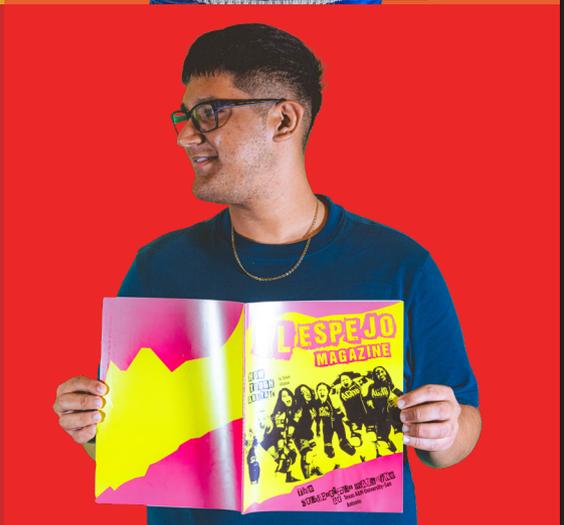


ELESPEJO

M A G A Z I N E

FALL 2023
ELESPEJOMAG.ORG



CELEBRATING **10** ISSUES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Viva Miss Fiesta



8

A&M-San Antonio's North Star



12

Cajun Coffee Shack



18

Top 5 Tacos



22

Must-Reads



26

Music That Follows



28

Para todo los Jags



32

Flip Side



38

Zeros & Heroes



42

Against the Odds



46

Daniel Cortez



52

Reclaiming Her Identity



56

A Heroic Journey



60



Photo(s) Credit: Riana Tovar

COVER

The cover of the issue were shot to illustrate a story written by Elizabeth Lopez.

CONTRIBUTORS

- OMAR ACOSTA - ILLUSTRATOR
- AMANDA AGUILLON - PHOTOGRAPHER
- MADISON GUTIERREZ - DESIGNER
- DAKOTA MARKGRAF - WRITER
- DANIELA RODRIGUEZ - WRITER

The views expressed in El Espejo magazine do not necessarily represent the views of Texas A&M-San Antonio nor its employees.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

Elizabeth Lopez and Melanie Reyes

ELESPEJO

M A G A Z I N E

FALL 2023/ ELESPEJOMAG.ORG

CO-EDITOR/COPY

ELIZABETH LOPEZ

CO-EDITOR/VISUALS

MELANIE REYES

SOCIAL MEDIA

ALEX PLATA

DESIGN/WRITER

RIANA TOVAR

WRITER

MARLEY WALKER

WRITER

SAMUEL ROCHA

WRITER

AU'JANAI "JAI" PHILLIPS

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MEDIA

JENNY MOORE

ADVISER

DONNA PAZDERA

DESIGN CONSULTANT

RICHARD FISHER





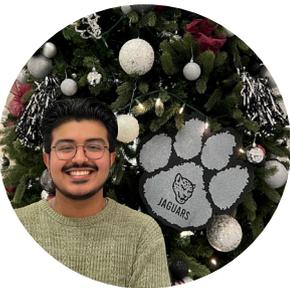
ELIZABETH LOPEZ



MELANIE REYES



ALEX PLATA



SAMUEL ROCHA



RIANA TOVAR



AU'JANAI "JAI" PHILLIPS



MARLEY WALKER



OMAR ACOSTA



AMANDA AGUILLON



MADISON GUTIERREZ



DAKOTA MARKGRAF



DANIELA RODRIGUEZ

FROM THE EDITORS

HOLA TODOS!

Thanks to all of our readers, El Espejo Magazine has officially published the 10th issue, and it would not have been possible without you, our audience and loyal supporters.

New beginnings can be scary, and this semester we had new staff coming on board and some leaving, but we eagerly anticipated where this issue would lead us.

We continued to cover stories that mean something to our communities and beautiful student body. Because of you and everyone who inhabits San Antonio, we have been able to carry on this legacy that brings pride, integrity and respect to our city.

This issue is special. It represents time. It represents a journey. We reflect on hurt, disappointment and challenges, while also reflecting on perseverance, hope and love.

Being that our city is radiant and filled with diversity and prosperity, our designers conceptualized the vision they had for the 10th issue of the magazine by imagining something new and vibrant, while nurturing the past and its nostalgic feeling.

We want to thank our designers, writers, advisors and we want to remember our former staff members who have made it possible for us to continue our publications. This magazine will break the creative boundaries and challenges to think outside the box.

We hope you enjoy our creation. It was a labor of love, especially for you. Salud! Cheers!

Thank you,
Melanie & Elizabeth

Photo Credit: Amanda Aguillon

Public Figures

12

Photo Credit: Samuel Rocha





Photo courtesy of: Calista Burns

8



VIVA MISS FIESTA

Photo courtesy of: Robert Shaw

Calista Burns' Official Miss Fiesta 2020 Photo at the tower at University of Incarnate Word.



BY RIANA TOVAR

Calista Burns is the longest-reigning Miss Fiesta San Antonio.

Burns earned the role of Miss Fiesta at age 19 and didn't step down until age 22. For three full years, she maintained the image of providing service to the community through the pandemic.

"It's about being involved in your community, and I believe not many people know that," Burns said.

Fiesta is built on community and providing service to those who helped create the foundation of our city. The season itself is filled with ambassadors who reflect this idea, one of which is titled Miss Fiesta. A title created in 1949 was originally a beauty pageant for young ladies of San Antonio. However, that tradition has now evolved into a three-month-long orientation, interview and selection process to become a representative of service all year long.

Burns said that growing up, it was just her and her mother that got through life together. She learned to stay motivated and was always encouraged to reach her dreams.

"My mom always explains to people that when I was little, I would always say 'I want to be on the float and wear the shiny hat!' Although I don't remember that, the idea is something that motivated me through this experience," Burns said.

Burns was crowned the 2020 Miss Fiesta after going through two attempts of the thorough application and interview process. As part of this process at the time, applicants were required to create a large-scale community service project of their choice focused on either arts, history, safety, health, or education. Burns chose to focus her efforts on STEM education as she had already been working with the "Girls in Engineering Math and Science" program, also known as GEMS.

However, shortly into Burns' reign as Miss Fiesta, the world began to shut down due to the pandemic. Even with the cancellation of the annual celebration, there was hope and effort to keep the spirit of the city alive.

Steve Rosenauer, the executive director of the Fiesta Commission explained that even with the hard times Burns had great patience and understanding with the uncertainty that surrounded their annual festival.

"It was important to get the Fiesta spirit out there during COVID," Burns said. She made sure to stay active on social media, create her own fiesta decorations, attend virtual interviews and participate in virtual fiesta events.



Photo courtesy of: Calista Burns

Burns delivering STEAM Kits to local student during pandemic.

“I REMEMBER SITTING IN ZOOM INTERVIEWS WITH KSAT NEWS AT 6:30 A.M. ALL DRESSED UP IN FIESTA CLOTHES AND MY CROWN ON MY COUCH.” – BURNS

For two out of the three years, Burns had to devote her time virtually and socially distanced from her community. But this obstacle only made her and the Fiesta Commission more creative. In July 2020, Burns partnered with H-E-B and Valero to create at-home science projects known as STEAM kits to give to local elementary children.

"We put all 50 of the kits together in my living room. Each one contained three experiments and I delivered all of them to each student's house during COVID," Burns said.

Photo Credit: Riana Tovar

The STEAM kits became a success. Allowing Burns to participate in this program three more times by the summer of 2021, increasing to over 200 kits and creating a virtual camp to do the experiments together over Zoom.

Burns shared that being able to conduct the experiments with the children, even if it was virtual, was special to her and reassured her that what she was doing as Miss Fiesta was enough.

However, in 2022, Fiesta came back in full swing and even stronger than ever as every Fiesta ambassador, committee and volunteers prepared for the 11 days of events. After having no Fiesta in 2020 and a socially distanced Fiesta in 2021, the Fiesta Commission decided to let Burns continue her reign as Miss Fiesta.

“Calista deserved to experience a full Fiesta after all she had done for us. So, it was important to us and the Miss Fiesta committee that she attend as many events as possible,” Rosenauer said.

Burns experienced seven to 12 events a day, participated in five parades and attended over 50 events during the week and a half of Fiesta.

“You get up at 5 a.m., don’t go to bed till midnight and get up the next day to do it all over again,” Burns said. “But the feeling you get when thousands of people look at you on a float is unimaginable. It’s all so crazy, but it is so much fun.”

Rosenuaer also shared that it was during Burns’ reign that they saw that Miss Fiesta is more than a community service project.

“She represents all of Fiesta and is considered the queen of all the events. That’s why it’s important for her to attend and show a physical representation of our gratitude and proof to the little girls that they can become Miss Fiesta too,” Rosenuaer said.

Burns said that after her three years of reign as Miss Fiesta, she could not keep the large, heavy crown. But she could keep other memorabilia including her custom Miss Fiesta Boots, decorative earrings, dresses and over 400 Fiesta medals.

“I started by filling a glass vase to display my medals, but I now have boxes and boxes full of them,” Burns said.



Burns entered Miss Fiesta as a freshman in college and finished her reign during her last semester while student-teaching the second grade.

“I remember I got to visit my students all dressed up as Miss Fiesta and they were amazed. Seeing their faces was truly a special moment,” Burns said.

At the end of 2022, Burns guided new Miss Fiesta applicants through the interview process.

“I bawled my eyes out as I had dedicated three years to this committee, but I was excited to meet all the contestants,” Burns said.

Burns stepped down from her title and crowned the 2023 Miss Fiesta Jazzlyn Ramirez.

The current Miss Fiesta is now in the process of passing on her crown as well. The final selection of the 2024 Miss Fiesta will take place at the Annual Fiesta Poster Unveiling on Jan. 31, 2024.





Photo Credit: Riana Tovar

Although Fiesta medals are fun and full of color today, they originated as a way to honor the fallen soldiers who fought in the Texas Revolution.

Fiesta 2018!!

A&M SAN ANTONIO'S NORTH STAR:

1 oz SILVER
999
SPOT PLUS
SPOT PLUS

~~4.50~~
3.15

After the departure of the previous president Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson, and interim president Dr. Linda Schott, Texas A&M University-San Antonio was in need of a president who could lead this campus in the right direction and found someone qualified for the role. Dr. Salvador Hector Ochoa, bestselling author and numismatist, has the credentials to back up his position as President of A&M University-San Antonio. Ochoa earned his bachelor's from St. Edward's University in 1981 studying psychology. He later earned a Master's of Education in Guidance and Counseling from The University Of Texas-Pan American in 1984, and a doctorate in school psychology from Texas A&M University in 1989. He has previously served as the Dean of College Education at Texas Pan-American and at the University of New Mexico. Ochoa's most recent position was as Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at San Diego State University. He held that title for three years before deciding to return home to Texas. Ochoa's extensive resume continues with his book, "Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: A Practical Guide," becoming a best seller according to The Guilford Press, the book's publisher.

A CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT

BY SAMUEL ROCHA

Q: What was the goal of your book and how has it positively impacted teachers and professors?

A: I'm really proud of that book. It has helped people in schools to know how to appropriately assess children whose primary language isn't English and to understand their true abilities and strengths. Although I miss doing research for topics like this book, being in this position made me realize running an institution is kind of like doing your own research for the better of the campus.

Q: What is your vision for the future of TAMUSA?

A: The Northstar for me is to get as many students to graduate. The amount of faculty here that believes that students come first is very positive. This is a young institution and the opportunity to build a campus upward is a big reason why I chose A&M-San Antonio. In addition to adding more widespread undergraduate programs and master's programs; I would like to see more doctoral programs in this institution as well. I'd like these programs to meet the workforce needs of San Antonio.

Q: What made you choose A&M-San Antonio?

A: By seeing myself in my students I don't see this role as a job. It's more of a mission to make a difference. What this institution aspires to become is a big reason why I chose A&M-San Antonio.



Photo Credit:
Samuel Rocha

During his entire 34 years in higher education, Ochoa has raised over \$3.7 million in grants and has participated in over 30 publications. Ochoa is a strong advocate for student and faculty research as well as publishing his own research journals such as the Journal of School Psychology, The Journal of Special Education and more.

Q: How are you involved with scholarships such as the Jaguar Promise?

A: The Jaguar promise to me is very important. We need to honor all the ways that students come here. While it was great to do the Promise program through incoming freshmen, I think we needed to look at a program for people coming from early college high schools and transfer students. I am very proud that we are able to expand that scholarship program. We're trying to provide an opportunity and break down those financial barriers for students to come and be successful in their education here at A&M San Antonio.

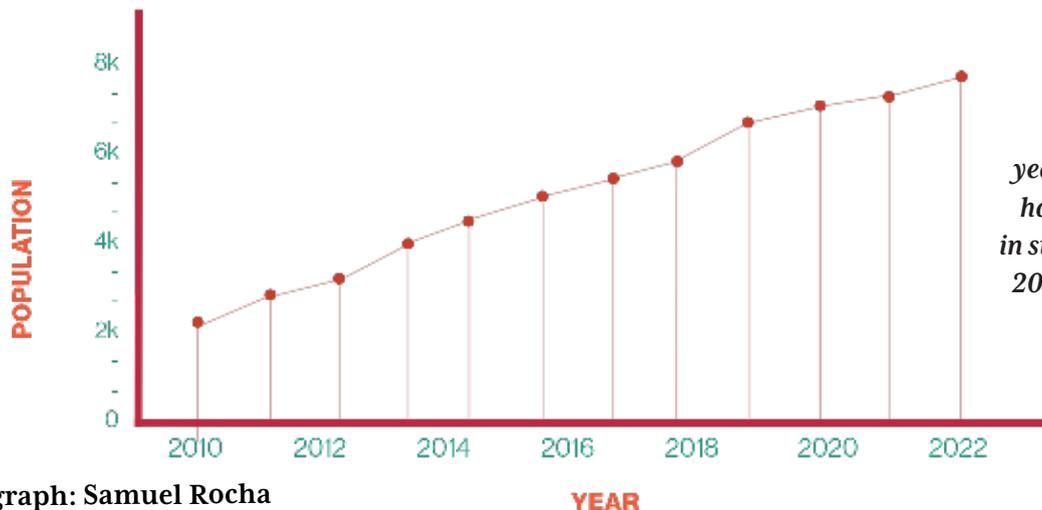


Q: Tell me about your daily routine as president

A: I'm an early bird. I like to be here by 7 o'clock and I usually leave around 6:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. Every morning I ask myself, 'What can we do to serve our students better?' and 'Which is the best way to move this institution forward?' Being president is all about making important critical decisions and I want to make sure I make those decisions right. Sometimes I have to make very tough decisions regarding students. I ask myself every time, 'Would I make those same decisions if my kids were my students?' If I cannot make that decision then I shouldn't make that decision for someone else's kids.

Q: What was it like growing up in McAllen for you?

A: I was born in Mercedes, Texas and I was raised in McAllen. I come from a family of eight kids and I love being from a large family. I'm right in the middle between the eight kids and we're very tight and very close. I'm very appreciative of being raised in a large Catholic family. Although all of us are very different, it's how we work as a unit that makes us all stronger and closer with one another. For me growing up in Rio Grande Valley I saw a lot of my classmates had a lot of opportunities but had no means to develop them. Back then I felt they were just as capable as me, but it was difficult for them. My grandparents raised me and instilled in me about a college education. People could take anything from you but they cannot take your education. My dad used to tell me that when you get an education, it's not only for you but also for you to share with your community.



Over the course of 15 years, this young campus has seen a 215% increase in student admission since 2009 and is home to over 7,000 students.

Photo Credit and graph: Samuel Rocha





Q: Tell me about your coin collecting. When did you start?

A: I started coin collecting a long time ago. Finding ways to reduce stress can be tough sometimes, but coin collecting for me helped out a lot. I got into coin collecting because when I would go to coin shops with individuals who were much older than me, I loved listening to their stories. I collect quarters, I almost have every Washington quarter. I also collect pennies. I'm missing three or four, but they're really expensive ones and very hard to find. I really enjoy that feeling when you finally find something you've been looking for and the satisfaction of almost filling up that coin collection. It's a hobby that I wish more people would take up. I've purchased coins that are valued at over \$200 for one coin. The ones I'm missing are upward of \$300 and even over \$1,000. Having the opportunity to hopefully complete the whole set is exciting.

Q: Tell me about your favorite restaurant near campus.

A: One of my favorites near campus is Guerrero's Mexican Restaurant. I love Mexican food.



Photo Credit: Samuel Rocha

Food

THE
CAJUN
Coffee  Shack

ESPRESSO • COLD DRINKS & SNACKS
VARIETY OF FLAVORS AND SUGAR FREE FLAVORS

 The Cajun Coffee Shack

18

Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes



THREE TACOS TEA

22

Photo Credit: Riana Tovar

CAJUN COFFEE SHACK SHAKES UP SA'S CAFFEINE OPTIONS

BY MELANIE REYES

The rich smell of coffee and the delightful snack options are the first things you notice at The Cajun Coffee Shack. It's a family business started by Michael Barrios in 2019. Your head will turn toward the design of the shack, a Louisiana Cajun theme since Barrios and his wife Bethany, are from Louisiana. When they moved to San Antonio, they saw there were no coffee stands here except for big corporation coffee shops like Starbucks.

Katey Barrios, their daughter, explained that they lived in Seattle, Washington before moving to San Antonio. Her dad is a coffee lover and after living in an area that had a coffee stand on every corner, the love for it had to go toward something. He wanted to bring that sweet, dark aroma to other coffee lovers here in San Antonio and decided to create this family business. He originally wanted to start one in Seattle, but they wouldn't be able to make very much due to the amount of stands on each block. Once they moved to San Antonio, the business started to rise and become known to those in the area. Katey explained that they do face some obstacles when it comes to popularity since people stick to what they know best: bigger corporations.

The family business has over 125 items when it comes to food and drinks. Customers can create their own drinks and add-ons, flavors and milk alternatives. Katey recommends trying the King Cake Latte and a cake pop for those who don't like sweet things. Another popular item is the pizza bagel that people usually eat for breakfast or lunch. Wrapped in a little plastic bag, it has pepperoni,

Katey Barrios creating the Harvest Moon coffee and a Teddy Bear kids' drink.



Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes

and marinara sauce inside the bun. Their pumpkin spice vegan donuts and Harvest Moon drink are popular during the fall season.

“Cake pops and donut holes are a go-to. Vegan donuts, [and] the Canadian bacon croissant sandwich is really popular. But we just have to keep up stock with those so we don't run out,” Katey Barrios said.

On average, they see about 350 customers on a good day, but their sales are 50% of what they were last year. During COVID-19, they were doing well since people wanted to get out of their houses to get a drink. Katey explained that Inflation and competition have been their biggest bumps in the road. Scooters, DutchBros and Dunkin' Donuts are

down the road from their location but they're trying to get their notice by supporting other small businesses and giving back to the community. They collaborate with schools around the area by giving free to-go containers.

"Recently we did John Jay [high school], and they put [an] ad on the little magazine for the football season," Katey said.

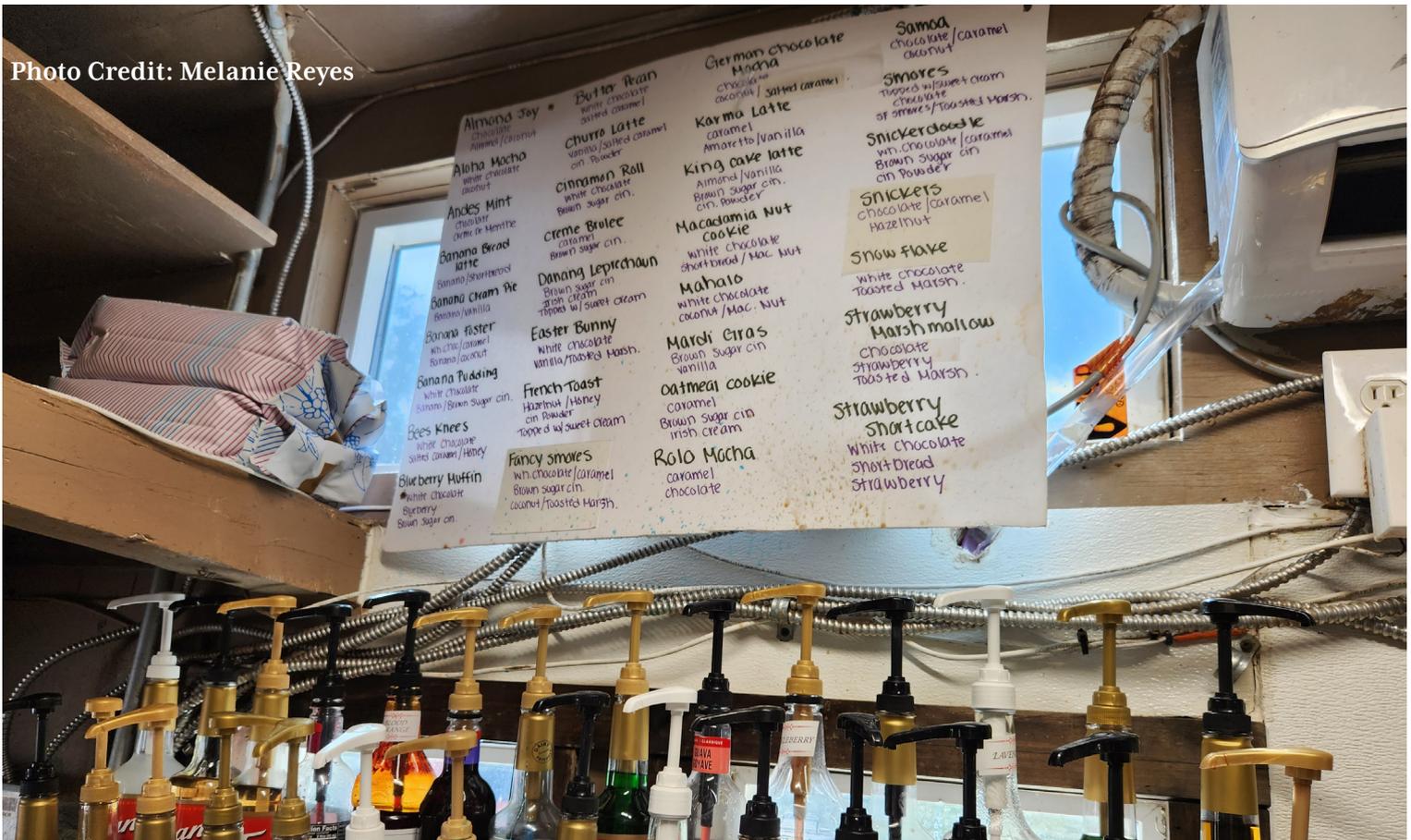
Katey will message big blogs and influencers to come by and help promote the business.

They do discounts for first responders and offer a military discount. If there are national days like "national police day" or "Teacher Appreciation Week," they'll promote that and have a discount for the specific day(s).

They also have a rewards program where every Monday you get double points, and if you get 10 points, you get \$3 off.

The majority of customers live near Stevens High School but some who don't live in the area will come by and get something to drink. They have one customer from Boerne, Texas, who will drive three days a week for their drinks. Others will drive far for the variety of drinks and snack options that aren't provided anywhere else. High school kids will park their cars and sit on the benches that are provided.

"The Red Bull Italian sodas are popular for high school kids," Katey said.



The different drink combinations can range from Almond Joy to King Cake Latte to Strawberry Shortcake.



The outside view of the mural and drive through window on the truck.

Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes

Their goals are to stay as a drive-thru due to prices rising if they decide to do an indoor seated place, have a larger building and have their name become known.

“I think just to make our name bigger, more well known that way we can carry on and do all like [the] stuff we do to give back like the food drives, the toys for Christmas, all that type of stuff,” Katey said.

Some ways they contribute to the community are donating to schools, hospitals, homeowners’ associations, doing trunk or treats, Boy Scouts and whatever they can find to spread the word and give back.

They currently have nine employees with the majority being college students.

Jenna Cordaway has worked at the shack for two years and noticed how many people come by for the fall season. Cordaway recommends trying the seasonal drink Harvest Moon which has white chocolate, brown sugar cinnamon, toasted marshmallow and pumpkin pie.

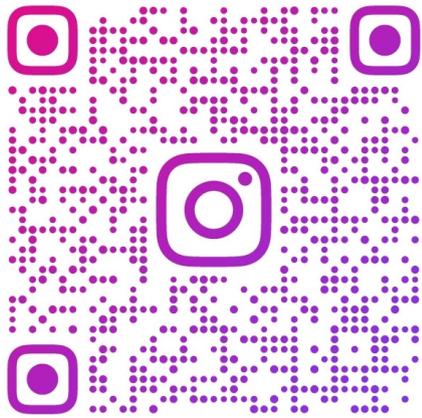
All in all, she enjoys having one-on-one conversations with customers and learning more about them. Cordaway likes the environment and good times she has at the shack.

“The owners treat us like family,” Cordaway said.

The Cajun Coffee Shack is located at 11618 Potranco Rd, San Antonio. It is open year-round, weekdays 5:30 am - 5 pm, and from 7:30 am - 6 pm on weekends.



NEED A BREAK FROM READING? FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



@ELESPEJOMAG

OUR INSTAGRAM



Photo Credit: Omar Acosta

You just got stick bugged.

BY MADISON GUTIERREZ

FIRST PLACE

7/11



“Beans beans they warm your heart, the more you eat the more you...you know how it goes.”

- *bean and cheese enthusiast*

“If you like bean and cheese, you nastys.”

- *bean and cheese hater*

mid



SORRY

“Establishes I am a woman of substance, who enjoys a food of substance.”

- *potato and egg enjoyer*

“The blandest people, basic.”

- *potato and egg hater*

UR WEIRD



but it's cool

“People who like this like living life with excitement.” - *chorizo and egg enjoyer*

“If you like chorizo and egg, you must wanna be different so bad.”

- *chorizo and egg hater*

SECOND PLACE

THE



UNDERDOG

“Screams ‘I know, love and appreciate flavor!!’”

- carne guisada lover

“Boujee.”



- No one hates carne guisada

THIRD PLACE

A Good



Sunday Morning

“Sundays are incomplete without barbacoa.”

- barbacoa lover

“If you like barbacoa, you are greasy.”

- barbacoa hater

THE TACO TEA

Photo(s) Credit: Riana Tovar

*If You
Know,
You
Know*



26

THE WICKED

LITTLE BROTHERS

MISSIONS
ER SUSPECT

E

SIMON & SCHUSTER

COLLEEN HOOVER

Christina McDonald

EAR

C. CAST + KRISTIN CAST

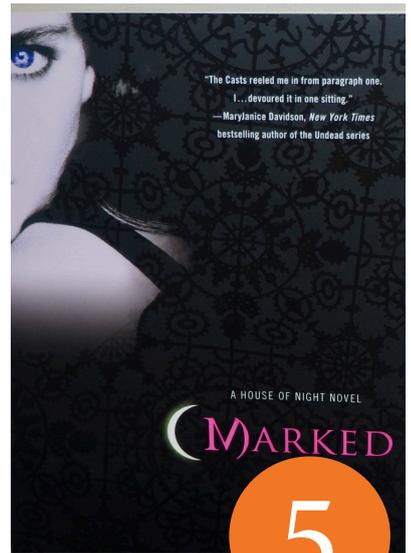
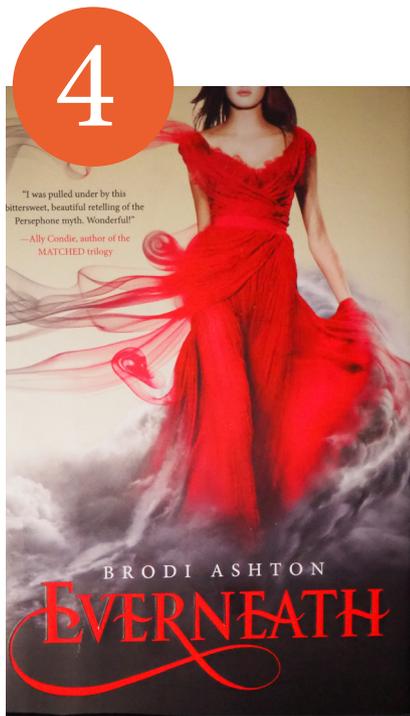
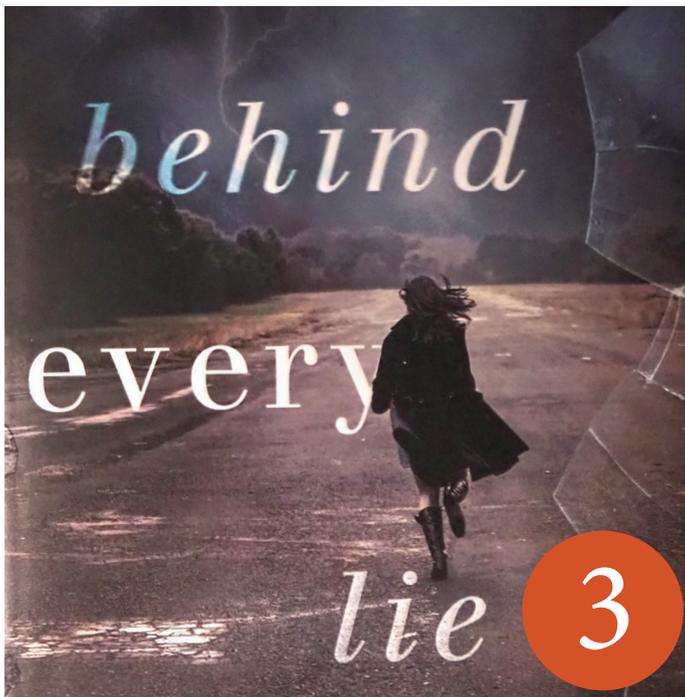
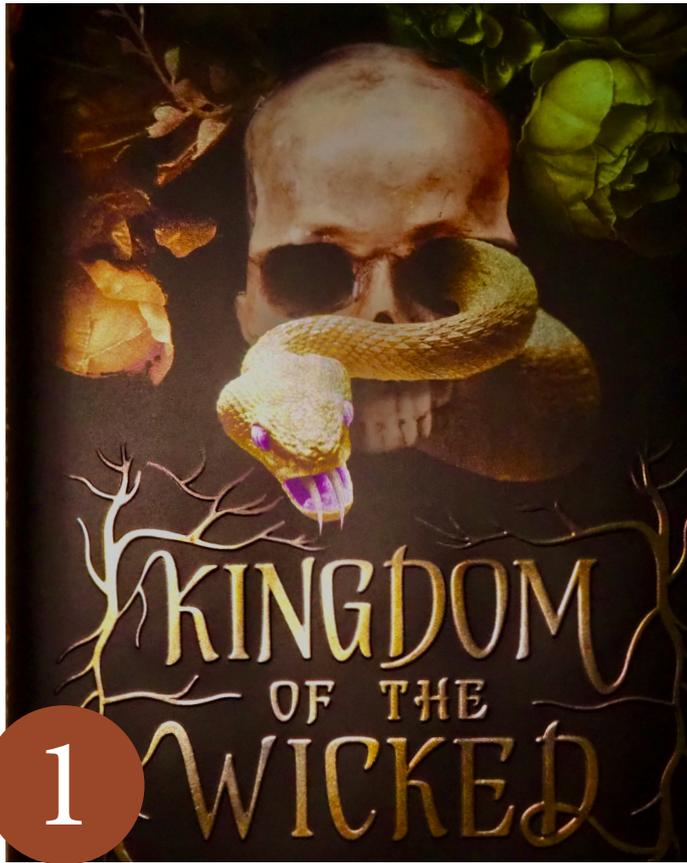
AN COBEN



MUSIC THAT FOLLOWS US

28

TOP 5 MUST-READS



1. Kingdom of the Wicked by Kerri Maniscalco *"One day you'll call me Death. For now, Wrath will do." - Kerri Maniscalco*

I recommended this series because this was the first book I read that has a dark side. Rather than the normal "let's root for the good guy" kind of book, the lines of good and evil are mixed in this series as Emilia tries to avenge the death of her sister. I think this book is perfect for someone looking to read something a little dark for the first time but not too dark.



2. The Fear by Natasha Preston

"If a killer knows you like to run every morning from five to six o'clock, when do you think you're most at risk?" - Natasha Preston

I recommended this book because while I was reading the synopsis of the book I thought this book dealt with the supernatural but then to learn that it was someone making a person's worst fear of dying come to life, I knew I had to read this book to see what would happen. Little did I know the ending of the book would shock me to my core.



3. Behind Every Lie by Christina McDonald

"We aren't defined by our tragedies, by our history, by our mistakes, but by pieces of love and sadness and happiness, and the whole range of human emotions we feel." - Christina McDonald

I recommended this book because out of all the mysteries I have read, this one stayed with me. All the events that happened in this book had me thinking about it way after I finished reading. I couldn't, and I still can't get over the audacity these people had in the book to do what they did.



4. Everneath by Brodi Ashton

"Remembering is easy. It's forgetting that's hard." - Brodi Ashton

I recommended this series because it was just the title of the book that interested me as I had never heard the word everneath before. Once I picked it up and read what it

was about, I knew I had to read it. I wanted to see what choice Nikki would make, whether she would stay above ground or go back to Everneath and start a new life.



5. Marked by P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast

"You are old beyond your years Zoeybird. Believe in yourself and you will find a way. But remember darkness does not always equate to evil just like light does not always bring good." -

P.C. Cast

I recommended this series because this was the first book I read when I started getting into reading. It was a lot more different than the other books I had been reading at the time, and it was the book that made me want to keep reading and made me into the book lover that I am today.



BOOKS TO CONSIDER:

- "Black Ice," by Becca Fitzpatrick
- "Die for Me," by Amy Plum
- "Confessions of a Murder Suspect," by James Patterson
- "Home," by Harlan Coben
- "Ugly Love," by Colleen Hoover
- "Antigoddess," by Kendare Blake
- "Unearthly," by Cynthia Hand
- "Shine," by Lauren Myracle
- "The Gathering," by Kelley Armstrong
- "Matched," by Ally Condie

BY DAKOTA MARKGROF

PLAIN WHITE-T'S

All That We Needed

One of my first memories is sitting in the back of my dad's truck watching my mom channel surf the radio. The song "Hey There Delilah" by The Plain White-T's comes in through the speakers and she goes to the next channel. I'm begging her to go back to that song and she does. We listened to it and it became my first "favorite song."



MUSIC THAT F

FLATLAND CAVALRY

Humble Folks

When I first met my partner, I did not really listen to country music, though growing up it was all I listened to. Country music was what took up roughly 95% of his music and he kept telling me that I would learn to love country music again, and boy was he right. About two weeks into our relationship, his sister was coming into town to celebrate her birthday and invited us to a small concert of a country band called Flatland Cavalry that she really enjoyed.



TWENTY ONE PILOTS

Twenty One Pilots

When I was in high school, I felt that I had a harder time fitting in than most. I struggled a lot with my mental health, and while that is something I am more in tune with now and ensure I am constantly taking care of, I found music to be an escape of sorts. I found a band called Twenty One Pilots and associated the song, "Addict With a Pen," to be the most crucial in how I was feeling.



OLLOWS US



TAYLOR SWIFT

Folklore

As I have gotten older, I have come to love certain hobbies, one of those being reading. I am fairly competitive in my reading goals each year, and this year have been able to read over one hundred books. The idea of putting myself into a fictional world for a couple of hours has come to be therapeutic in a way. The song "The Lakes" by Taylor Swift allows me to imagine what my life would be like if I could move away from life and responsibilities and live my life peacefully without worry, as I find

myself traveling when I read. She admits throughout the song that she feels as if she is not cut out for the life of social media where everyone is hunting her down, and how she would like to go to lakes with her love to get away from it all. The song is beautiful with ultimately sad undertones and I found it to be a beautiful escape from reality, similar to how I find myself when I am reading.



Features

32





38

Photo Credit: Marley Walker



42

Photo courtesy of: Juliana Perez



46

Photo Credit: Daniela Rodriguez

PARA TODOS 10 ISSUES OF

BY ELIZABETH LOPEZ

Dozens of state and national awards later (chingos of awards later), we are here, issue 10. Time flies when you're telling important stories. We are more than a magazine, we are a community of individuals who come together to create something unique each and every issue. What used to print once a year, is now published every semester. In 2020, El Espejo won two Pacemaker awards, which is considered to be college journalism's highest honor. Since then, we have won two more.

When Donna Pazdera was hired in 2017, she became the founding adviser for El Espejo at A&M-San Antonio. She gathered students who were currently taking communication courses that she thought would make a good fit, but first, they needed to come up with a name.

El Espejo means Reflection in Spanish. Names give objects meaning and importance and ultimately reflect who we are. I asked Pazdera who came up with the name, she responded, "I did." Brainstorming for the name of the future magazine with her initial staff members was a challenge, but she confessed that she wanted the name to be strong and reflective of the

community that she now had the opportunity to teach. This became our mission "hold a mirror up to our community and reflect what we see."

To publish the student-run magazine semester after semester, Pazdera guides her students by playing the role of "backseat driver" as she likes to call it, and since then, the magazine has made tremendous accomplishments. You are holding the 10th issue of the award-winning magazine in your hands right now, and in the collegiate magazine world, getting to 10 issues is a big deal and worth celebrating.

Since the first issue was published back in 2018, staff members worked hard to make the issues of the magazine possible. Some of the struggles they faced occurred during COVID-19 a few years later. Pazdera recalls many of their experiences being filled with stress and fear that it would not be possible to publish anything that semester.

This would not be the magazine's only struggle, as it takes a lot of time and effort to cultivate the type of work the magazine does. In the magazine we not only storytell, we create from the student



S LOS JAGS: REFLECTION

perspective of the city we call home. It takes reporting skills, photography skills, designing abilities, and most importantly, the desire to step outside the box and explore a different kind of imagination.

The magazine's most recent accomplishments include placing as a finalist for a Pacemaker in the best general magazine contest. The magazine also won two first-place awards in photography and entertainment writing, three second-place awards for news photography (Uvalde) and page design, one honorable mention for best magazine cover, and fifth place for Best of Show (out of 10) for Best magazine. On top of this, we have created an award-winning podcast, "Mirror Mirror." Looking past our numerous awards and accolades, what truly makes El Espejo important is the people who have been a part of its success. Without them, we wouldn't be speaking about our tenth issue.

Espejo important is the people who have been a part of its success. Without them, we wouldn't be speaking about our tenth issue.



Photo Credit: Elizabeth Lopez

Former El Espejo co-editor-in-chief, Miranda Rodriguez poses with one of the three issues she helped produce.

HERE ARE A FEW WORDS FROM FORMER EDITORS-IN-CHIEF AND STAFF WHERE THEY SPEAK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE WORKING AT EL ESPEJO:

Kevin Castro Class of Fall 2019

“Personally, I felt lost and unsure of who I was at the time I joined the El Espejo team. That was back in January 2018, when I was brought on as the copy editor for the first issue. After the first issue, I knew I wanted to do and see more for the magazine and that there were so many opportunities there. That was when I applied for the editor position for the second issue and was truly allowed to do what I wanted.

We did some great work on that second issue, and the impact it had on me was that I realized how capable I am of making something that does make a difference for others, which was important to me. At the time, that “difference” was creating a space for El Espejo at A&M-San Antonio so that other comm students might not feel pigeonholed the way I did when I transferred there. Since then, I have kept that same mentality: “What can I do to make a difference?”

This philosophy helped me when I eventually returned to the university as a staff member, where I worked for HR for a little over a year. It wasn’t my favorite job, but I knew there was value to the work I was doing and that in some

way, a difference was being made for others. Eventually, I made the jump to Marcom, and now I get to see directly the impact our work has on the A&M-San Antonio community. I think working for El Espejo really helped me discover my passion for higher education and the university. Sometimes I still tell Donna, “You have really helped make a difference in my life,” and she always replies, “So have you.” I don’t think I would have felt that need to want to do more for something bigger than myself if it weren’t for my experience at El Espejo.”

Photo Credit: Riana Tovar



Kevin Castro
and the second
issue.

Thalia Guzman
Class of Fall 2022

“Being a part of this magazine was an unforgettable, fulfilling experience. For two issues, El Espejo gave me the privilege to compete at the collegiate level, travel and co-create the magazine’s first podcast alongside great people.

It pushed me out of my comfort zone as a creative writer, and produced content I was so proud of as a social media manager.”



Miranda Rodriguez
Class of Spring 2023

“Wow! It feels weird to be writing this as an alumna. Where to begin... I owe everything to this magazine and Donna. I must be a pretty shit journalist because it’s hard to put into words how much being the co-editor-in-chief of El Espejo changed my life.

I was given free rein to be creative. Before this magazine, I had never been given a chance to explore storytelling in this way. El Espejo is where I cut my teeth as a journalist, storyteller and ultimately a creative. On top of that, I was the boss. I don’t know who decided to give me that job *cough* Donna *cough*.

When I came to El Esepjo, our entire staff, myself included, were new to the magazine. El Espejo had been recently awarded best student magazine in the state of Texas by the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association...to say this was a lot to live up to was an understatement. I didn’t know what I was doing, but I was going to try my hardest to create something (I didn’t know if it would be any good but I gave it the

college try.) This turned into issue seven, “Love Over Fear,” which went on to win state and national awards.

My staff and I created three issues together and won over 40 awards, we created an award-winning podcast, created new design concepts for each issue and I was given the opportunity to let my creativity blossom. I am proud to say I am an El Espejo alum. This pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to limits I never thought possible.”

Miranda Rodriguez and one of the three award-winning issues she helped create.



Photo Credit: Riana Tovar

Serenity Hernandez Bogert
Class of Spring 2023

“Mirror, Mirror on the wall: Who’s the fairest of them all?”

Even all the work I put into El Espejo in a year and a half could never match what El Espejo gave me in such a brief amount of time.

I forged lifelong friendships in elegant, pizza-scented D.C. hotel rooms, trekked by delayed plane, sauna-ed trains, and stenchy Greyhound buses to fun and life-changing journalism conventions, learned about my history by delving into the stories of some of our community’s most fascinating musical and cultural legends, then spent countless hours writing this, designing those, revising these and editing that... Hey! we even won a few awards while we were at it.

And I wouldn’t change a thing about any of it.

If it were not for our advisor, Donna Pazdera, the magazine as we know it would not exist... And the wiser, stronger, ambitious, and tenacious person it made me wouldn’t either.

Thank you, Donna.

I also want to give a special thanks to all my fellow students and other advisors who made it all so easy to be your Co-Editor-In-Chief. And a special thank you to my unbelievably talented Co-Editor, Miranda Rodriguez.

Thank you to all the teams who brought us to this moment, and all my best wishes to the current and future teams of El Espejo! Treasure these memories, and keep making your school, community, and -- most importantly -- yourselves proud!

Here’s to 10 more issues!”

Former co-editor Serenity Hernandez Bogert.



Photo Credit: Riana Tovar



Elizabeth Lopez
Class of Fall 2023

This magazine was a saving grace for me. When I transferred to A&M-San Antonio, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. As a non-traditional student who had been in college for about 10 years at the time, all I knew was that I wanted to start involving myself with organizations that related to my major.

I wanted to push myself to try new things and be a part of something. What drew me to El Espejo was the fact that they published once per semester, and with my busy work schedule, I felt that would be achievable for me.

I didn't know if I was a good writer until I took a leap of faith and just went for it. Turns out

that I love storytelling, and I am still working on getting better. Being a part of El Espejo has been an experience that I will cherish for a lifetime. Here is where I got the freedom to explore my writing style and where I received effective critique.

I met so many people and made friendships that will last forever. I got to travel and feel like I finally had a voice to tell other people's stories that don't have a voice for themselves. Stories that I feel are important to tell. I always felt supported and grateful to have experienced working at El Espejo.

Thank you to those who came before us. You made this possible for the rest of us.

This was my first issue as editor, it's time to pass the torch. To the next generation of El Espejo crew, continue to grow this magazine. Take pride in our community and shout our stories from the rooftops! We have laid the foundation for the future, it is now your turn...Prove to everyone that we are the little school that could. Cheers!

Current co-editor-in-chief, Elizabeth Lopez.



Photo Credit: Riana Tovar

FLIP SIDE RECORD PARLOR

BY: MARLEY WALKER

The fresh scent of aromatic incense or burning sage welcomes visitors entering the Flip Side Record Parlor. Various genres of music play from speakers at the front of the store that create an ambiance ranging from mellow soul reggae to headbanging 90s grunge streamed on 99.5 KISS-FM.

Flip Side Record Parlor is the oldest vinyl store in San Antonio and has been referred to as a gem to the South Side community. In 1972, Doug Lease alongside his late wife, Marsha Patterson, opened the storefront off I-35 South, at 1445 S.W. Military Dr. The original location was a country-western music store known as “Country Sound Town,” prior to

its transformation into a diverse home for all music lovers.

Since 1972, the location has welcomed several in-store appearances from bands such as Pantera, Iron Maiden and Metallica for autograph signings. After 36 years of memories, Lease decided to move the shop down the road from the previous location to a shopping strip at 840 S.W. Military Drive.

Today, posters line the store’s front windows where music icons such as Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Jim Morrison and Ozzy Osborne face bystanders. A cardboard cut-out of Bob Dylan with a harmonica rack and a lit match in his hand stands at scale with the front door.

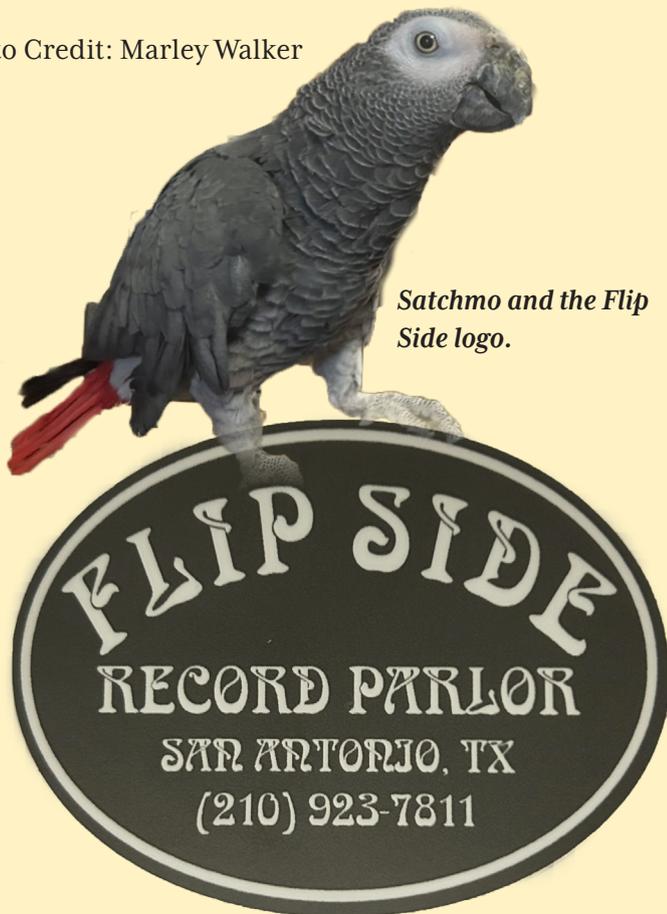
Roman Cuellar, the current owner of Flip Side, said Lease was an antique collector and wanted to exhibit a “nostalgia look” by combining old relics with new styles to embrace a comfortable feeling when in-store.

“It makes you feel at home, like [it’s] not so commercialized,” Cuellar said.

Complimenting the eccentricity of the store, customers may be greeted by three small dogs that go by the names, Chiquita, Babygirl and Chico. Chiquita and Babygirl are typically dressed in matching tutus and love to show off their tricks to visitors. Onze, a large, fluffy Husky can almost always be found seated behind the cashier counter alongside Cuellar.

It’s also important to introduce Satchmo, a 51-year-old African grey bird that can be referred to as the mascot and guard of the store. Satchmo originally belonged to Lease and has been a part of Flip Side’s journey since

Photo Credit: Marley Walker



Satchmo and the Flip Side logo.



WHERE HISTORY STILL SPINS

its beginning days. Satchmo's personality plays a big part in the energy of the shop. The bird can typically be seen in his cage, jingling his bell, whistling, mimicking the register sounds or repeating phrases in Cuellar's voice.

Each experience at Flip Side differs from one another allowing customers to get a taste of unique sounds with every visit. Posters, memorabilia and faded vinyl covers paint the walls with history and are considerable conversation starters.

A man wearing loose-fitting clothing entered the store with a basket consisting of various muffins for sale. Almost forgetting about the muffins, he was engulfed with curiosity when he noticed the wooden crates organized lovingly with vinyls.

In an attempt to recall the name of an old-school group that the man's father had played for him as a child, Cuellar quickly scanned over his memory to recall what the customer was describing. Scratching his head, Cuellar was able to use the terms "local," "Chicano" and

a couple of name guesses from the customer to identify the band as The Royal Chessmen, a Chicano Soul group from El Monte, California. The band became popularized in 1966 after their single "Beggin' You" was released.

Unfortunately, the customer left empty-handed as Cuellar said the search for local vinyls can be difficult to come by. The man was able to sell a couple of muffins on the way out and promised he would be back.

Interactions like this occur hourly as different features of the store draw customers in depending on their interests and tastes. Cuellar walks around the glass cases lining the room to assist another patron. When Cuellar asked the customer if he needed anything, he replied, "Oh-nothing. I'm just reliving my childhood."

It's safe to assume Flip Side Record Parlor is nothing like the vinyl shop portrayed in the 2000's film "High Fidelity." The staff caters to all music and are knowledgeable of each vinyl, CD or cassette sold in-store.



Vinyls organized in their original wooden crates.

Photo Credit: Marley Walker

“Love is the only thing in this world that is free.”
- Cuellar

“Everything else costs you something, that’s how I live and how I want people to feel when they come in here.”

Cuellar works alongside his wife, Velia Bravo with the help from both of their sisters, Ines Bravo Heck and Loraine Cuellar Gunn. They recently celebrated Flip Side Record Parlor’s 51-year anniversary in early April of this year.

Cuellar became involved with the music retailer in the early 90s after his wife started working at the shop in the 80s. This wasn’t the first opportunity Cuellar was offered regarding

selling music and merchandise. He worked at Sam Goody which was located in River Center Mall before the chain music stores closed in the early 2000s. Cuellar also gained experience from working as a sales rep for Sony and assisting his sister, Clarisa Renae Cuellar Peña, and Lease in managing the store at Flip Side.

Peña started working in 1994 and became recognized as a long-time employee with Lease at her side. In 2011, Peña became the owner of Flip Side following Lease’s death. Her commitment and love for sharing music with the community allowed Flip Side’s legacy to persist.

Even after being diagnosed with cancer in 2016, Peña worked long days and other jobs to keep the doors open. It’s hard not to acknowledge how much love and passion the entire staff needed to work together, despite the constant fight for the store to be self-sustained and the fluctuation of trends in music consumption.

In 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, Peña died of colon cancer at 46. This raised questions regarding the store’s future as she had a major impact on the culture and spirit of the music haven for more than twenty years.

Cuellar took ownership of the store and began observing major shifts in the industry amid the start of the pandemic. He noticed an influx of customers after a lengthy period of reviving inventory and doing anything he could to keep the music from fading. Bravo, Cuellar’s wife, reflected on making arts and crafts in their spare time, like magnets made from bottle caps that they were able to sell and include in their inventory.

With many people stuck inside during COVID’s peak, Cuellar shared that he felt social media had played a major role in turning people back to listening to vinyl. He said exposure online had motivated generations to rediscover classic oldies and new up-and-coming bands. Cuellar’s involvement in the industry has allowed him to view changes in music consumption. Whether it’s vinyls, cassettes, 8-tracks or CDs, it has created different cultures and looks throughout



Clarisa Renae Peña.

Photo(s) Credit: Al Rendón



Flip Side's three generations of customers.

"It's the comeback of vinyl that's really helped us keep the flame going," Cuellar said.

South Side students Angel Delgado, 17, and Ivana Rabago, 16, said that over the past two years, they have become loyal customers of Flip Side and referred to the store as "the coolest place ever."

Delgado recalled the moment he received a record player three years ago and made his first trip into the shop. He found himself interested in the records displayed in the windows from the view inside and decided to return with a friend who had been shopping at Flip Side for a while.

Delgado and Rabago have continued making trips to the shop searching for grunge and hardcore metal, as well as enjoying the oldies playing from speakers throughout the store. They also said that they have not been to any other record stores since discovering Flip Side, which is within proximity to their high school.

"We stick to our setting," Rabago said.

The two students said they find comfort in conversing with Bravo and Cuellar as well as visiting with the dogs and Satchmo, who they referred to as "an OG."

Flip Side Record Parlor is held close to many people's hearts. The store has created various experiences for its supporters by hosting fundraisers for local bands and groups, collaborating with vendors and selling tickets for small shows hosted inside or in the store's front parking lot.

"We concentrate on the music, anything related to it and anything that goes with being a counterculture, what we called it back in the day," Cuellar said. "It was a culture that likes to go to shows, listen to rock, burn incense and have badass posters."



Clarissa Renae Peña



Zeros to Heroes

BY RIANA TOVAR

Children of the incarcerated unknowingly face challenges in life that many will never understand.

However, there is a community workshop called Heroes and Zeros that matches the challenges faced by children of the incarcerated and of the military.

Juliana Perez has devoted most of her life to breaking this stigma about incarcerated families. This is one of the many concepts that Perez has taught and written about throughout her career.

She helps not only incarcerated parents themselves but has over 20 years of experience with home studies working with foster care and adoptive families.

Perez is a Licensed Independent Social Worker who has developed a curriculum for incarcerated parenting classes. This is her 12th year partnering with the Bexar County Adult Detention Center.

Both types of children can share similar lifestyles of not being able to see their parents consistently throughout childhood. They often share the same questions: When will they leave next? Are they coming back home? Are they going to miss my next birthday? Perez describes the similarities between two opposite groups of children.

“With children of the military, as a community, we know what to do. We offer counseling to these families and their children. We wrap our arms around the kids and share how proud we are of them and their parents. Because their parents are seen as heroes,” Perez said.

However, every year as Red Ribbon Week approaches throughout the country in late October to remind young children not to participate in alcohol and drugs, the week is often filled with pledges, songs and reassurance that if children look to their parents, they will show what success looks like if you stay away from those substances.

However, Perez said, during this week we overlook the ones who need help the most: children with parents in jail due to substance abuse.

“You can expect children of the incarcerated or from drug addiction to doubt, isolate, or even pretend to go along with the subject matter. But they will be hurting. Because we are talking about their parents,” Perez said.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, children with an incarcerated parent are three times more likely to have behavioral problems or depression than similar children without an imprisoned parent. They are also twice as likely to suffer from learning disabilities, ADD/ADHD and anxiety.

“Children of the incarcerated compound the trauma,” Perez explains. “They constantly have to suffer in silence because it’s a secret they can’t tell. How is that fair?”

In society, these two types of families are never seen as similar. It was the Heroes and Zeros workshop, the Mothers and their Children (MATCH) program and the Papas and their Children (PATCH) program that opened the eyes of people who have suffered alone in silence and finally showed that their lifestyle isn’t as rare as one might think.

The lives of those from foster care, adoptive, incarcerated and even military families all face complex struggles at young ages. But among this group, only one outreaches their hand consistently and respectfully through society.

Based on experience in the field with children in the foster care system, Perez saw that most times these children’s parents are incarcerated. For parents to see their children again, they are required to take classes that focus on improvement, such as parenting, substance abuse and job training. These courses are there to open the eyes of incarcerated parents to break abusive habits they were unaware of.



According to the Compassion Prison Project, on average, 60% of currently incarcerated parents have been exposed to crime, violence and abuse either directly or indirectly before entering. The data also shows that 40% of the women and 45% of the men were raised with an incarcerated family member.

Due to the high statistics, Perez wanted to create a class that breaks down the basics of parenting completely. Specifically, Raindrops to Rainbows, the MATCH program and PATCH program were made to provide a crash course on the basics of a child's development, health and characteristics that oftentimes aren't taught to the parents themselves.

Early in her career she quickly learned that what seemed like basic essentials to many, was not the case for those growing up surrounded by family members who are incarcerated.

Shining a light on parents and children who need help feeling accepted and protected is what Perez has strived to do throughout her career.

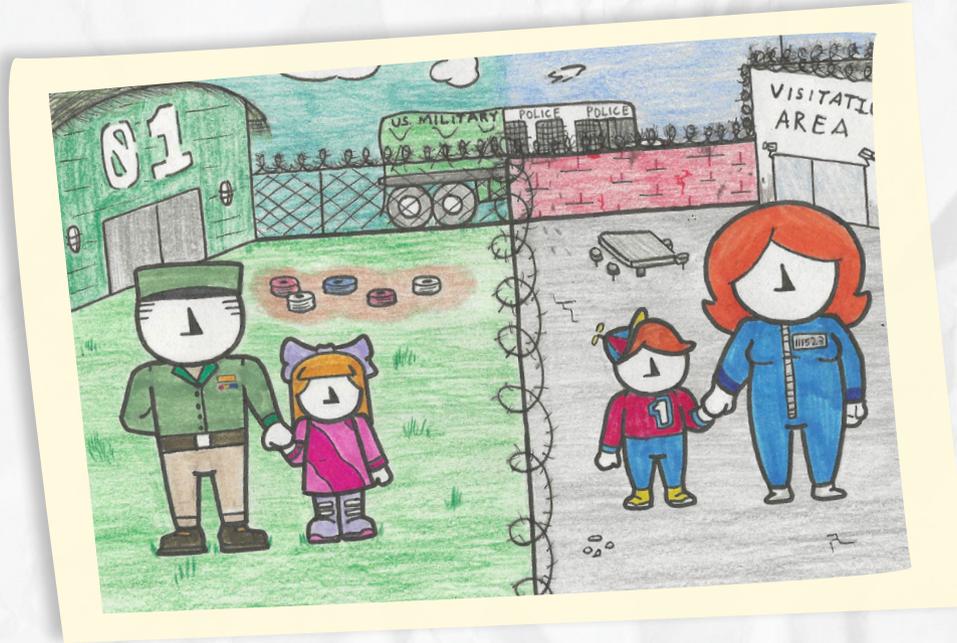
"The message that incarcerated parents receive from communities is that they will never get ahead in life and so I try to motivate and inspire them to prove that's not true," Perez said.

"I THINK AS PEOPLE IN THE 'FREE WORLD' WE DON'T REALIZE, OR WE ASSUME THAT EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT WE KNOW."- PEREZ



Illustration: Riana Tovar

Illustration: Omar Acosta



Rosalinda Sanchez went through the MATCH program with her mother, and shared how Perez inspired their journey.

“I remember the fun we had during the visits doing crafts and singing. I was able to have personal contact with my mom. There was no glass in between us. I was finally able to experience being held by my mom. That is something I will never forget.” Sanchez said.

Sanchez shared that this program is meant to reunite kids with their parents and give families a piece of what they are missing.

Rachel Cisneros served approximately one year at the Bexar County Adult Correctional Center while Sanchez was 9 to 11.

Cisneros met Perez while incarcerated and continued their relationship after her sentence.

Sanchez said that after her mother’s sentence they would still attend the MATCH community classes and her mother became incredibly involved with the program. This eventually led to Perez hiring Cisneros as the Program Director for the MATCH program.

“I’m not embarrassed to say that my mom was an ex-drug addict and ex-con. But because of that, she was able to relate to these mothers who came to class and show proof that the program works,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez said that she saw Perez as a hero growing up.

“Julie was the person that was able to give me my mom back,” Sanchez said.

However, later in their relationship, Perez said that because of people like Rachel Cisneros, she was inspired to continue her life too.

“While I was an employee working with incarcerated parents, despite their situation, a majority of them still had dreams. Still wanted to be somebody and better themselves. At the time I thought to myself, even with all their legal issues and problems they still want to achieve something. So, I have no excuse to not go back to school,” Perez said.

From there Perez returned to school in her late 30s and finished with a license in clinical social work, a license in chemical dependency counseling, and a master’s degree in social work by age 50.

Sanchez’s mother passed away 2 years ago, and she shared that during that time she reunited with Perez.

“When I got back in contact with her, it felt like we were back where we started, but I wasn’t a little girl anymore,” Sanchez said.



At Cisneros' funeral, Perez spoke on how inspirational

Cisneros' life was to not only incarcerated parents but to her personally.

Sanchez shared the amount of gratitude she had for the life Perez helped her and her mother build. Sanchez attended St. Phillips College and is now an EKG technician at Methodist Hospital.

"Growing up I idolized Julie and what she did for us. She is this amazing woman that does such heroic things. But as I've grown older I've learned what she truly taught me is that my mom was a hero too."
- Sanchez



Illustration by: Riana Tovar



Rachel Cisneros and Juliana Perez at community event.

Photo courtesy of: Rosalinda Sanchez

Currently, Perez works as a contract parenting educator who funds the same programs outside the detention center that are offered once a month for free to anyone in the community who is on parole, probation or has a CPS case so they can meet their requirements for their service plans.

This monthly class takes place at the Bexar County Reentry Center here in San Antonio.

Perez recently co-authored a book with Jim Guevara, titled "Garrison's Visitation Day", with illustrations from Nanon Williams and Jessica Dickerson who are currently incarcerated. The book was created to provide counseling and advice for children of the incarcerated, caregivers, and counselors who aren't sure what to do and need guidance on how to handle the strong emotions that come with traumatic events associated with incarcerated parents.

She agreed to this interview in hopes to not only share her story but also shed light on the programs and sources that do make a difference in the lives of incarcerated families. Her book was successfully published in June of 2023.

AGAINST THE ODDS

BY DANIELA RODRIGUEZ



Photo Credit: Daniela Rodriguez

There was nothing new to me about being First Generation aside from the struggle of having the name, “First Generation”. Now, I want to preface this by saying that being first-generation is not a term of constant struggles. It’s a term that comes with a lot of baggage and must be handled with perseverance in mind. Nonetheless, the struggles will seem never-ending at times. The term “First Generation” appeared to me when I first arrived at my university, but the struggles I faced began before setting foot on campus.

FAFSA was a nightmare to fill out alone, the fear of any single mistake on that form marked the beginning of my collegiate journey. From having to learn how to read tax transcripts to constantly

reminding your parents to sign FAFSA forms was exhausting for someone who had no one to rely on in terms of the college experience. To this day, the fear and anxiety creep in as FAFSA season approaches—signifying the overwhelming process.

Following high school graduation, the excitement started to bubble for my upcoming journey. A journey that hasn’t been traveled, a path that I am creating while building myself up at the same time. Excitement soon crumbled down when my mom’s health took a turn. She went from a healthy mom trying to help her daughter with dorm decorations, to fighting for her life on a hospital bed.

Suddenly, my priorities were no longer to succeed in college but to be there for my mom by helping her



take care of my little brother. My mom fought for her life for a few weeks before deciding to move back to her home in Mexico, in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León for the time being with my brother. I was worried but amidst her illness, she encouraged me to not leave college to take care of her.

— She would often tell me “Mija, quiero que te vayas, quiero que seas alguien,” to convince me to not end my college journey before it even started. Her words of encouragement in the end worked as I decided to continue to go off to my new chapter in life: college.

Luckily enough, my mom was getting better and was able to come back home to Uvalde, Texas, to help me pack up and move in at Texas State University. I was thrilled! My mom was getting better and I was doing something amazing being the first in my family to go to college. The excitement continued as I dorm shopped and searched Amazon up and down for the perfect decorations because my experience had to be perfect. It had to be like in the movies where students moved into their dorms and became best friends with their roommates.

— I wanted and expected it to be perfect.

— I later realized my experience wasn't going to be all sunshine and daisies. I would see my mom's bags on her nightstand filled with necessary medication like her blood pressure monitor, and her glucose level testing kit. I would see her sitting and doing her daily routine and a feeling of guilt in my heart settled in. I would also see my dad's work bag on the floor and look at the way his face contorted in pain as he rubbed his back due to all the extra hours he had been putting in work to be able to provide for hospital bills, doctor visits and for us.

This feeling of guilt seemed to sink into my heart and take a permanent spot that stays here to this day. Tears sprung to my eyes.

It was now a space lacking the love and exuberance that used to spill through the cracks of the windows and the crevices of the house itself. While the tears spilled, I did my best to keep a smile on my face as I was moving into my dorm and had a good day with my family. Time flew and the night was creeping in, and the goodbyes came.

**“HOW COULD I LEAVE
AND EXPECT TO GO LIVE
A PERFECT COLLEGE LIFE
WHEN MY HOME WASN'T
EVEN HOME ANYMORE?”**

“Si se puede mija,” both of my parents reminded me before having to leave. The tearful goodbyes were hard, but the feeling that followed was probably the hardest.

It wasn't like the movies. I sat on my twin XL bed and stared at the floor wanting nothing more than to call my parents to come pick me up. I didn't want to be here starting a new chapter in my life when the previous chapter was up in flames.

However, I was reminded of what my mom and dad told me: “Si se puede.”

So, my motivation reignited, and I was determined to do my best to one day help my parents retire.

School started and it was like I was a fish out of water. I felt so small on a campus so large. Still, I was determined to succeed. I attended classes and was doing well for the first two weeks until my mom got sick again. This time it was worse. I panicked and did my best to balance my life at school and at home. I went to school Mondays through Fridays, went back home to Uvalde on Friday nights and would go back Sunday nights.

I had no time for myself and started to fall behind in my classes. This pattern continued throughout the semester; ultimately leading me to fail two of my classes while barely passing the other ones. I was disappointed in myself. I was in a dark hole with no way out, and as the next semester followed, I still managed to fail one class. I was a biology major at the time, so these failing grades were hard hitters on my self-esteem and eventually led to having imposter syndrome.



Illustration by: Riana Tovar

I didn't feel like I belonged on campus. I felt like I was taking someone else's rightful spot and I was just a fake. As my mom's sickness progressed, my lack of motivation and the feeling of being lost progressed as well. I knew being a biology major wasn't what I wanted, but I was looking for something that could lead me to good money for my parents. Eventually, I decided to switch over to being a political science major in the fall of 2020, and while I liked it, I also felt that I didn't love it.

I was still having to go back and forth from San Marcos to Uvalde to take care of my mom, which inevitably, led me to fail classes again. I was convincing myself that God was punishing me for leaving home when my home needed me most. I convinced myself so well that I decided to move back home in October 2020. I still did classes, but now I was home taking care of my mom and my brother while my dad worked. This worked for me until May of 2021 came around and my mom's health deteriorated. That's when I decided to take a step back from university entirely.

I didn't know what I was going to do with my life, but at that moment nothing else mattered. My family needed me and I was going to be there.

Unfortunately, in July of 2021, I suffered the greatest loss of my mom. My best friend. I was distraught, but I had no time to process what just happened because my little brother needed me. I was to take care of him while my dad worked out of town, so as the year progressed, I took some classes at the junior college in Uvalde. I mainly focused on

my brother and work during this time. Life continued this way until my brother graduated and I knew that he was going to be okay with my dad.

I moved to San Antonio, Texas, and I had time to reflect on myself and what it was that I wanted to do with my life. I was always so busy putting others before me that I never asked myself what it was that I wanted to do. The answer is that I'm still figuring it out and that's okay.

There's so much projection surrounding first-generation students. There's the fear of contributing to the 40 percent of First Generation "dropouts". There's the expectation to be the best and the need to succeed without failure because one misfire can cost us everything. The truth is that failing all those times led me to where I am now. A student who knows she's passionate about writing. A student who used to lay in bed crying thinking she would never succeed in college or that she would go back at all. A student who is getting her class ring this November. A student who will be the first to graduate in her family next year in 2024.

There is so much more than what meets the naked eye of a first-generation student. To some, it's just a title that might imply that their college life is or will be different than others, but it goes beyond that. The weight we carry is the pain and suffering from past generations and the need to succeed rises. We hold the tools needed to carve out a new path for our future generations and those are the hardest tools to use as each shoveling is engrained with countless feelings of guilt and tears, but we are the beginning of something new.





Photo Credit: Daniela Rodriguez

**WE ARE AMAZING. WHENEVER YOU FEEL
LIKE YOU DON'T BELONG HERE OR LIKE YOU
CAN'T DO THIS. JUST REMEMBER,
SI SE PUEDE!**

Local Stories

BOXR  STATION
SAN ANTONIO, TX.

52

Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes



56

Photo Courtesy: Thelma Mercedes Garcia-Vazquez



60

Illustration by: Omar Acosta

RISING STAR: DANIEL CORTEZ

BY MELANIE REYES AND SAMUEL ROCHA

Daniel Cortez, 20, is a professional fighter from San Antonio, Texas who started boxing when he was 10 years old. He is currently 7-0 with four knockouts in the super bantamweight division. At first, he wasn't interested in boxing but after his father convinced him "to get the feel for it just so you can say you've done it before," he fought anyway not knowing the feelings he would experience after.

"After that moment, it took off from there...I wanted to keep winning," Cortez said.

In an interview with Cortez, we got a closer look at what it takes to box competitively and his personal experience in the boxing world.

Q: Who inspired you to continue boxing?

A: Local fighters [like] Jesse Bam Rodriguez, he's the current world champion right now from San Antonio. There's Hector Tanajara Jr., he was doing good, Biggie Rodriguez and Mario Barrios...they inspired me to take it to the next level 'cause they're local fighters and they paved the way for me to do good and gave me motivation to keep going.

Q: Tell me about your toughest battle inside and outside the ring. How did you overcome it?

A: I think a battle people don't really recognize too much is a mental battle, because nobody realizes that...but I feel like that used to defeat me a lot as an amateur. I used to overthink it and just get mentally defeated, but I thank God that I overcame that. I still got to really figure out the person in front of me but if I'm mentally there it's good, it's all good.



Photo Credit: Samuel Rocha

Cortez showing us his moves at Boxr Station



Q: How fast did you get comfortable with punching someone in the face?

A: I got used to that pretty quick. It was good.

Q: How have you grown since the start of your career?

A: I think I've grown a lot mentally. Being in a sport, it really makes you strong minded and facing the challenges that are in front of you with training camp, being on a strict diet, being away from your family and stuff, that's stuff that you deal with mentally. Just getting through all that makes you that much tougher.

Q: What's your favorite part about boxing?

A: The fans, the crowds, it's definitely an experience I can't explain. Walking out into the ring, everybody cheering your name...when you're fighting, that's something that I can never explain. I'm going to live with thinking [about] something that I will be proud of. All my fans...come from all over Texas just to come watch me and that's something I love about the sport.

Q: What is your fighting style?

A: I would say I'm a boxer-puncher, meaning I can box whenever. It actually depends on who is in front of me because other times I'll go in my style BOXING boxing. And then I'll start walking them down...taking the fight to them, landing hard shots. Usually like the first round, I see how they're fighting and I adjust to them, to their style.

Q: What connections have you made in the boxing scene?

A: Boxing is a small world. You can get connected real quick. My trainer he's one of the best trainers in the game right now so he has connections too. We just listen to whatever my trainer says and whatever he thinks I'm ready for and we just follow him. I've received a few sponsors with Gamez Law Firm, Social Spot, San Antonio Collision Center you know and the list goes on and on. Every fight I have new sponsors coming in.

**“THERE’S A
FIGHT GOING
ON BEFORE THE
ACTUAL FIGHT
IN YOUR HEAD.”
– CORTEZ**

Q: What advice would you give someone who's starting fresh?

A: Advice I can give new people coming to the sport is, you know it takes discipline, heart and just enjoy it, have fun. If you're going into this as a career, just know that it doesn't last forever. The pain doesn't last forever and so just enjoy it while you're doing it.

Q: What does it mean to fight in your hometown?

A: My first amateur fight was...I would say 10 years ago. So whenever I made my pro-debut, I was a little nervous because I was like 'man I don't know, it's going to be crazy fighting in front of family and friends again.' But it ended up being good, it was a huge crowd and they gave me so much motivation in my fights, so much fire to go in there, it's awesome.

Q: How did you keep this undefeated streak?

A: Just training hard. Every camp, I take it as if I'm fighting for a world title so I train as hard as I can every fight. I know I'm mentally and physically ready for each fight and I don't take anybody lightly. I don't care about the opponent's record or what they've gone through, I take every fighter the same. I go 100% on each fight and thank God we've overcome every fighter so far.

Q: Are there multiple gyms you train at?

A: Right now it's just this one, Boxr station at San Antonio, Texas. This is the gym I've been at recently and it's been good. I've been training here for about six months now. I do my training camps in California. Whenever I have a fight, I go straight to California, I do my camps up there with head trainer Robert Garcia. He's trained multiple world champions so whenever I have a fight I go up there and when it's fight time I come back down and then Robert Garcia will come back down. He trains Jesse Bam Rodriguez, he's trained Mikey Garcia, Josesito Lopez, a few world champions and Jose Ramirez. He's a world-class trainer so it's a blessing to be there.

Q: How far do you see yourself going professionally in boxing?

A: I want to be a world champion. That's like my main goal right now. I'm going to do anything it takes to get there. I'm just taking one fight at a time right now building my record, building my name. But I hope to take it far to the top. I think I need to build more experience [because] I'm still green right now in the pro sports...hopefully in a few years, even a title shot would be amazing.

Q: Have you ever been injured?

A: I broke my wrist at one point. I was fighting like that for a year and I didn't know it was broken. This was in like high school. I dislocated my thumb and so I did x-rays and they were like 'Oh you have a broken wrist, we're not even worried about your thumb, we gotta do something.' I was out for a good year, no boxing, nothing. So it was a little setback but it's all good. Right now, I am going through a little hand injury since my last fight [Sept. 1, 2023].



Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes

Entrance to the Boxr Station.

Q: What are some of your favorite songs to get hype before each fight?

A: I've been coming out to Spanish music like *Peso Pluma*. I think I'm going to keep doing that. I adjust to where I'm fighting and who I'm fighting, but usually I'm feeling Spanish so I'll blast *Peso Pluma*.

Q: What kind of hobbies do you have outside of boxing?

A: Me and my family, we breed dogs, Rottweilers. That's a little hobby of mine, it keeps me busy when I'm back home. I have all my dogs to take care of so that's my little hobby back home.

We got the opportunity to speak with his trainer, Froylan Cervantes Jr., who is the owner of the gym Cortez currently trains at. It's located at 514 El Paso St Suite A, San Antonio, TX 78207.

Q: How long have you had this gym?

A: This is my gym, [I] opened it two years ago with my father-in-law at the time. We're still in business together, just kind of keeping it going [and] trying to keep it up and running. [We] try to get our fights going and everything. The past two years we obviously got some attention. We're just blessed for it all and grateful.

**“KEEP UP
AND STAY
DISCIPLINED.”
– CERVANTES**

Q: How long have you known Cortez?

A: Actually just for his last camp, I think it was his first time he showed up and he went over to RGBA for a while. I started bringing him back in here and they liked the gym... and they like the work and everything, the environment, the vibe. It all comes together to provide an atmosphere where you can train comfortably. If you're nice and comfortable, you can perform your best as well.

Q: What was your first impression of Cortez?

A: He reminded me of like a lower-weight class version of George Ortiz. The intensity and stuff and the way he fights. His fundamentals are really good. Since I first met him, he's [been] working with RGBA so he's working with one of the top teams and he already looked really good from when I first met him. So we're going to be doing [what we can] with team Cortez and help him with his fundamentals and everything in order to keep that solid because that's most important...good foundation and everything is after that.

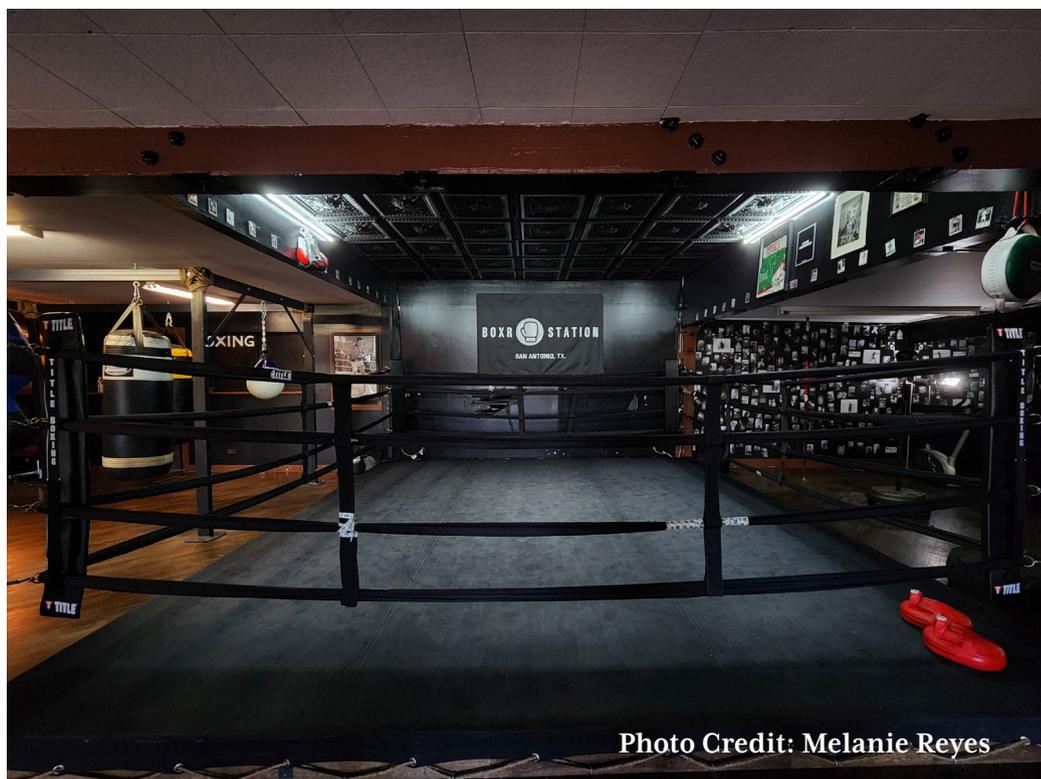


Photo Credit: Melanie Reyes

Training ring inside Boxr Station

RECLAIMING HER IDENTITY

BY ELIZABETH LOPEZ



Illustration by: Omar Acosta

Thelma Vasquez is American-born, but her life changed forever when her mother took her to a cousin's quinceñera in Mexico. Vasquez, then almost 6 years old, remained in Mexico until she was 20. When she tried to return to her home country, she lacked the documentation to prove it.

"No one ever imagined the toll it would take on her identity or the difficulties it would create for her cultural adaptation," said Lizeth, 34, a family friend.

"She felt a lot of resentment toward her family. She had everything here in the U.S., and then her world was turned upside down when they decided to take her to

Mexico." Lizeth continued.

"She suffered a lot during this time of transition because everything she knew about her world and her life drastically changed from one day to another. Her grades in elementary were just fine here in the U.S., but as soon as she arrived in Mexico, she began to struggle academically," Lizeth said.

Vasquez said that as she grew up in Mexico, she never thought that she would ever feel the need to come back to the U.S., but as life went on and she became a mother, she knew that she could give herself and her daughter better



opportunities in the U.S. As an adult she understood that she had dual citizenship, there was never a question about that, but there came a time when her father got into an accident and later, died.

Vasquez decided to return to the U.S to see her dad while he was in the hospital despite all of the misinformation she had heard about the possibility of not being able to. She said she was afraid, and to make matters worse, at the port of entry she faced poor treatment by immigration police. This was an emergency. Her father was in critical condition at the time, and she was well within her rights to come back, but they proceeded to treat her as if she was entering the country illegally. They didn't believe that she was a U.S. citizen since all she had to prove her legality was her birth certificate.

One of the agents even mocked her by saying, "Why are you trying to come back? Your dad is probably dead already, and you being there won't make a difference."

Thelma Mercedes Garcia-Vazquez, 26, and her daughter Kate Gaely Garcia, 3, out and about together, finally.



Photo Courtesy of: Thelma Mercedes Garcia-Vasquez

Either way, Vasquez didn't give up. She came prepared with diplomas, photos and anything that could prove that she was a U.S. citizen. This process took hours, but finally, they let her pass and she stayed in the U.S. for about three weeks. She was able to spend time with her family mourning her father's death.

While being in the U.S. during this time, she said she didn't try to investigate anything about herself. She simply focused on everything that was going on with her dad. Once everything settled down, she went back to Mexico and continued her life as normal. During our platicas, or conversations, Vasquez explained that eventually, she reached out to Lizeth about wanting to come to the U.S. for good. She was having marital problems and decided that it would be best to surround herself with good people who wanted to see her succeed.

Vasquez arrived without her daughter in the U.S. in February 2021. Her daughter, Kate Gaely Garcia was a year old, and with no proof that Vasquez had ever lived in the U.S. for more than four years, the authorities could not let her daughter through. Vasquez said that they told her it would have been easier for her to bring her daughter with her had there been proof that she had at least been reported as a dependent, but there were no records. Vasquez had to start a petition called "Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relatives" for her daughter while she began the process of obtaining forms of identification for herself as well. This was "heartbreaking" for her, she said, as she had to make many arrangements for her daughter to stay back with her ex while she got everything situated here in the U.S.

According to Lizeth, Vasquez's ex is a very impatient man and he demanded so much from them during this time. He made things very stressful by calling Vasquez endlessly, asking her when the process would be over, and if Vasquez did not answer, he would then call Lizeth and her family members. He wanted Vasquez to visit every weekend and he wanted things to move quickly so that he could continue his party life scene without a child to care for.

After Vasquez had been in the U.S. for about a month, his family tried to extort her for money.

“This is something very common among people who make their way to the U.S. Most people assume that money grows on trees in the land of the free, but they are so wrong. Starting from scratch in a new place is tough,” Lizeth said.

In addition to maintaining herself, Vasquez also supported her ex, her daughter, and her ex’s brother back in Mexico. She had double the responsibilities all while trying to establish herself.

“Her sacrifices were never acknowledged, nor appreciated. He dragged her emotionally in such a heavy situation,” Lizeth continued.

Vasquez teared up as she told me that it had been one of her greatest challenges to leave her daughter behind. She suffered greatly. She left her life behind to come to an unfamiliar place knowing that she had every right to be there.

One of the first things she did when she arrived was go to the hospital. She had a massive migraine, but this is also how she obtained a document with her name, date of birth and address, which is one of the documents required to be able to obtain an ID.

Still, she had issues getting her ID because she was missing another form of identification that included a photo of her, in most cases people use their passport, but Vasquez did not have a passport. This caused her to pivot again. She said she felt like she would take two steps forward, but then she would get knocked five steps back. She knew it was going to be hard to situate herself, but as a U.S. citizen, she didn’t imagine it would be this tough.

Vasquez also did not speak English very well, which then created a language barrier and it made it easier for folks to assume that she was undocumented. People treated her differently because of that. Still, she managed and started taking English night classes and found a job as a waitress at a local Mexican restaurant where she began to earn an income so that later she could report her taxes. It was not enough to pay for all of the expenses that were required during any legal procedures. She later had to find multiple jobs, one of which was at Ross.

Vasquez reportedly made about \$30,000 annually, but she stated that in total she feels like she spent roughly \$60,000 to make a lot of things happen for herself. She needed to get a Social Security card and a valid ID because without these things you can’t buy a car or open a bank account. You also can’t get good jobs or take out loans without these forms of identification. Vasquez also did not know how to drive, so she had to learn so that she could get a valid driver’s license.

Lizeth helped her reach most of her goals, but what no one could help Vasquez with was the sadness of not having her daughter near her. She constantly thought about her daughter and visited her every four to six months, but with her goal of eventually bringing her to the U.S. she could not take that much time off, she needed to work. What would have taken Vasquez about a year to bring her daughter to the U.S., took her about three. She said that COVID-19 had a lot to do with the delay in the process.

According to the American Immigration Council, as the pandemic spread, on March 20, 2020, the Department of State suspended “routine visa services” at all embassies and consulates worldwide, including canceling all “immigrant and nonimmigrant visa appointments.” This suspension encompasses applicants for both employment-based and family-based immigrant visas, including the relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs), as well as applicants for nonimmigrant visas for visitors, students, and skilled workers.

“The system seems to be designed to disappoint and discourage people from continuing any type of process surrounding legality in the U.S., even for Thelma, a U.S. citizen,” said Lizeth.

Vasquez has made a lot of progress since then. She now owns a vehicle and has her own apartment. Her daughter finally arrived in October 2023, she turns 4 in December. Vasquez summed up her experience with a common Spanish idiom: “Se siente como que no eres ni de aqui, ni de alla.”

Translated, it means: “Neither from here nor from there.”



Thelma Mercedes Garcia-Vazquez, 26, and her daughter Kate Gaely Garcia, 3, out and about together, finally.



Photo Courtesy of: Thelma Mercedes Garcia-Vasquez

A HEROIC JOURNEY: THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

BY AU'JANAI "JAI" PHILLIPS

I knew my life was about to change when my parents showed up during my winter break. I had been mentally preparing for this moment of my life for a while, as I knew this day was coming, and I had no choice but to accept the change.

I was new to town, my parents and I were the only people of my kind in that town. I was used to being at a new school by this point, this being the fifth school I had been to. Being moved from my home state and my family members, I was scared but ready for a fresh start, despite not knowing what lay ahead of me.

As my family and I entered the new town, I looked around in awe, seeing the mountains in the distance as we went through the unfamiliar town.

As I got settled into the new place, the first day of school started to approach quickly, only a week was left before I had to attend school. I became more nervous the closer the day got, trying to stretch out the days as long as I could. I didn't know what the people were going to be like, and knowing I hadn't had the best of luck with people lately was making me anxious.

I didn't want to go to school and be the new girl again but I knew I had no choice. The more nervous I got, the faster the day came. Before school started, that anxious feeling was soon replaced by a stronger, overwhelming one: rejection.

The first few days of school were a breeze as I got to know where my classes were and interacted with a few students. As the news of a new student started to die down, and people started to get used to me, I realized the people weren't that great. Instead, they were mean, and I had problems, many problems.

There were many who didn't like me. They didn't know me. I was different. I was beautiful, smart, independent, a rare human being indeed. They saw me as a threat, and because of this, I faced many enemies.

To face these challenges, these enemies, I knew I had to do something.

I tried to kill them with kindness. I was nice to people, even the people I didn't like. I tried to be friends with anyone I could, anyone who would accept me, but that failed.

I stayed close to my little group of friends, but it wasn't the same. They grew up there, with almost everybody that went to that school and even though they were the outcasts, they weren't a reject like me, so that failed too.

I tried to escape in my books, and even though it worked for the most part, it was limited so that ultimately failed as well.

There were many ways I tried to squash my enemies and get through the challenges I faced, but nothing I did worked.

What could I do at this point? Nothing but to shut everyone out.

I closed her eyes, trying to keep the noise out.

I took a few breaths.

I opened my eyes.

I was at the top of a mountain, looking out at the view, in awe of what I saw. More mountains out in the distance, a



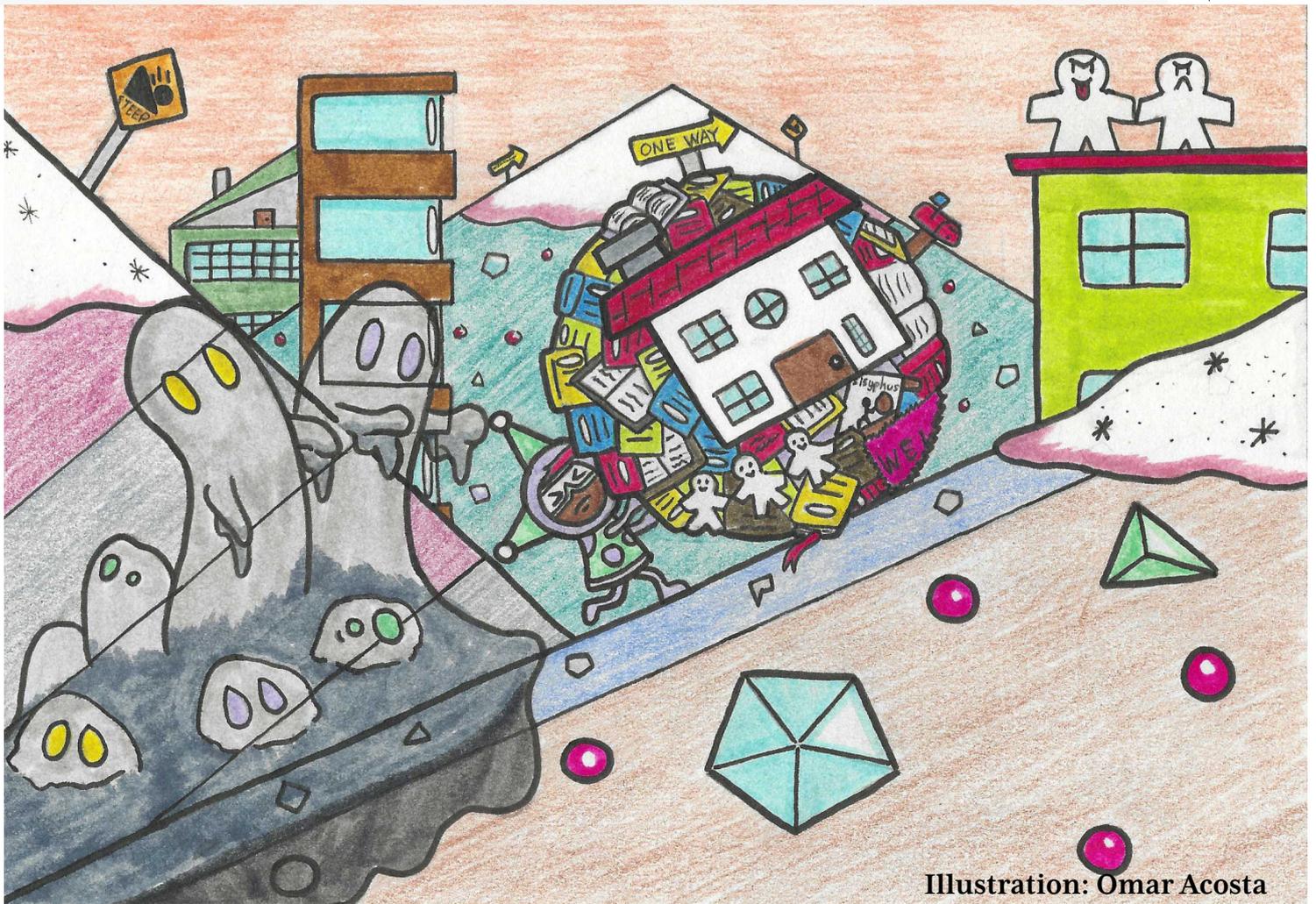


Illustration: Omar Acosta

few more buildings, and a lot of land laid out below her. I thought I could see beyond the town I stayed in, see more towns out into the far distance, and perhaps I could. I could taste the fresh air, feel the coolness of the wind on my face. I was above everything, everyone; I felt like nothing, and no one could touch me. I could feel my spirit start to break free until I lost my footing, falling, and rolling down the mountain.

I never stopped though. I kept rolling and rolling, never coming to an end. I could feel my head start to pulse and throb, feeling as if my brain was rolling with me. I couldn't make out my surroundings as I kept rolling and as I rolled further down this never-ending mountain, I started to see shadows.

My heart was thumping, hammering inside my chest. My body was hot, and moist with sweat as I kept rolling. I tried to inhale, but dirt got in my nose and mouth, making it hard for me to breathe. I tried to move my limbs to stop

myself from rolling but could feel them locked in place.

The shadows started to dance around me, and my surroundings started to get darker. Pain radiated in my head as it continued to throb and pound. I kept trying to move, gritting my teeth as I tried to push my limbs out so I could stop myself from rolling.

I closed my eyes, trying to get the swirling world out of my head, to get the shadows out, to calm the pain in my head. I focused on my body, knowing my limbs weren't locked into place, but the fear made them feel locked up. I struggled to calm myself enough to move even one limb. I tried to take enough breaths without inhaling dirt. I focused hard, telling myself I needed to get a hold of myself.

I managed to stretch my arm out, my hand reaching out, digging my fingers into the ground to stop myself from rolling. However, that did nothing, only slowed me down a little bit. My hand was hurting from the tiny rocks and the

rough ground. I felt my skin cut open from a few sharp rocks, my blood oozing out of the cuts.

My eyes tried to adjust after I opened them, looking around me. Looking for a sign of the rolling ending soon, but I didn't see it. I didn't even see the ground. Nothing but dirt and a slanted mountain.

I closed my eyes again, trying to block everything out.

I took a deep breath, noticing nothing going in my nose or mouth, and opened my eyes.

My heart dropped. I looked around me, trying not to move too much.

I was at the top again, seeing the same view as before. I inhaled, getting that fresh air again. I didn't move, scared that I would fall and never stop falling. I stayed there, not sure what to do, or how to get out of this situation. I felt a gust of wind, my hair whipping me in the face. It covered my eyes for a split second, and in that split second, I felt a force on my shoulders, pushing me back. I gasped, grasping at the air as I tried to grab onto something, but I knew nothing was there. My heart felt as if it was going to burst out of my chest as I hit the ground and started to roll again.

I felt pain everywhere as the tiny, jagged rocks bit into my body. The pain in my head from last time intensified as I kept rolling.

My limbs were not locked into place this time as I tried to stop myself from rolling but failed each time, my fingers never finding the traction I needed. I tried to use my feet but found them useless, my legs crossing each other while I rolled. I looked for an end, but never saw one as I kept rolling. I closed my eyes as a tear slipped out, only for it to be whipped away by the wind.

I opened my eyes, gasping as I took a few deep breaths. I looked down at myself, tired of having to go through this feeling every day. I didn't know how to stop it or how

to not feel this way, but I knew I only had myself to rely on. I didn't want to go to my parents, I didn't want to go to anyone. I wanted to do this on my own. This was my burden to deal with.

Going through every day, things seemed like they were only getting worse no matter what I did. Even when I kept to myself, people wanted to bother me. It seemed it was getting harder and harder for me to get through my challenges.

Finally, I had enough of this torment. I felt as if I had been tortured a thousand times and then some.

I knew I had to get out of this place. I knew my family wanted to leave as much as I did, learning that they had also faced some challenges of their own.

My family and I knew we had to leave. We couldn't stay where we were anymore, but we needed the right opportunity. We couldn't just pack up and leave with nowhere to go and without money to do anything.

Just when things seemed like it couldn't get any worse, luck appeared to be on our side one day.

The perfect opportunity dropped in our laps right on time, and we knew we had to take it.

Immediately saying yes to this opportunity that would relocate us to a new place, where we would have money and a fresh start where we know things will be better, the plans were in motion. We were finally leaving.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, opening them back up, a little smile coming onto my face.

I felt it in my gut that this opportunity was going to lead to great things.

For the first time in years, I felt like I wasn't struggling to stop rolling.





**a Podcast*



10

ELESPEJO
MAGAZINE