a frank, even voice as her dark eyes stare straight ahead. As she describes her life, her face and voice remain even, her pitch unvarying except when she laughs or becomes passionate.

She motions her hand in circles while describing her day-to-day: she wakes up, puts on her clothes and makeup, makes her bed, prepares her breakfast and eats it out in the street where she will start her day’s work.

“I’m transsexual, okay? I took courses for working at a hotel, as a hostess, and I ended up in prostitution,” she says. “Right now, the moment isn’t appropriate and we’re in a crisis, not only in Spain, but in the world. So, a person has to keep working in things that aren’t pleasant. And with me, it isn’t pleasant. But I have to eat, and you gotta pay to eat and to live.”

Iris: a thin circular membrane that encloses the pupil, which controls the amount of light that enters the retina, comes in various shades and colors. And so, Iris juxtaposes the various shades of her identity and phases of her life as a transwoman prostitute.

She bashfully chuckles and her eyes widen as if to ask if she really has to say her age. 34 years old, she moved from Cádiz when she was about 20 and now the Alameda de Hércules in Seville is her neighborhood. Characterized by its restaurants, bars and clubs, children at play accompanied by their distracted parents, modern fountains, a few decadent houses, and two grand columns—removed in the 18th century from the ruins of a Roman temple in order to serve as pedestals for the statues of Julius Cesar and Hercules—this is the space that Iris navigates on a daily basis, a

few meters from her spot at the intersection of Joaquín Costa and La Mata streets.

“The Alameda has a lot of character, and lots of single guys too. There are all of these famous bullfighters and flamenco singers and dancers who lived here.” She describes the neighborhood as forever-moving. Lines appear around her cheeks as she laughs at the fact that she can’t sleep from the non-stop noise.

Her family doesn’t live with her in the Alameda, but she talks to them often and has a good relationship with her mother and siblings.

“I call her to ask how she’s doing, and for recipes. My mom doesn’t like to cook, but she had to learn. She had to learn because, obviously, she had seven kids.” She smiles and shrugs. Though she still chats with her mother, Iris admits that since she started to change from man to woman her mother hasn’t been there for her in the way she needed and wanted. And with an intake of breath and flat voice she utters, “But I continue forward,” she says as she sighs. “I continue forward,” she repeats. However, Iris is certainly not alone.

“There are good neighbors here, here good neighbors, here good neighbors. Over there, over there,” she echoes as she points to various apartments on the street and to José Luis Romero’s restaurant, at the end of La Mata street. In the midst of these good neighbors, Iris has received some ugly looks or people “looking over their shoulders, typical stuff.” But she respects those who respect her, affirming with a nod of her head. The majority of them greet her, although some tend to be friendlier or more suggestive than others. For example, the many catcalls to which she responds with a smile or a laugh.

“She’s really appreciated around here, at the bakery, at the pharmacy, at the grocery store, everyone likes her. Go ask,” says José Luis, busy at the counter of his *haute cuisine* restaurant a mere 30 meters away from the threshold of the house where Iris works.

“She’s come to eat here a couple of times when invited by one of her clients. Very gentle, very polite, and very concerned about her

figure. I’ve met her at the grocery store more than once and she’s always commenting on what she will or won’t eat so as not to get fat,” José Luis says. “I’ve told her that she’d do well if she decided to open a little business, like an alternative dinning place or something. She’s smart, and pretty too, and she has a very charming manner.”


Though as friendly as the neighbors or the catcalls may seem, they don’t compensate for the friends that she has, which aren’t many.

“Very few friends, maybe three I think, friends in this life. Very few, very few. In this world it’s very difficult to have friendships. Not just because of our job, but in general,” she makes a circle with her arms to include Angeli who sits across from her right in the door of the house they share.

Angeli is a widowed Afro-Latina woman from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where she worked as a nurse. She came with her children to Seville eight years ago through a program to care for elderly people. But the hours were very few and very little pay. In the end, she lost her job due to the economic crisis. She has known Iris for three years after they initially met through a mutual friend and later became close friends as well as co-workers.

“I think she’s a great girl. I respect her a lot because she respects me,” Angeli says. Beyond working together, they shop and go out to eat, and Iris even spends time with Angeli’s two daughters, one of whom is studying cosmetology and the other to be an electrical technician. “No one should judge anybody. People like him, you have to accept it,” she says in reference to Iris’s transsexual identity.

For the local authorities, Iris’s and Angeli’s dignity can only be achieved outside of prostitution. The novelty of the Ordinance Against Sex Trafficking and Prostitution that the City Council enacted a year and a half ago is that it seeks to penalize the clients of prostitution. There is a big possibility that many of Iris’s and Angeli’s clients are deterred by the likelihood of receiving a hefty fine from the local



“Very few friends, maybe three I think, friends in this life. Very few, very few. In this world it’s very difficult to have friendships. Not just because of our job, but in general.”

police, who would consider them accomplices of sexual trade.

“Well, if they hear about the fine, they get scared. But honestly, some of them would deserve it!” Iris says with a laugh.

One street down from Iris and Angeli, in a house full of modern art and designer furniture, lives María with her husband and two daughters.

“Iris always gives my four year-old gifts. She’s very sweet with her,” María says sitting at her office in the state art center that she manages. “I know what she does, but she’s trying to take courses and do other things. She doesn’t

like her job and wants to leave that business. Iris is amongst the few who are left following the big transformation of the neighborhood.”

The Alameda de Hércules flourished at the beginning of the 20th century. The entire city would come here for high and low forms of entertainment: Flamenco cabarets, big cafes, theatres, the city’s first open-air cinemas, even the Carnival celebrations that the city no longer holds. This is where young people would also come to stroll along the boulevard under the elm tress, to meet friends and to flirt. Then, the families who lived in the little palaces and in the bourgeois houses on both sides of the Al-

ameda started to move towards the periphery of the city and the area became a sort of red-light district. There were many brothels and after the civil war the neighborhood fell into deep decline. By the 70’s, and until its recent restoration, the neighborhood was filled with heroine and prostitution. Urban speculation also made its appearance and many buildings, from the most humble to some of the noblest, were knocked down. Most people considered it a dangerous place to visit.

María’s eldest daughter, Carmen, is a 22 year-old college student who has known the *plaza* since she was a child.

“It was very different from now. Look for photos on the Internet of how it was before the reconstruction. It was only dirt, a lot of junkies,” she says.

She describes the relationship between herself and Iris as amiable yet distant.

“Everybody around knows her and her friend Vanessa, and Deborah, who’s her boss or her *madame*,” she says. But despite the greetings and chit-chat, Carmen isn’t totally at ease around Iris and her coworkers.

“It’s an uncomfortable sensation. For me, it’s normal to pass them and say ‘hello, good afternoon,’ or if I go with my little sister

who’ll say something, but the situation changes when there’s a client. And then there are [other prostitutes] not so kind. But not Iris!” she clarifies with raised eyebrows. “Iris always greets me.”

And though these awkward situations have occurred, her father has managed to create quirky, fun greetings like “How goes business!”

Carmen nods her head and buries her face in her hand to describe her embarrassment.

“No one knows the future,” Iris states. She smiles as she tells how much she wants to have kids and marry, although she knows it will be difficult. “I always knew that I wanted to

change my name. My dad died in 1984. I was about six or seven years old when I saw this singer from Tangiers on television. No one had told me before, but she was a man,” she says.

“I changed my name when I underwent my transformation and it remained,” she says. The iris, more than a colorful membrane, controls the amount of light that can enter the pupil. Likewise, Iris assuredly states that she doesn’t know what the future brings, but she’s a “girl in her own world,” her own shade, and she continues forward. ●●●

Kamilah Smith

Fines for the costumers

The former municipal delegate for Women’s Affairs and a legal advisor explain the plan in force against sexual exploitation.

Prostitution is no laughing matter for María Dolores Rodríguez, former city councilwoman, delegate for Women’s Affairs (2008 to 2011), and member of the Socialist Party, nor for Amparo Díaz, lawyer and legal adviser on the Integral Action Plan Against Trafficking, Prostitution and Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation, which was enacted by the city’s government after receiving the support of all council members on November 26th, 2009 and that is intended to be in effect from 2010 to 2015. These two women have spearheaded awareness campaigns and ordinances to protect women’s rights, focusing on issues that range from domestic violence to prostitution. They bluntly and unapologetically assert that prostitution is one of the grossest forms of gender violence.

“It’s said that prostitution isn’t rape, but why not? Because you pay for it?” the former delegate argues.

The 21 objectives laid out in the Integral Action Plan are to be achieved through 56 actions or steps. María Dolores Rodríguez recounts the success with which the local ordinance against sex trafficking and prostitution was received by the City Hall, yet the Integral Action Plan was more of a struggle, in part due

to an initial disagreement between the conservative Popular Party, who prefer to address prostitution as an issue pertaining to public order, and the Socialist Party, who saw it as one of the main manifestations of gender violence.

The former municipal delegate emphasizes that, in the end, all council members voted in favor of the Integral Action Plan and for the subsequent Ordinance Against Sex Trafficking and Prostitution, the latter of which came into effect on May 26, 2011.

“We need to change the usual references to the shame that these practices bring to the streets of our city,” says María Dolores Rodríguez. “Our intention is to put an end to the stigmatization suffered by the women so that the clients abandon the hypocritical anonymity under which they perform actions that, while having a negative consideration when observed in public, are in reality tolerated thanks to the silent complicity of society.”

One of the most prominent features of the new approach introduced by the Integral Action Plan is the ordinance that fines clients of prostitution with penalties from 750 to 3,000 euros. In the period between October 18, 2011 and September 20, 2012, a total of 113 clients of prostitution received fines from Se-

ville’s local police, regardless of the fact that there had since been a political shift in power following the Popular Party’s success in the March 2011 local elections.

Amparo Díaz asserts that in Iris’s case, the plan offers resources to leave prostitution. She points to a number of municipal bodies that she guarantees would give some type of assistance to Iris: Delegations of Women Issues, Social Welfare, Cooperation for Development, and Coexistence and Safety. A total of 500,000 euros was the initial budget for a plan that is evaluated by the different delegations every year and which is providing specific training for many municipal workers on the ways in which to help women who are subjected to sexual exploitation.

María Dolores Rodríguez concludes: “this is not the fulfillment of fantasy, or a fun or leisure activity, nor the problem of a few women who have chosen this freely. We’re talking about women who live in poverty and under precarious circumstances. In fact, in the last few years we’ve seen an increasing number of women trafficked against their will in order to be sexually exploited. We’re talking about violence against women.” ●●●



THE ‘FORUM OF MEN FOR GENDER EQUALITY’ DEMONSTRATES IN SEVILLE, OCTOBER 23RD 2011/ JOSE F. SALAS

Angels Among Us

Rafael Segura is a taxi driver who provides free rides to the hospital for children with cancer in his colorful and magical car. He's one amongst many individuals who support them and their families in Seville.

As you're getting in the taxi, you're thinking it'll be just you and the driver, with minimal conversation. You'll cover the basics; where you're going, maybe discuss the quickest route, and then pay and be on your way. For most taxis, this would be the case. But your taxi driver is Rafael Segura, and there are a few other passengers on this trip. You're sharing your space with Sponge Bob, Mickey Mouse, Shrek, and The Simpsons. Your eye doesn't stop moving from the vibrant colors of the butterflies in the front to the stuffed animals sitting under the back window, and finally to Rafael himself, who has adorned the space right above the till with two small pictures of his children. He points to each of the photos, saying, "My children: Alicia is six, and Alejandro is fourteen."

Rafael has been a taxi driver in Seville since 1985, but it wasn't until his four-year-old daughter, now six, suggested the idea that his taxi becomes the most unique in the whole city.

"Why have you decorated your taxi this way?" you ask him curiously.

"When I finished working each day," he says, "sometimes I would stop in a Chinese corner store and buy one of these little toys for Alicia, like the princesses or the hearts. She would put them in her room and I would tell her that they made her room magical. And one day she says to me, 'Daddy, I want you to put these in our taxi, so it can be magical, too.'"

And so it began. Rafael started putting some of the toys in the taxi, and after a few days, showed it to Alicia as a surprise. Over the last year and a half, it has become covered from floor to ceiling.

"She showed it to all her friends. She was so, so proud of her dad's taxi," Rafael says.

What a nice story, you're thinking to yourself. Something for a father and daughter to share and do together. Then you start to notice other things in the car. First, the donations box sitting between the two front seats. Then the signs on the back of the seats. A heart cut out of paper, reading, in both Spanish and English, "This taxi supports children with cancer." Reading further, you notice another sign, reading, "If you know a child with can-

cer whose family needs transportation, call this number." So you ask Rafael about this as well.

"I was thinking, after my taxi was decorated, that I should do something more," he explains. "A lot of children would ride in it and then I thought, the children who are sick, it's important for them to ride in *this* taxi."

For a child with such an illness, something as simple as a short ride in a colorful taxi could take their mind off of it for the time being. Instead of thinking about the hospital, they can be distracted and entertained by Rafael's beautiful, colorful decorations.

"So, I went to the Virgen del Rocío Hospital and told them what I wanted to do, and they told me about the ANDEX Foundation, and that I could give donations to them. That was the first idea, and I decided that if there was a family that was in a bad financial situation, I could offer them my taxi," Rafael explains.

ANDEX is the Association of Parents of Children with Cancer of Andalucía. Through their work since 1985 with the Oncology Unit at the Virgen del Rocío Children's Hospital in Seville, they were able to open a new Hematology Department for the hospital in 2002. ANDEX is part of a larger foundation, the Spanish Federation of Parents of Children with Cancer, together with 17 other associations throughout the country. "ANDEX helps parents financially, amongst other things," says Dr. Eduardo Quiroga, director of the Children's Oncology Unit at Virgen del Rocío. "They have social workers who are assigned to help the families."

María Luisa Rodríguez, a mother of six, and her husband, Andrés, had two children suffer from cancer.

"One of their sons contracted a type of lymphoma when he was two or three. After receiving treatment, he was well. Then, two or three years later, his brother, who at that time was ten or eleven, began to have severe pain in the belly and suffered urinary problems, so I did an ultrasound and saw that he had an abdominal lymphoma, too," says Dr. Quiroga, who treated both boys. "From there," he continues, "the parents and I began to investigate and discovered that their children had an im-

paired immune system that predisposed them to suffer lymphomas."

After having a third child, María Luisa, Andrés and the doctors found a unique solution to help treat them. They were able to have another child and later a set of twins by using genetics to ensure the younger children would be able to donate blood to their older siblings. This worked to cure all but the oldest son, who passed two years ago. Over ten years, María Luisa and Andrés got to know the people of the Virgen del Rocío hospital, like Dr. Quiroga, very well.

"Our younger son understood nothing, while the older understood everything," María Luisa says, explaining the importance of keeping the children's spirits up.

While she has never known Rafael or his taxi, her kids were never short of moments of relief inside the hospital. There is a classroom in the hospital, full of windows and just as colorful as Rafael's taxi.

"In the classroom, they paint pictures, they build things, they make decorations for *Semana Santa* or *Navidad*. It is an extremely, extremely wonderful place. And it is all because of their teacher, Ana," María Luisa says, gushing. But Ana doesn't teach alone. "She has a puppet, that is a raccoon, or *mapache*. She uses it with the younger children. I remember, when my son was afraid of the nurses, the doctors, everyone... Ana would talk with *mapache* and my son started to talk to it."

Along with Ana on the weekdays (who, according to María Luisa, is missed by the children at night and on weekends), many volunteers spend time with them. María Piedad Navarro, a university student, volunteers with ANDEX. "I go to the hospital on Thursdays from 6 to 8 p.m., but a different group goes every day," she explains. "It's a little break for the parents, who can leave while we're there."

"I just wanted to do something, for someone, to do things for people and to help. At the university, there's a list of volunteer opportunities, and I chose this one," she says.

But even without being a relative, María says it can be hard not to build a personal connection with the children.

"This is something that we shouldn't do," she reflects, "because some children die, and it's really difficult. I have a friend who could not go back to volunteering after a child with whom they were close, died. But the majority of the time is good, and I enjoy it."

The Spanish government enacted a Royal Decree in 2011 to help parents like María Luisa and Andrés, who find it very hard to keep up or to cope with work and other daily routines while their children are sick. The decree gives parents 24 months paid if their case meets certain standards set by Social Security. Unfortun-

nately, it came too late to support María Luisa's family, but she is happy that it was passed.

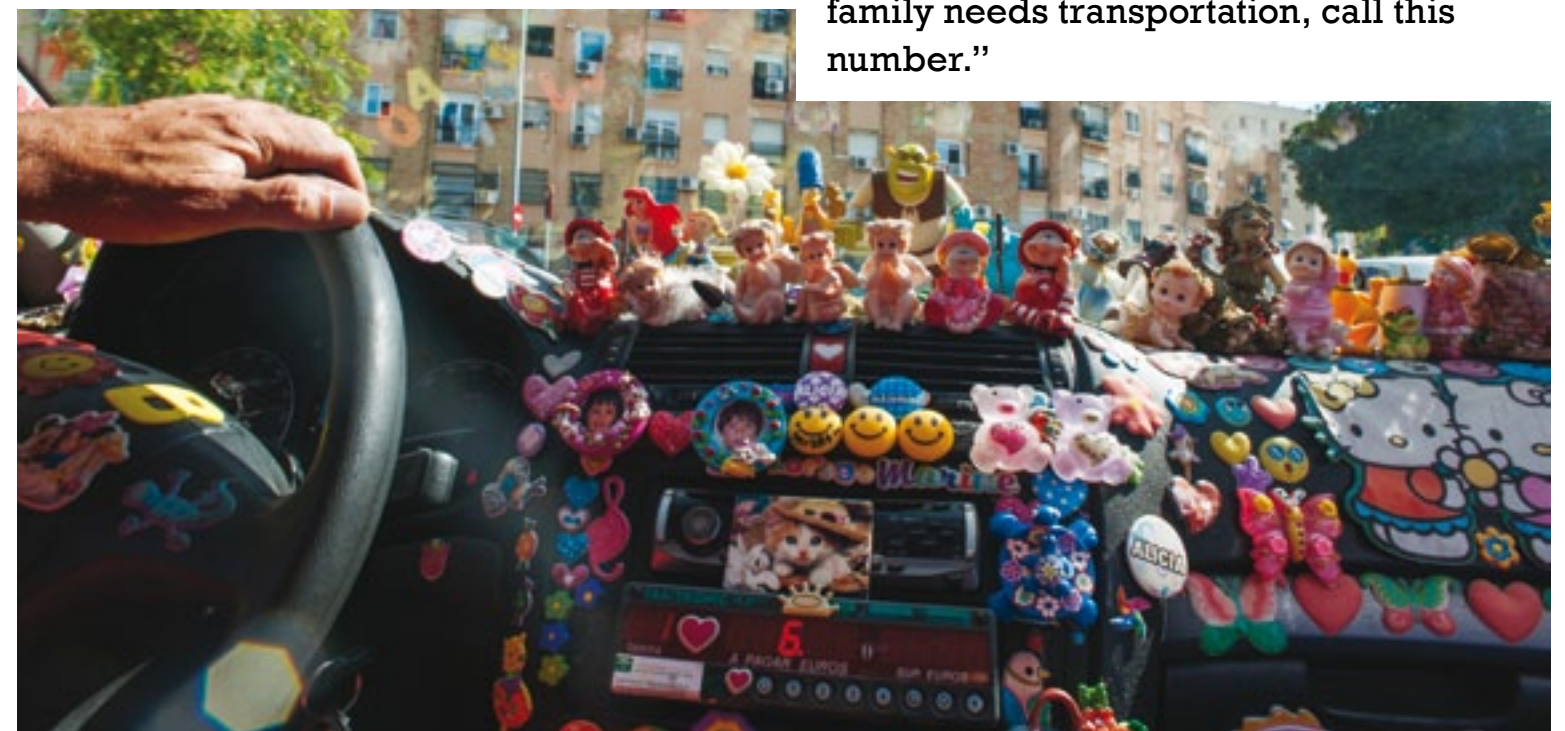
"It can be very difficult because you have to use your own sick days to go with your child to the hospital," she says. "The main goal is that the children are happy, all the time."

Rafael agrees. He decorated his taxi simply to bring a smile to his own daughter's face, and he wants to share that smile with children who were suffering. "Everyone likes the taxi! Everyone wants to take pictures," he says, laughing. "I'm happy to do my part, to give my own grain of sand."

As Rafael arrives at your destination, you pay him, dropping your change in the donation box, and you take one last look at his taxi in all its wonder. The colors of the butterflies and the smiling flowers, the letters put together in random order, conceivably by a child. You might begin to think about how you can do your part, how to give your grain of sand, and how you might become, like the children, the teachers, the doctors, the volunteers, and the parents, an angel among us. ●●●



"If you know a child with cancer whose family needs transportation, call this number."



RAFAEL SEGURA IN HIS TAXI, OCTOBER 2012 / ANTONIO PÉREZ

“By the Grace of God, I am here”

Ken Ocah left his home in Nigeria seven years ago, travelled through Africa, and lived in a tent in Morocco for months before finally entering Europe on a dangerous three-day trip at sea across the Strait of Gibraltar. This is his odyssey in his own words.

It happened on September 14, 2007. We opened our eyes and we found a big ship before us. The man from the Spanish rescue team told us to wait through his walkie-talkie. There, we thanked God and then joy came. I had spent three good days at sea. We had 28 adults and 12 kids on the boat. The accommodation was awful. Those 72 hours felt like 72 years. You see no trees, no flies, no life. We had bread and sardines to eat. We eat those things because as long as you put something in your mouth you will live. Although we did what we could to survive, in the end we owe to God for seeing us through.

God really walked me through that. God was really on our side because on my trip no one died. We thank God, we thank God. We hear about people dying at sea trying to get to Spain, but in Morocco that is nothing.

So many people that want to come to Morocco have to pass first through Magnia. This is a very dangerous place in Algeria. It is like a military war ground. This valley is a land people wish to not experience anymore. It is the last point before heading to Morocco. I was a little afraid, but I couldn't be afraid because my heart was in me. When you leave Nigeria you either succeed or you don't come back. I don't know how to put it. It was very brutal just being there. I arrived in Tangiers in 2005 and I left in 2007. After you pass through Morocco you will find yourself in Spain.

The cost of the boat depends on your connection. There are some people who want 500 euros from you and there are some who want 240 euros. It depends. It depends on the people that help you. Paying for that ticket is like paying your debt. I bought the ticket with my begging. I went to the street in Tangiers everyday to beg. I lived in a tent hidden in the forest nearby. I spent nine good months begging. I earned 300 euros.

When you are in the middle of the sea you are in the middle of no man's land. There you

cannot differentiate Spain from Morocco and Africa from Europe. In the middle of the sea there is a Spanish flag. When you pass the flag, you know you are in Spain and you can call to the Spanish to come and rescue you. It was very difficult because the water goes up and down really hard. That is why you hear people die in the sea. When the sea gets rough you see white foam. The water is up and there is no way the boat can climb it. When fishermen see that foam, they're scared and they stay home. We were about to die.

I can't remember the name of the ship that rescued us because it has been so long, but the Spanish came to our boat with a ship. They took us to Tarifa, then they took us to Granada and from Granada, I was free.

When I came to Seville I had a friend, Desmond. I met him a year ago, he was the one that helped me. He taught me how to sell tissues at the big street crossings with traffic lights and how to beg and how to make a living. He is no longer in Spain—he lives in Germany with his wife and kids.

There is no place like home. For seven years now I have not seen my mother. I lost my father three years after I left for Morocco. It was very painful because I had not seen him for three years. Along the way, I lost my eldest sister, who was already sick when I left.

Sometimes they call me and we talk and we laugh. I call my family twice a week. Although we talk, there is nothing like seeing them. I am my mother's last son. I know they have pain in their hearts. I want my family to come here and see what is happening because travelling is a form of education.

I ended my studies in 2004. I am an electrical technician with a national diploma and I studied at the local university. In 2005, I went for my one-year youth service. I was supposed to go back to school, but because of my lack of money I was unable to. My father was not rich. I come from a very poor family. I decided

to stop my education and look for a job. But when I could not find one, I decided to leave.

People think that it is really good because Nigeria is rich and everyone walks around flamboyantly. But it is not so good. We civilians have nothing to do with the politics and nothing to do with the militia. It is very difficult for us to survive, especially when you try to search for a job. Everybody tells you “you've got a job,” but they pay you low. They are not going to take care of your expenses or your needs. The next thing you have to do is look for a future elsewhere. God always makes a way when there seems to be no way. If your country is not good for you, you can look for a future elsewhere.

I'm still selling tissues in the street. I also help people park their cars and, on the weekends, I sing and I play the trombone in the jazz band of the 'First Life International Church' of Seville, which is full of Nigerians like me. They pay me a little for doing this. I've done a course to get my qualification as a plumber, but I have no work. Now, I want to start studying Pharmacology.

I have to go fight for my future and that is why this country is good. The most positive part about living in Spain is you learn to relate internationally and have respect for other people. We are one and all we need is to care for each other.

Sometimes the Spanish police make it difficult for Nigerian immigrants. If you are an immigrant, you have to wait. They bother you and ask you questions. That is the most difficult part about living in Spain, but there's going to be change soon because God works in mysterious and miraculous ways. I am 28 now. I have been here for five years trying to make things okay. I thank God for everything and I am grateful to be here. ●●●



“Paying for that ticket is like paying your debt. I bought the ticket with my begging. I went to the street in Tangiers everyday to beg.”

KEN OCAH IN SEVILLE, NOVEMBER 2012 / ABENI HILL



Jennifer Nelson

Style Wars

In the dark arts: should graffiti be celebrated or exterminated? While many do not consider this “vandalism” to be a part of the beauty of Seville, graffiti artist Seleka is working to change the opinion.

Seleka is not a teen with a backpack full of spray paints, dubiously surveying the scene for empty space on buildings, but a prompt and responsible adult, with a beard to prove it. Sitting at Bar Manolo in Plaza de la Alfalfa, he is surrounded by graffiti, both commissioned and non-commissioned, like clues to a secret society where only a certain kind of talent belongs.

“I grew up in the neighborhood of San Carlos, in the northeast of Seville. There, we had the plazas and we had the wasteland. The plazas were protected but in the wasteland you could do as you pleased on the miles of walls surrounding the old Renfe railway buildings. There was even a hall of fame for graffiti,” Seleka says. “Then there comes a day, when, because the older kids in your school do it, or because you like how it looks, or for many reasons, you pick up an Edding marker or a spray can, and start trying.”

Seleka found his passion for graffiti in 1993, at the age of ten, but it took him two years to save up for the supplies to paint his first mural.

“I had miles and miles where I could put my name without bothering anyone, and without anyone bothering me,” he says.

Sometimes, he would even go to the north end of the train station at Santa Justa just to see the graffiti on the trains. “That was like watching a moving exhibition.”

However, it is exactly this kind of artistic experimentation that the City Council of Seville is attempting to remove. Seleka on the other hand has a very clear idea of the tradition on which his artistic expression is grounded.

“Graffiti is the type of painting that developed in the streets of New York and Philadelphia between the late 70’s and mid 80’s. Everything that came afterwards can be called many different things but it is not the same as the original. It merely has the essence. That period of time defined the style, and created the concept and the forms. The rest comes from repetition and evolution,” he says.

Graffiti culture in Spain, like in the rest of the world, has evolved from mere gang terri-

tory marking into a true art form, tagged only for the purpose of artistic recognition.

However, for Lipasam, Seville’s public cleaning and waste-disposal company, it is costly vandalism. With an annual budget of over 96 million euros, they employ 1,607 men and women, who are responsible for cleaning over 1.077 kilometers of city streets. Part of their job includes ridding the city of unwanted graffiti.

In order to encourage an orderly use of public spaces, they’ve organized in recent years an annual Urban Art Contest, where graffiti artists are invited to paint city structures, such as recycling bins. The people have responded positively.

“I like this idea of decorating the garbage containers of the city and other public spaces. I think that’s awesome,” says Elisa Blanco, a 22 year-old resident of the *Casco Antiguo*, the old part of Seville. However, she clarifies that for her there are different kind of graffiti.

“Of course I hate those stupid kids that think they’re such rebels, spraying their name on my front door,” she says. “I’m ok with graffiti as long as it is a good piece and it’s done in a place that is not messing with someone’s property.”

For Seleka, it’s a bit more complicated than that. “It depends on your intention. If you have a concept and a style, then you can make art by simply writing a phrase. When there is something incidental or random, you can also be creating art without knowing it. It all depends on the eyes of the beholder, just like contemporary art. An uninformed person cannot understand what you are doing or what you are thinking, and they may think your painting, or your graffiti art is a joke. You could be doing the best mural in the world in the most desolate place, making a gift for society, and a cop may come, and take you and give you a fine, because in their eyes, you were not doing any good. But maybe the neighbor comes out next, and loves what you gave to that broken-down area.”

So then, what is the difference between “take your money” written on the walls of a bank, and the painting of a cat on the front of someone’s home? It is this difference that Lipasam must find a way to judge, while remain-

ing cautious of becoming overzealous. Elisa Blanco believes that well-done graffiti is an art.

“The ones near the river are so cool and really make a part of the city that was completely forgotten more interesting,” she says.

Graffiti is so prevalent in Seville that it contributes to create the background of the city, making it the artistic capital of the south of Spain.

There are ways, aside from contests, to display the work of graffiti artists without worrying about legal consequences, such as commissioned works. Many storeowners purposely commission popular graffiti artists to paint their storefront to deter inexperienced artists from tagging their property. Tagging refers to stylized signatures, logos, or nicknames. These tags can stand-alone or can be a signature on a piece, which use different colors, are bigger and may be an individual or collective work, as those next to the Plaza de Armas bus station. However, the social stigma and deviance associated with graffiti can oftentimes make even legal graffiti difficult.

“I personally have had arrests and I’ve had murals that I’ve been working on for a month when the police come and take me. I’ve even had city permits, and the police will come and take me; but as of now, knock on wood, I’ve never received a fine related to graffiti,” Seleka says.

But part of the subculture of graffiti is to be able to paint illegally. This is the way in which it was born in New York City, and the way many artists become addicted to their craft; the adrenaline rush.

So the question remains. How should this group of individuals be defined? They have been classified as artists, as well as members of a deviant subculture of vandals. Seleka resolves the question by defining himself.

“A direct translation would be graffiti writer, at least that’s the least pejorative way to say it, because graffiti has negative connotations. As artists, we seek a meaning that defines us better. For example, the history of graffiti includes simply writing your name, so we use the term *grafitadores* to describe what we are. We are graffiti writers.” ●●●



STENCIL BY DANI ALONSO FOR THE 'PONY BRAVO' BAND, SEVILLE 2012 / MAX LANDERMAN



Megan Ziegler

Change of act at ‘Don Quixote’

The actors at the theater project Estrellas en Silencio (Stars in Silence) break stereotypes. They are patients of the Psychiatric Hospital at Sevilla-1 prison and go beyond its walls to represent the universal story of Cervantes as a way of rehabilitation. We accompany them to one of their performances and listen to the stories that led them to the stage.

Behind the burgundy curtains of the Gilena House of Culture auditorium stage, Julián Vicente stands, script in hand, feeding forgotten lines to his six onstage actors in their rendition of *Don Quixote*. They arrived earlier in the day from the Psychiatric Hospital located in the Sevilla-1 prison. Julián, who is not only the director but also the writer of this adaptation of Cervantes’ universal novel, drove the group in a mini-bus to deliver their performance to a group of middle school students in Gilena, in the Spanish province of Seville. As they walk off the mini-bus with their heads held high and cigarettes in hand waiting to be smoked, they look more like rock stars coming off their private jet than psychiatric patients arriving to perform a play.

You ask them if they are nervous for their performance and Ramón Rebanal, the eldest in the group, replies with confidence, “We have already performed it four times and could not be more ready. We don’t really start to get excited until we are on stage.”

They carry in a small array of simple props and begin to set up the stage. Among the most complicated equipment are an overhead projector and a CD player, which will play music at the beginning of each of the four acts. Two desk-size tables are set up on stage covered by white and gold table clothes and full of old books. The actors quickly run through lines and change into their costumes before the audience arrives. When everyone is off stage the back doors open and a flood of overly excited adolescent students, happy to skip class in order to see the play, invade the room.

When everyone has taken their seat, and the roar of noise has settled, it is brought to Julian’s attention that the students are unaware of the actor’s history. They have been told that the six men about to appear on stage are part of a normal adult theatre group.

Estrellas en Silencio (Stars in Silence) is one of several artistic therapeutic projects offered at the Psychiatric Hospital of Sevilla-1 prison, one of only two centers of this kind in Spain. Patients here suffer some type of psychiatric illness and have been sentenced for

crimes they committed, many of them under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Here they are treated and supported by psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians and teachers. Family visits are common. Patients are viewed first and foremost as people, not criminals.

Estrellas en Silencio was created in 1994 and produces about one play every year and a half. The works vary from classics such as *Don Quixote* to one-person monologues.

“Some of the benefits of therapeutic theater include the improvement of cognitive skills such as attention, concentration, and memory as well as emotions and feelings,” says Julián. “These plays expose the actors to situations that bring about anxiety and cause them to develop adaptive coping strategies, power relationships and discover empathetic and social skills.”

Although everyone is encouraged to participate in theater, Julián does try to seek out patients who identify personally with the characters and are capable of performing onstage.

Carlos López plays the main character, *Don Quixote*. He is dressed in all white, a stark contrast against his long dark black beard. He secretly hides his lines under a book on the table in front of him, located center stage. Carlos has been at the mental hospital of the prison for six years and is an active member of both its theater group and its radio station. He sits center stage reciting his lines loudly and clearly in front of the audience of eighty-five students. He occasionally needs Julián to read the beginning of a line as a reminder but nonetheless moves around the stage with ease and confidence. He demands the room’s attention and cannot help but smile when the audience erupts in laughter at the play’s jokes.

As he takes his final bow, he removes the white cap that hides his completely bald scalp, and steps up to the front of the stage with the other cast members. They gaze excitedly at the audience as a brief question-and-answer session commences. As the applause settles down, the audience is finally introduced to the group.

“Okay, well now they will tell you what center they came from,” explains Julián.

The man who played Sancho Panza takes the microphone.

“We come from the Psychiatric Hospital of Sevilla-1 prison,” he says.

Julián asks the students if they know what that means. He tells them that the six men are psychiatric patients who use theater as a form of therapy. By acting and becoming a different character, the patients face their own selves at the same time as they develop empathy for other persons and ideas.

Each of the six actors shares a personal anecdote describing their experiences with drugs and the crimes they have committed. Although the students are timid and apprehensive to ask questions, they nod their heads in understanding of the stories. The group takes a moment to emphasize the dangers of alcohol, and how easy it is to become victim to these substances.

The role of *Don Quixote* came to Carlos naturally because, like the gentleman from La Mancha, Carlos has experienced a distortion of perception (while on drugs) and has battled to gain normalcy.

“I spent fifteen years hooked on speed, and I committed arson,” he says, “but I’m so lucky to have parents who are such a blessing. I’ve even stolen money from them — once 300,000 pesetas — and I’ve hit my dad, but they’ve forgiven me for everything and now I can’t wait to go home and help them because they’re old. I receive a pension of 280 euros — and that’s what I spend in speed in a month,” he jokes. “No, I’ve quit drugs and I will try to do an examination in order to get a simple job, like sweeping the streets, because I didn’t go to college.”

Ramón Rebanal, who plays the notary and the innkeeper, is not only the eldest but also the one who has experienced confinement for longer. “I’ve been in prison for 18 years and five of them in the psychiatric hospital,” he says. “As mental patients we couldn’t be in a normal prison. We’re quite lucky to have so many good people helping us, to be do-

ing so many therapeutic activities, and for those who receive support from their family, it is wonderful to receive visits and have occasional permits to go out with them. That makes everything so much more manageable. We’re helped to cure our illness and to have a chance to go back into society.”

Before Ramón played his two parts, Antonio Écija was the notary and the innkeeper, only during the first three performances. Back in the hospital he offers an account of his past, which seems to be in sharp contradiction with his gentle demeanor. “I came here because I robbed three gas stations, one after the other, and then I ran two policemen over in Málaga. The attorney wanted 19 years and

three months of confinement but they left it in three at the hospital. Now I’m okay. I haven’t had any drugs in two years.”

Unlike many patients, he’s lucky to have the support of his family. “I have a wife and a son and I’ll be out in three to five months. My goal is to take care of the housework because my wife works and I’m not fit to do a regular job. So I’ll have to sweep the floor, do the dishes, the laundry, iron the clothes, saw, take my kid to school and pick him up. Then, in the afternoons, I’ll go to the gym because I’m a little chubby now!”

Back in the auditorium, the young students of Gilena’s high school don’t ask questions during the discussion but the air feels

thick with a sense of understanding and seriousness. The students sit still and quiet, taking in the words of the men onstage. When the presentation comes to an end the room erupts with a final round of applause. The kids begin to exit as the six actors walk off stage to change into their normal clothes.

When the crowd has gone and the stage is clear, the six men head back to the mini-bus to start their journey back to the Psychiatric Hospital they call home. They have broken several stereotypes for a group of young students and have performed their own rendition of *Don Quixote*. All in a day’s work. ●●●



“I know who I am and who I could be, if I choose.”- Don Quixote of La Mancha, by Miguel de Cervantes.



STUDENT AUDIENCE AND ACTORS DURING THE REPRESENTATION OF ‘DON QUIJOTE’ BY ESTRELLAS EN SILENCIO IN GILENA, NOVEMBER 2012 / MEGAN ZIEGLER



Grace Martin

‘Casa del Pumarejo’, A Constant Presence in a City of Change

The ‘Casa del Pumarejo’, an 18th century neoclassical monument functioning as a residence for low income families, has been fighting for years to survive against the gentrification of the San Luis neighborhood. Without money to fund a restoration, residents, past and present, must wait, reflecting on its historical significance, the role it has held in the community, and the uncertain journey that lies ahead.

Three women sit crouched in the corner of an entry hall, escaping the weather on a rainy afternoon. One sits quietly and keeps to herself as the other two discuss what has brought them to the front door of *La Casa del Pumarejo*. The older of the two begins to talk as her younger counterpart paces the room.

“We live in the streets because we don’t have jobs, therefore we have no money to pay the rent for a flat. We are here looking for something to eat.”

A man joins the group from the streets. Carrying his bicycle, he continues on through and enters the patio as the women flood him with questions.

“Is this the kitchen where we can eat without pay?”

“What do you know of this building?”

“Are we allowed to enter?”

“This is a house, but I believe you can eat at the monastery around the corner,” he tells the women, as he points them in the direction of the food kitchen.

Beyond the gate separating the entry hall from the house, an elderly woman looks out from a line of second story windows encircling the patio. Her name is *doña* Felisa, but within *La Casa del Pumarejo* she has earned the nickname of *La Reina*, or “the Queen”. She stands strong, observing the stir that arises below. It is a new day, but the story stays the same. Years of continuous press over this ancient mansion-turned-home have created a cloud of confusion that looms over the building. Visitors are frequent, and the residents are wary of the outsiders and their motives.

The house resides in the Pumarejo Square, in Seville’s old town neighborhood of San Luis, an area well known for its community activism and its involvement as a stomping ground for much of the city’s history, says

David Gómez, an active member of the local committee.

“Aside from the churches and convents, the Casa Palacio del Pumarejo is the oldest standing building in the area. This square, which was added post-construction, is the nucleus of communication within the neighborhood,” David says.

When full, it housed 34 families. Now, only three families remain after, just this year, more were forced to leave by the City Council due to ‘safety reasons,’” he explains.

Despite rumors to the contrary, the house will not be destroyed because it belongs to the Municipality and is legally protected as a historical site. But the unanswered questions surrounding its future use (the present urban plan states that it cannot be privatized and must have a public function) leave its residents in a constant state of unrest.

After a night shopping trip, La Reina sits on the bench and lets out a sigh. This time, *doña* Felisa looks different. She is not standing with the same watchful stance as before in the window. There is exhaustion in her frame and suffering in her eyes.

“It’s just that it has been thirteen years now. Thirteen years of a new person, new reporter every other day, every other week, always asking the same, the same, the same. We came in 1974 and raised our family here. Here, our children were born, grew and married. Here, I still stand today.”

Like La Casa del Pumarejo, *doña* Felisa has been a constant presence, standing her ground as histories form around her.

Antonio Rubiales’ is the son of one of the three remaining tenants, and he often visits her to have lunch, pass the time, or drop off his bike whenever in the neighborhood.

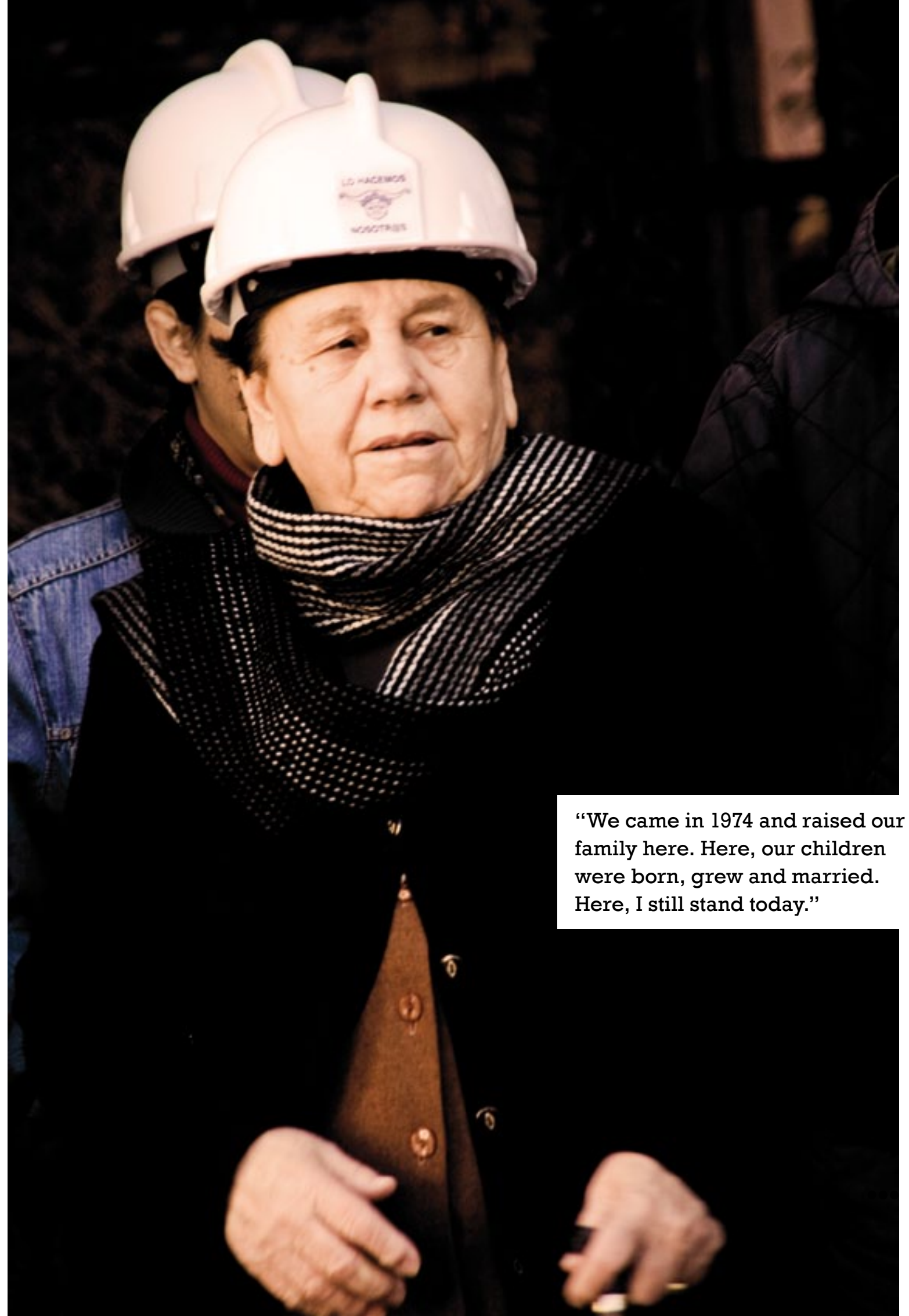
“It has been two years since I have lived in the house, but it was my home for 30 years starting at age eight, my whole life,” he says.

“Growing up in the Pumarejo was a different experience. It isn’t just any *plaza*. The 80’s were very hard times here, actually in the whole *barrio*. Going to school, people would ask me, ‘Where do you live?’ and I would tell them *Plaza del Pumarejo*. Their response was ‘Uy, that is a dangerous area. Where in Pumarejo?’ and I would tell them *La Casa del Pumarejo*. ‘Uy,’ they would respond again. It was notorious for drug problems, crime. But it wasn’t just like this for me, my family, my siblings; it was this way for whichever person who lived in the neighborhood at the time,” he says.

“We didn’t have drug problems, but people who did were all around us. Candy was sold to the junkies who then used the wrappers to smoke crack, so in turn we never ate candy. Some people would say it was a hard childhood, but I don’t remember a hard childhood, nor do I have a problem with drugs nor do any of my friends. It was an experience I wouldn’t change, because it made you mature at a younger age, but not in a bad way,” he says. “It was very fun. If you see the house now, it’s not the same as it used to be. It is so calm, quiet. It is another world, another world entirely. There were many kids around growing up, lots of us.”

Antonio begins to count aloud, looking up as he searches his brain to recall the whole group.

“We were six, more or less the same age,” he says. “We would kick around the ball, play baseball, ride bikes in the patio—it was a little crazy. There were many neighbors, and it was a completely different time back then. When someone would have a birthday, we all celebrated together. First communions were also always celebrated in the patio.”



“We came in 1974 and raised our family here. Here, our children were born, grew and married. Here, I still stand today.”

NEXT PAGE: DOÑA FELISA AT ‘CASA DEL PUMAREJO’ DURING THE PRESENTATION OF THE PLATFORM ‘LO HACEMOS NOSOTRAS’. SEVILLE, NOVEMBER 27TH 2012 / STEFANIA SCAMARDI

The joyful smile Antonio wore while remembering the stories of his childhood gradually slips away.

“Now, the house doesn’t have life. I mean, it does, but not in the same way. Now it has life thanks to the community center, *La Casa del Pumarejo* Association, and all of the other organizations here. It is getting better with the help of these people, but for many years it was really sad around here.”

“What has happened to the house is totally normal: people grow up, they marry,” Antonio continues. “But the problem remains that new families aren’t coming in to fill the spaces that the old families left. Now people look at the house as problematic, because it is expensive to maintain and needs renovations. Maintenance costs money, and no one is willing to pay.”

The City Council proposed a budget of 5.6 million euros for integral rehabilitation of the old palace in 2007, but no action has been taken. Now the local government says that the money is not available with the looming economic crisis. To this day, only partial, superficial fixes have been done to the home in order to prevent it from collapsing.

The municipality’s plan is to devote the top floor of house to people who live under precarious conditions, for example if their homes are in danger of falling in or if they have been evicted for failing to pay the rent. There will be 22 apartments if the plan ever comes to fruition, but first the City Council must make the repairs and renovations that the house so badly needs.

“I don’t know what the future holds, but it makes me scared”, says Antonio. “If they end up closing it, or if my mother has to leave, it would be hard. It would be more than just the normal trauma that one feels of growing up, of leaving their parents. Because it is a very special house, it’s aesthetically beautiful, it has life within, it has a rich past full of memories. But it’s also special for the collective efforts that have been put into the fight, everyone working together for the same end: to save an amazing house that I have had the great luck of living in for 30 years.” ●●●



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[1] DISCUSSION SESSIONS ABOUT ‘THE HISTORIC MEMORY OF THE PUMAREJO’ IN THE PATIO OF THE HOUSE, JUNE 19TH 2004 / DAVID GÓMEZ

[2] GRAFFITI DEMANDING RENOVATION WORKS FROM THE ROOF OF ‘CASA DEL PUMAREJO’, 2010 / STEFANIA SCAMARDI

[3] DETAIL OF THE PATIO OF ‘CASA DEL PUMAREJO’, 2012 / GRACE MARTIN

[4] FRIENDS OF ‘CASA DEL PUMAREJO’, INCLUDING FELISA (SEATED IN THE CENTER), GATHERED AT THE HISTORIC *BAR MARIANO*, 2011 / ANNA ELIAS {annaelias.com}

“The Association ‘Casa Pumarejo’ has the solution: the project ‘Lo Hacemos Nosotras’ (‘We Do It Ourselves’). A campaign based on the support of the community through crowd-funding in order to finance the full renovation of the ‘Casa Grande.’”

