

Interview: Erica Garza (with Fabbiana Gutiérrez)

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Where do you consider yourself to be from?

I consider myself to be Mexican-American, though I was born in Los Angeles, CA and do not speak Spanish. Heritage is important to me and I've always felt that if I simply answered the questions as "American" I would be leaving out too much of my history.

What was your childhood like?

Both of my parents did not grow up with much money, but they were hard workers and provided me a very different childhood from their own. I grew up with privilege. I went to private schools all my life, took many vacations growing up and had very little to worry about when it came to finances. I was very lucky.

Where are your parents originally from?

My father is from Mexico City, but he immigrated to the US when he was five years old. My mother was born in the US, but she is of Mexican descent.

Do you have any siblings?

I have an older brother who is three years older than me and a younger sister who is 10 years younger than me.

Why did your family come here if they migrated?

All of my aunts, uncles and cousins have different ideas about why my family came to the US. I don't think I'll ever know the truth, but my guess is they were escaping from some bad relatives.

Can you describe a funny moment in your life, a changing experience?

When I was thirteen I was on the phone with a boy and we were having phone sex. I didn't know much about sex then so I was mostly listening. My mother picked up the phone and I'm not sure how much she heard before she screamed at me to come downstairs for dinner. I can't say that I had much of an appetite that evening.

What language do you think, dream and prefer writing in?

English.

Have you always had an interest in writing?

Absolutely. I'm fortunate that I discovered the thing I most love to do at a young age. I started keeping journals and writing stories when I was just seven years old. I read anything I could get my hands on and this nurtured my writing well.

Did your family have an influence on your decision to go to college?

My parents left that decision up to me. They never pushed me in any direction and always told me to trust my intuition. Going to college seemed the right thing to do for me. I loved academia and still do.

What college did you decide to go to and why?

I have my B.A. in English from UCLA and my MFA in Writing from Columbia University. I was a transfer student to UCLA and only spent a short time there. I did the majority of my undergraduate work at a community college, Pasadena City College, which I actually credit for the bulk of my education. I chose PCC because of its study abroad program to Italy. I chose UCLA because I followed a boy. I chose Columbia University because of its extraordinary alumni and obviously its location in New York City.

Did you go to college with a major in mind?

Yes, I always wanted to be a writer so I studied English to learn from the greats and Writing to try to become one.

Why did you decide to become an author?

I purposely did not choose a back-up plan because writing is all I ever wanted to do so I needed to make it work no matter what. I decided to become an author because I had no other choice.

Is it difficult to be Latina and be an author?

No, I don't think being Latina prevents me from any opportunities afforded to other writers.

Is there a stereotype you had to face as a writer?

The only stereotype I found was in the comments section of my *Salon* article about porn and sex addiction, "Tales of a female sex addict." Some commenters thought that my sexual behaviors were caused by rape or abuse at a young age because I was writing about a topic many women do not write about. If I were a man talking about porn and sex, I doubt that anyone would have asked these questions. It is a stereotype to think women are not sexual beings and do not have the same kind of desires. I hope to do more work to bring this stereotype down.

What inspires your writing?

There is so much that inspires me. Love inspires me. Travel inspires me. Art inspires me. People inspire me. I love to take long walks or long drives or sit in silence for a while, wading through my thoughts until I find the right ones to write down.

What messages do you like to portray to your readers?

In my writing, I am completely vulnerable, authentic and open. I talk about the things that scare me, that make me feel ashamed, my secrets. I want to be a voice for women who feel that they might be alone in their afflictions, to encourage them to come forth and be brave. To tell their truth. And I want to help reshape misconceptions about women, their bodies and sexuality.

Do you consider yourself to be a bold writer?

I think to be a good writer, you must be a bold writer, a writer who takes risks. I try to push myself more and more each time I sit down to write.

What is your writing process?

I don't really have a process. I write whenever the words come to me. Sometimes it's in the morning after a cup of tea. Sometimes it's late at night when the house is asleep. Sometimes I'm out running errands and the words come to me, so I keep an app on my phone where I can record these thoughts.

Is it difficult to get published?

Yes, I have found it to be one of the most difficult things about being a writer. You have to grow thick skin pretty fast to deal with all the rejection. They always say to not take it "personally" but when you write non-fiction like I do, it's tough to take it any other way.

Do you believe that your background (Latina and Catholic) has affected your style of writing?

My first impulse was to say "No, I don't think so," but when I consider that my style of writing is a reflection of my education, my experiences and my upbringing, then YES, I do think that being Latina and Catholic must have influenced my writing style simply because it is part of my past. But for the record, I no longer consider myself Catholic.

If you had to decide on a culture (European, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latino, etc.) which one would you identify yourself with and why?

I consider myself Mexican-American, although sometimes I use the terms Chicana or Latina.