

Home Suite I and V

By José Ballesteros

I. Suite in the key of the Pioneer Inn

2F58+FH, Oshkosh Wisconsin

Pioneros

You don't know the why of the arrivals
or what airplanes are for beyond painting the sky for you
worst the train only its whistle that wakes you at night
and the secrets the soles of shoes keep
about jungles, deserts, rivers, sidewalks, highways,
and roads.

You, the Pioneer Inn, first and only place
In Oshkosh Wisconsin that would take us
Our family so complete at that time
dazed and full of labor and promise.

You are an old friend permanently closed now
part resort, part motel that housed us for months
your first *andinos*
my father went from job to job and bank to bank
and door to door to get a lease
while my mother wept homesick from your insides.

The barman, more patient than any monolingual teacher,
taught me everything I needed to know
including what the E stood for on a baseball scoreboard
I had a sweet tooth for everything the new world had to offer
especially my Papi's payday Shirley Temples.

You were witness to our *no hablo inglés*
our a *lapiz/pencil, gallina/hen algo/something,*
pluma/pen fluency
You were witness of long silences while spoken to
of made up sign language with your staff
champú and *rinse* weren't a problem at all
but to ask for soap we had to take our hand
and rub it all over our body like we were visiting
a curandera.

After a few months
the 3 channel TV started making sense.
On Fridays we'd convene in the room
where you housed my parents
to watch the Love Boat and Fantasy Island
and during the commercials we'd dump on your plush carpet
all the stupid questions
we got asked at school by classmates
to see who got the best one
like showing off lip smacking loot
after a night of trick or treating

Do you live in trees?
Do you eat insects?
Is your dad drug a dealer?
No? Then why is his car so clean?
Will your tan go away when it snows?

Esperen...
¡¿Va a ver SNOW?!

You were our American crib and kinder.
You were our pioneer in.
You kept us warm from the wind of the Great Lakes.
and brought our hands back to life
from the ice covered water of the creeks
where we learned how to fish.

I wished I could have shown you
the *nieve* on our volcanos back home.
I wish you dared to get out more
and live life beyond the walled murmurs
of your suspicious fishermen and hunters
that gave us dirty looks
as we ran around unashamed and wildeyed
while our parents worked.

V. Suite in the key of 5709 44th Ave, Hyattsville MD 20781

Comuni3n en los Courtyards

So close to the capital of this big thing
but so many steps away
A row home in a town equally represented by every-body
where community and *comunidad* dance together
to funk, cumbia, chanchona, jazz, banda, bachata, rock, rap y reggaeton
on the porches of those who have us over
se habla espa1ol y and we learn other *idiomas*
WE fight with and for our schools
learn to ball in the park and courtyards
and we grow our *comida* in shared vegetable gardens
apartment neighbors watch our kids
vecina, por favor vuelvo ahorita
there's a press that publishes our *work*
and a studio *donde hacemos arte*
and a mad man on a beach bike that sings out his *poemas*
our mall is alive and it's the center of the universe
50 years from today it's what this whole thing will look like
Wáchale!
50 years?
No, 20 years!
I don't know who lived here before
because there is so much US to do around here.
We are building it *con nuestras propias manos*
guatemaltecos, salvadore1os, Etheopians, mexicanos, Afgans, filipinos,
Blacks and whites y muchos m1s
kneading our *masas* together to break bread over the same table
caring for our *culturas* and becoming as rich as any prairie.

A welcoming that tastes of the motherland
that is the same thing as saying *hogar*.
Not a yearning for what was or what will be,
but a toast to the joy of what is.
A new homecoming
en fin
a home.