

I WRITE THE FUTURE!

A CALL TO ACTION, A CALL TO WRITE, A CALL TO GO PUBLIC
FOR STUDENTS OF ISAW TEACHERS



TERESA CHUC DOWELL



Teresa Chuc Dowell is a writer of poetry and short stories and a Teacher Consultant with the Los Angeles Writing Project. Her poems have appeared in *The National Poetry Review*, *Babel Fruit*, *Community Life Magazine*, *PoetryMagazine.com*, *Jack Magazine*, and *Miller's Pond*. Her short stories have appeared *SugarMule.com* and *Memoir*, and she has written and published a children's book called *Bye Bye, Grandma*. Teresa teaches English literature and writing at a Los Angeles public high school.

I invite teachers to explore with students the multitude of voices in contemporary poetry today that investigate the issues of immigration, racism, poverty, identity and culture. There are fine contemporary poets who reach out to the community while bringing awareness to these issues. I have had the honor of meeting and reading with poets such as Melinda Palacio, Lynne Thompson, William Archila, and Jeffrey Schultz, all published in the newly released *New Poets of the American West Anthology* edited by Lowell Jaeger.

◇ Melinda Palacio's poem, "El South-Central Cucuy", begins, "My uncle said I wouldn't have a life./ Sorry, la little Minnie, he snarked,/ Dah, ha, ha he laughed./ If the Cucuy doesn't get you, the Bomb will." Culture and immigration.

◇ Lynne Thompson writes in her poem, "Soar", "And my tantie, once a muck-a-muck in her own right (having flown an airplane solo in days when// most women and Negroes were grounded)." Racism.

◇ I explore identity in my poem, "Names" - "I am tired of having five different names;/ Having to change them when I enter/ A new country or take on a new life."

In these poems and in many poems in the anthology, poets bring to the reader's consciousness, the issues that are important to them, the problems that need to be solved. The creation of "change" first begins in the mind or heart and bringing "awareness" is a first step. Poets use their writing to do both.

Contemporary poetry uses craft—rhythm, rhyme, imagery, alliteration, consonance, assonance, metaphor, similes, allusions, etc.—to create music and paint pictures with words. (These terms are so much more than answers on a multiple-choice test. They take life in poetry.) There is tension and release. There is magic in the specific details, but there are so many ways to create a poem.

So to students, I invite you to read widely so that, in your writing, you may touch the hearts of many. That's one way to write the future. I wish you all luck and endless creativity!

Teresa Chuc Dowell, mother, teacher, poet, writer

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Names

I am tired of having five different names;
Having to change them when I enter

A new country or take on a new life. My
First name is my truest, I suppose, but I

Never use it and nobody calls me by this Vietnamese
Name though it is on my birth certificate –

Tue My Chuc. It makes the sound of a twang of a
String pulled. My parents tell me my name in Cantonese
is Chuc Mei Wai. Three soft bird chirps and they call
me Ah Wai. Shortly after I moved to the U.S., I became

Teresa My Chuc, then Teresa Mei Chuc. “Teresa” is the sound
Water makes when one is washing one’s hands. After my first

Marriage, my name was Teresa Chuc Prokopiev. After my second
Marriage, my name was Teresa Chuc Dowell. Now I am back

To Teresa Mei Chuc, but I want to go way back. Reclaim that name once
given and lost so quickly in its attempt to become someone that would
fit in. Who is Tue My Chuc? I don’t really know. I was never really her
and her birthday on March 16, I never celebrate because it’s not

my real birthday though it is on my birth certificate. My birthday is on
January 26, really, but I have to pretend that it’s on March 16 because my
Mother was late registering me after the war. Or it’s in December, the date
Changing every year according to the lunar calendar – this is the one my
Parents celebrate because it’s my Chinese birthday.

All these names and birthdays make me dizzy. Sometimes I just don’t feel like a
Teresa anymore; Tue (pronounced Twe) isn’t so embarrassing. A fruit learns to
Love its juice. Anyways, I’d like to be string...resonating. Pulled back tensely like a bow
Then reverberate in the arrow’s release straight for the heart.

Teresa Chuc Dowell (*published first in Babel Fruit*)

*“When I am writing a poem, it is to make something, an object or organism that
will be whole and living, something that will have a life independent of me.”*

Octavio Paz



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