



A House of My Own: Stories from My Life

By Sandra Cisneros

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From the author of *The House on Mango Street*, a richly illustrated compilation of true stories and nonfiction pieces that, taken together, form a jigsaw autobiography—an intimate album of a beloved literary legend.

From the Chicago neighborhoods where she grew up and set her groundbreaking *The House on Mango Street* to her abode in Mexico in a region where “my ancestors lived for centuries,” the places Sandra Cisneros has lived have provided inspiration for her now-classic works of fiction and poetry. But a house of her own, where she could truly take root, has eluded her. With this collection—spanning three decades, and including never-before-published work—Cisneros has come home at last.

Ranging from the private (her parents’ loving and tempestuous marriage) to the political (a rallying cry for one woman’s liberty in Sarajevo) to the literary (a tribute to Marguerite Duras), and written with her trademark lyricism, these signature pieces recall transformative memories as well as reveal her defining artistic and intellectual influences. Poignant, honest, deeply moving, this is an exuberant celebration of a life in writing lived to the fullest.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*A House of My Own* tells the story of the award-winning Mexican-American novelist, poet, short story writer and essayist's quest for her dream house, in a book as beautifully appointed as her legendary 'purple' home in San Antonio, with lustrous pages, color photographs and colorful chapter headings that lend it the look and feel of an objet d'art . . . These 'stories from my life' assemble nonfiction drawn from three decades, touching on themes similar to those found in her fiction—identity, belonging, culture, feminism, the importance of home and kinship—each has a new introduction explaining the context and why she chose it. The book's atypical form offers a truer portrait of Cisneros than might be found in a conventional autobiography. A literary salon steeped in storytelling and writers, it honors her process and influences and draws attention to crucial and difficult points of her development. Like a manifesto, it reasserts Cisneros's artistic credo—living alone, charting her path, seeing writing as 'a resistance, an act against forgetting, a war against oblivion, against not counting, as women' . . . Cisneros pays tribute to every friend, artist, musician and tradition that inspired her . . . *A House of My Own* reminds us of the importance of our place in the world, and of the holiness of what we find there. Cisneros is right there in the room, fiercely candid, warm and gracious, talking about everything: the best recipe for *mole*, her humiliating fifth-grade report card, the men in her life, her dreams about old houses and forgotten pets—and writing, always writing." —Gina Webb, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*

"Cisneros is best known for *The House on Mango Street*, about Esperanza, a Mexican-American girl who turns to writing for solace from her chaotic Chicago family life. With her newest book Cisneros fans will finally find out whether Esperanza's story was based on the author's real experience. In a tone that is intimate and inviting—indeed, we feel we are sitting right next to the author as she sips tea (or chugs tequila) at her home in Mexico, and recounts her adventures with a laugh and a shake of the head: *Ay Dios mio*. That is not to say Cisneros's memoir is insular, accessible only to women, or writers, or those from immigrant backgrounds. Much of the book is focused on the hardships of writing, [but] it is as much an ode to pursuing one's passion despite all odds as it is a meditation on family, friends, and finding a home. We follow her on her quest for enlightenment, for worldliness, artistic substance, and a career to sustain her. What she finds along the way is much more, including poverty, war, loss, and a depression that nearly kills her. She also happens to come across a gaggle of colorful folk that in some way reinforce her resolve. These are her teachers: writers, brujas, ancestors, and friends—people who inspire her faith. The book pays homage to them, the patterns cohesive in the author's intention to assemble a picture of the mansion of the spirit . . . Cisneros has found a place in the world of letters, but longing for a home has kept her spirit restless . . . Wherever she settles, even when she settles, she is Sandra Cisneros, a wandering spirit and creator of stories. 'Stories without beginning or end, connecting everything little and large, blazing from the center of the universe into *el infinito* called the great out there.'" —Sandra Ramirez, *Los Angeles Review of Books*

"Rather than writing an autobiography, Cisneros has documented her life through a mélange of essay, poetry—and battle cry." —Natalie Beach, *oprah.com*

"Tantalizing. In no way is this a traditional memoir with tidy numbered chapters and a smooth arc. Instead, Cisneros collects writing, lectures, newspaper articles, keynote speeches, stories repeated out loud but only now finding their way onto the page—and assembles them into one beating heart." —Maggie Galehouse, *Houston Chronicle*

“Sandra Cisneros understands that a place molds you, as much as family and friends. Her new collection stitches together three decades of her unique life into a kind of rolling memoir. Not until near the end do you realize what Cisneros has done, crafting a collection that lays out memories as the mind often sees them—in pieces, in fits and starts. Each work is prefaced by an introduction that provides context and glue for the book as a whole. They're as delightful to read as the pieces themselves, and are classic Cisneros. Her prose reads like poetry, rhythmic and energetic; her poetry is as natural and effortless as plainspoken prose. In fact, this is what makes Cisneros who she is as a writer: simple, melodious language that explores emotions and brings big ideas down to earth . . . This memoir has the transcendent sweep of a full life and would make a great movie. It is for anyone looking for inspiration to travel far, live large and write . . . A full and satisfying portrait [of] how the writer got—and kept—her mojo.” —Dwight Silverman, *Houston Chronicle*

“From her breakout book, *The House on Mango Street*, to this new collection, Cisneros’s concerns about finding a home have been at the forefront of her work . . . Now, after decades of traveling [and] as she’s settling into life in Mexico, Cisneros is not only finding a new purpose in her life, but also her longed-for spiritual home. *A House of My Own*, Cisneros’s new collection of biographical essays and reflections, serves as a memoir of her restlessness and her movement toward happiness, [and] reveals an even greater scope to her talent and thoughtfulness . . . This supposed provocateur has found a home—and now, so she says, she’s finding her voice.” —Richard Z. Santos, *Kirkus*

“This Chicago-born writer has always been a fierce talent. No one writes like her, and for a long time, no one told the stories she did so masterfully in her poems and novels, the stories of Mexican people, of working class people. Perhaps most importantly, she wrote her life, a life many of us didn’t know was an option as ‘nobody’s mother and nobody’s wife’ . . . *A House of My Own* is a compilation of true stories and non-fiction pieces that form a ‘jigsaw autobiography’ of the author’s life. The thread that connects each story is the idea of home and all that means: building your own for the first time, belonging to two countries, and how our childhood homes shape us. Cisneros is kind and warm and honest: everything you hope your literary hero will be.” —Tina Vasquez, *Jezebel*

“The beloved author gets intimate in her new book—a rich compilation of true stories and photos from [her] life and career. In the introduction, Cisneros explains that the book is a way to understand her life over three decades—from 1984 to 2014 to be exact. *A House of My Own* takes readers to many places Cisneros has traveled, from Chiapas, Mexico to Hydra, one of the Saronic Islands of Greece and where she finished writing *The House on Mango Street*. *A House of My Own* helped Cisneros realize many advantages of growing older. You get to know yourself better, she said, and won’t give your time away to just anyone. ‘Your time is the most valuable thing you have,’ she says.” —Amaris Castillo, *Vivala*

“With a phrasing and bravado echoing Saul Bellow’s Augie March, Cisneros writes, ‘I was north-of-the-border born and bred, street tough and city smart, wise to the ways of trick or treat.’ Her new autobiographical work is very much about borders and about houses, particularly ‘the house one calls the self.’ It is made up of nonfiction chapters, most of which have previously appeared. Make no mistake, though. *A House of My Own* isn’t a greatest-hits collection. It is a surprisingly resonant account of Cisneros’s life, which is woven through each of these pieces, regardless of their subject. These essays provide a multiplicity of perspectives on Cisneros, a place where each of these writings can talk with the others, where a conversation can take place while the reader eavesdrops. A complex, nuanced picture of the writer emerges.” —Patrick T. Reardon, *Chicago Tribune*

“In *A House of My Own*, Cisneros takes readers behind the typewriters she has written upon over the decades, revealing the rooms in which her novels and poems were composed, the thoughts circling her mind as she created the characters so many have adored, and introducing the people she loved and lost along the

way. . . [She] talks of words as medicine and libraries as medicine cabinets. Through her inclusion of book introductions she wrote for other authors, we get rich glimpses into her relationships with fellow writers, sitting with them at tables as they sip beers and share life. And when we read older articles that tell of thoughts the author no longer thinks, Cisneros grants new insights . . . The writer also explores poverty and wealth, often through the lens of art. Throughout each story, though written for a diverse smattering of purposes and people, is Cisneros's constant molding of words like clay . . . Her words will make existing fans love her more, and drive new readers to reach for her previous works after closing this one." —Christina Ledbetter, *Associated Press/The Washington Post*

"Generous, welcoming and deeply gratifying . . . This hefty volume of what is aptly being called a 'jigsaw autobiography' gathers three decades of Cisneros's nonfiction writings that showcase her talent as a lyrical essayist. Long-time fans will recognize her inimitable style that frequently spirals into lush sensory language. But the real gift here is in learning about Cisneros's creative process, her early struggles as a 'migrant writer,' her literary influences and the difficult life-changing moments in her personal journey." —Rigoberto González, *NBC News*

"The only girl among six brothers, Chicago-born author and poet Cisneros describes finding a sense of belonging in like-minded authors—Gwendolyn Brooks, Marguerite Duras—and travel, including the Greek cottage where she wrote her first novel, in *A House of My Own*." —Megan O'Grady, *Vogue*

"Brilliant, lovely, spirited . . . Cisneros's collection of lectures, essays and family memories explores human yearning for home, a safe place where we can be ourselves. For Cisneros, the daughter of a Mexican-American mother and a Mexican father, it meant straddling traditional and contemporary cultures and setting out to find her place in the world . . . The title essay recounts her early days of living and writing in Bucktown, 'a down-at-the-heels' neighborhood of Chicago, where Nelson Algren once roamed and not far from Saul Bellow territory. She recalls an exhilarating time of learning and discovering how to be a writer, how to live alone, how to trust your own voice, how to teach students who 'have to defend themselves from someone beating them up' to write poetry . . . People, books, education and experiences influence and broaden her worldview, but also bring bittersweet loss . . . This collection puts a gifted storyteller at your fingertips, one who offers a panoply of life in apartments, rented rooms and borrowed houses, a journey with a curious, lively mind and reflections on cultures, families and traditions." —Elfrieda Abbe, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

"Sandra Cisneros has spent her whole life searching for a place to call home, documenting her journey in essays, poems, and novels, the most famous of which is *The House on Mango Street*, her semifictionalized account of growing up in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. In her new memoir, *A House of My Own*, the author recounts more than 30 years' worth of personal stories about the places she's lived and the writing they inspired." —Brianna Wellen, *Chicago Reader*

"Dazzling . . . Revealing, impressive . . . refreshingly candid. This memoir in essay form includes personal stories about family, and travelogues detailing unexpected encounters as a single woman journeying solo. It also pulls together nonfiction writings that range from literary tributes to monographs and speeches punctuated by hard-won insights. Home is a theme throughout. [Though] lovers are not as present as friends and family—her critical support system, who are deservedly celebrated—two figures who show clearer than all the others are Cisneros' parents. It's hard not to beam at her mother's trademark malapropism 'Good lucky!' and at the love she exudes for her father, despite a complicated relationship. It's when she writes about [him] that her poetry shines most brightly. *A House of My Own* is part artist statement, part declaration of independence from *The House on Mango Street*, as Cisneros closes yet another chapter in her writing journey. After all, she declares, 'The book is the sum of our highest potential. Writers, alas, are the rough

drafts.” —Rigoberto Gonzalez, *Los Angeles Times*

* “Profound insights, striking detail . . . a patchwork-quilt memoir resplendent with color photographs. Cisneros’s reflections on houses she’s lived in and the meaning of home form a unifying motif, along with accounts of her early struggle to envision a way forward as a self-described ‘American Mexican’ and ‘working-class writer.’ Cisneros pays passionate homage to her parents and such writers and artists as Gwendolyn Brooks, Elena Poniatowska, Eduardo Galeano, and Astor Piazzolla. She also examines with abiding candor and impish wit gender expectations, sexuality, and her long campaign to become ‘a woman comfortable in her skin.’ At once righteously irreverent and deeply compassionate, Cisneros writes frankly and tenderly of independence and connection, injustice and transcendence, resilience and creativity, the meaning of home and the writer’s calling. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** This mosaic of autobiographical stories [is] guaranteed to enthrall her many fans; her true tales of coming-of-age and becoming a writer against all odds [are] deeply compelling.” —Donna Seaman, *Booklist* (starred review)

* “The author of *The House on Mango Street* has written what may well be the best memoir of the year thus far. She seamlessly weaves ‘memories’ from her life from 1984-2014 (some written for specific audiences and expanded in this volume). As in her fiction and poetry, Cisneros blends family stories from Chicago and Mexico with lively storytelling, rich details, and good humor. The result is a fierce portrait of an artist and her quest, and the roads taken and not taken to find a home of her own. All readers who are interested in creative writing, memoir, American literature, and Chicana literature will appreciate this memoir, [which] deserves to find the broad and wide readership of her earlier books.” —Pam Kingsbury, *Library Journal* (starred review)

“An extraordinary and magical journey. Sandra Cisneros makes me so happy that I am a reader, so joyful that she is a writer, and even more exhilarated that she is part of our world. Read this book and laugh, cry and rejoice!” —Edwidge Danticat

“Charming, tender: a warm, gently told memoir, assembled from essays, talks, tributes to artists and writers, and poems . . . Cisneros chronicles the creation of [*The House on Mango Street*], begun in graduate school at the University of Iowa when she was 22, and completed on the Greek island of Hydra in a whitewashed house with ‘thick walls and rounded corners, as if carved from feta cheese.’ Homes feature in many pieces: the apartments her family moved into, always looking for cheaper rent; the house they finally bought, where the author had a closet-sized bedroom; her house in San Antonio that she painted purple, raising objections from the city’s Historic Commission. Besides reflecting on her writing, Cisneros discloses a period of severe depression when she was 33; a tantalizing family secret; and eulogies for her parents. The making of a Latina writer.” —*Kirkus*

About the Author

SANDRA CISNEROS is the author of two widely acclaimed novels, a story collection, two books of poetry, and, most recently, *Have You Seen Marie?* She is the recipient of numerous awards, including National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, the Lannan Literary Award, the American Book Award, the Thomas Wolfe Prize, and a MacArthur Fellowship. Her work has been translated into more than twenty languages. Cisneros is the founder of the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral and Macondo Foundations, which serve creative writers. She lives in Mexico.

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Users Review

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