

## **Interview: Fabio Chee (with Camila Piedrahita)**

**December 2014**

### **Where were you born?**

Mexicali, Baja California \*Mexico – My last name is Chinese because I was adopted by my stepfather when I was 5. Even though my mother divorced him, I kept the name since no one ever bothered to change it.

### **Do you speak Spanish?**

Yes (Ph.D. in Spanish)- I immigrated to the United States when I was 8 years old, but only stayed 6 months and returned to Mexicali.

### **How were your childhood years?**

This is a difficult question to answer: Perhaps, alright? I did live away from my mother for a long time. I lived with my grandparents while my mother was away at school (nursing school) and later when she went to the U.S. before me and my brother (two years). Also, I never knew my father, and my many stepfathers were ephemeral parents.

### **Did you attend public school? How did you do in school? Any difficulties?**

I went to public all throughout my schooling (including B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees). The only difficult times were during my first years in High School when I was learning English and taking G.A.T.E. English classes at the same time. I finished grade school in Mexicali (in a tiny ejido called "Ejido Morelia #2"). I went to high school in El Centro, CA in the Imperial County desert, one of the poorest areas of California (and a border area with Mexico). During my first year in college it was also difficult before I realized that computer engineering was not a major for me. I initially went to college to study computer engineering at the University of California, Irvine, but changed my major to Spanish after my first year. I graduated from UCI in 2000. I then attended the University of Texas, Austin from where I received a M.A. in Hispanic Literatures in 2003. I took a year off in 2004 to teach at Imperial Valley College in Imperial County. In December 2011, I received my PhD. from the University of California, Irvine (I returned). My PhD. degree is in Spanish.

### **How much education did your parents receive?**

My mother was a nurse in Mexico (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social) but she never learned English well and she was never accepted as a nurse in the U.S. Grandparents didn't go to school, although my grandfather did learn to read and write, my grandmother is illiterate.

### **What did your parents work in/as, as you grew up?**

After immigrating to the U.S. my mother left her position as a nurse to get many types of jobs, including selling tamales, working at fast food restaurants, and state sponsored home care.

**Do you know your biological father?**

No.

**Are you married or have any children?**

Neither.

**What are your hobbies?**

I like to play chess and soccer. I also like camping and going to rock shows--I love live music.

**Why did you/your family come to the United States?**

To get a “better” life... that is still in debate.

**What do you like writing about?**

I don't think there is anything in specific that I like to write about; however, most of my writing is set in the desert or in California/Baja California.

**What inspires you to write?**

Many things, but mostly sadness.

**What is your writing process? (Do you think about what you will write, then write it and go back and add? Or do you write what you feel and leave it the way it is?)**

This depends on the text. The short stories published in *Label Me Latina/o* were written a long time ago and somewhat polished since... Other texts (poetry mostly) tends to be written in the moment, but it doesn't mean it is a finished product.

**What message do you want to portray through your writing?**

It depends on the text, really. Sometimes I just want to tell a story, regardless of any message or moral lesson. Really, what I like for people to do with my stories is think and reflect upon them as they may or may not relate to their lives.

**How many pieces have you done? Published or in the process of publishing?**

I have published some alone pieces (short stories and poetry), including many texts under pseudonym but I would like to keep those pieces under pseudonym for the moment. Currently, I am in the process of publishing a poetry collection in Mexico and I am preparing a critical text to be published later in the year (an essay on Latino Science Fiction).

**Has your culture affected your journey as a writer?**

Culture affects everything.

**Did you ever have a mentor or guide throughout life or writing career?**

I could say so, I had many teachers who were also writers and poets, as well as friends with whom I went to college that had interest in literature.

**Who is/are your favorite authors?**

Cervantes is by far the best of the best, however, I also like: Miguel de Unamuno, Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, Cristina Rivera Garza, Salvador Plascencia, Oscar Zeta Acosta, and Guillermo Fadanelli.

**Which culture do you identify yourself more with?**

I guess I identify the most with Mexico; I feel like sometimes I disagree with some Chicanos and Latinos due to the reason of having lived in Mexico, but I do identify as Chicano as well.

**What triggered you to start writing?**

Sadness. The need to tell a story through other characters, reading other works that impacted me (see #18).

**Was there a life-changing event in your life that we can see reflected in your writing?**

I guess what can be most prevalent in my writing from my life is my experience of the desert, which is often the setting of my stories.