



Hoyt Street: An Autobiography

Mary Helen Ponce

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"Church movies we saw were mostly westerns--old westerns, in black and white. Father Mueller drove to 'Los,' as we called Los Angeles, to pick up the films and assorted reels. He never explained why western movies were all he got; I figured he knew a cowboy."

It's the 1940s. Little Mary Helen Ponce and her family live in Pacoima, a Mexican American barrio near Los Angeles. Unmindful of their poverty, Mary Helen and friends Beto, Concha, Virgie, la Nancy, and Mundo sneak into the circus, run wild at church bazaars, snatch apricots from the neighbor's tree, and poke fun at Father Mickey, the progressive priest who plays jazz on the church organ.

Experience the shame of first-generation Americans examined at school for lice, and the desire of a little girl who longs for patent leather shoes instead of clunky oxfords. Share Mary Helen's joy as she savors the sun on her face during walnut-picking expeditions, and basks in her family's love all year long.

"I am overjoyed to be invited into la casita on Hoyt Street. . . . Thank you, Mary Helen, for placing your house on the map, for inviting me to the intimacy of its rooms, allowing me the privilege to sit at the table and be nourished. In naming your own life history on Hoyt Street, you are also naming mine."--Sandra Cisneros

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