

## A Scabulous Time

### **scabulous**

*adj.* proud of a scar on your body, an autograph signed to you by a world grateful for your continued willingness to play with her, even when you don't feel like it. *from the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*

My first attempts to try to write myself were disastrous. These attempts came in the form of songs. But, I scabulously embrace these songs that are metaphorical scars on my soul and writing because in a very ugly and deformed way, they are a part of me.

I've written more songs than these, but they're all just as bad, and they don't necessarily have a running theme. These songs include aspects of my now unpracticed faith. They include aspects of my culture. But, most of all they include my early attempts at creativity in written form. Anne Lamott says that as humans we long to see our words in print. As a purger of belongings and mementos, I won't easily get rid of these songs. So, I think as cheesy and as embarrassing as these songs are, they validate me as a human, as a creator of texts.

The following three songs were written for three sisters on the occasion of each of their quinceañeras. Coincidentally, these quinceañeras and songs span a period of nine years which coincide with the span of my academic career.

What do these songs say about me as an emerging writer and scholar?

Please feel free to be brutal. As I said, I'm simultaneously proud and deeply embarrassed by these songs. And, it's okay to feel indifferent towards them as well.

The following is from the critical introduction of my MFA thesis, which explains a bit more about my early attempts to try to write myself.

At some point in their lives, my parents decided they would abstain from certain joys in life in exchange for protection from the cruel, gritty outside world. Mexican rancho life included shotguns and the pastimes of dancing, drinking, and womanizing that characterized the Mexican revolutionaries long after the revolution was over. Well into the 1950s, the ranchos my parents grew up in outside of Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico maintained turn of the century conditions with dirt floors and no sewage. Education, not readily available, couldn't save them from this rascuache lifestyle; and so, they turned to religion for sanctuary. This meant that even after leaving rancho life and moving to the U.S., our family would never approve of drinking, smoking, dancing, or basically anything fun. Even going to the movies constituted sinning. I think King David received less chastising from Nathan the prophet for his sins of adultery and homicide than I did for dancing to the "Grease" soundtrack in my kindergarten class at the age of five. We resembled Amish people except we had electricity and didn't make our own soap.

My parents created a God-centered life for our family. Every conversation revolved around doctrinal beliefs and we learned to weigh each moment against the threat of hell and banishment from God. After a serious brush with death – he got split in two by a forklift, losing the use of his large intestine for six months – my father became a Pentecostal minister, sold his shotgun collection to help with church expenses, and got rid of our television set because he believed it was the devil's box. After years of entertaining myself with Christian radio drama and classical novels my older siblings brought home from school, my grandmother gave us her

old black and white console, insisting we were completely cut off from the world. I have massive gaps in my pop-culture literacy.

In retrospect, my pursuing writing was inevitable. My romantic inclinations convince me that writing is in my blood. For a great part of my childhood, my father sat behind a typewriter late into the night unloading unto the page in Spanish. During one of my nose-pull-open-every-drawer episodes, I found some withered, moth-eaten pages inside a folio tied with a string. The pages bore ribbon-typed poems about a girl with ruby lips who cried at a funeral. The shock at the mention of lips by my father made me stop reading. When I asked my father about the poems, he said I could only have them published after his death.

My parents did not consider reading and writing real work. My father joked about his lazy brother who copied his school notes everyday to get out of doing farm chores. My dad's strong work ethic prohibited the sun finding him (and the rest of our family) in bed. Real work took place out in the fields, and he left the reading and writing for the evening. However, no matter how poor and small our house, my father always kept a library in one of the rooms. Both my parents read voraciously, and I inherited this love of books. Most of what they read involved religious topics as if they could only allow themselves the pleasure of reading and writing if it involved God. Maybe that motivated my father to become a minister; he could read and write all he wanted if it pertained to God.

My views on writing changed when I enrolled in university as a music major. I hoped to one day record my own Christian music album, but encouragement from English professors (and reality-check sessions with music professors) motivated me to pursue an academic career in English. A spider web map of opportunities and decisions made me a high school English teacher with a desire to improve my writing. Enrolling in the MFA program, not with the purpose to become a published writer, but rather the desire to become a better English teacher, eased the pressure of evolving from non-writer to writer and freed me to treat the time in the program as a journey of self-discovery.

My early experiences (pre-MFA) with writing mirrored what I learned from my parents; I wrote song lyrics, plays, and stories that had my church congregation as the target audience.