

BOOK OF THE WEEK REVIEW

Words to live by

A piece of timely advice from Rudolfo Anaya sets award-winning writer Luis Alberto Urrea on his life's course

BY DAVID STEINBERG
FOR THE JOURNAL

Author Luis Alberto Urrea has taken advice from Albuquerque's Rudolfo Anaya, and it's paid off.

"He was one of the first celebrity authors I'd met, and he told me if you can make your abuelito in Tijuana the grandmother of a reader in Iowa or in Chicago, then you have committed the most profound political and religious act," Urrea said in a phone interview. "I just loved that. That's been one of my prime writing rules for everything."

"Everything" includes "Nobody's Son," which won an American Book Award; "The Devil's Highway," which was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize; "The Hummingbird's Daughter"; "Into the Beautiful North"; and "The House of Broken Angels," his new novel about an American family with roots in northern Mexico. The book will appeal to anybody, really, not just Hispanics.

"Broken Angels" is a tender, sprawling, funny, violent family saga centered on aging, ailing patriarch Miguel Angel de La Cruz, who lives in the fictional barrio Lomas Doradas in San Diego.

He's nicknamed Big Angel, and the breadth of his family influence would be comparable to that of Don Corleone, only benevolent and blue-collar.

The saga's scenes explore the intrigues and affections of a flock of family members — siblings, children, grandchildren, cousins and even his parents in La Paz, Baja California. The story also explores themes of immigration, the ways there are to be an American and the power of culture as a reflection of

identity and expressed through food and language.

English is the dominant language of the book, but characters also drop in with phrases of proper Spanish, street Spanish, "folksy Spanish" and Spanglish.

Urrea said the character of Big Angel was heavily inspired by the death three years ago of his own big brother, Juan.

The scenario was the same as what the reader finds in the book. "Juan had been fighting cancer, and he knew he was going to die, so his grandkids and nieces, the army of young people who circulated around him, came out for his birthday. Like Big Angel, Juan knew what others suspected — that this would be his last birthday," the author said.

Urrea's family fretted that it would be a sad event. It wasn't. "But Mexicanos, man. Music and fiesta, and for some reason everyone wanted KFC and, of course, drink and joy. It was just this overwhelming day of the goodness of a family and people coming to terms with their histories and watching people thank my brother for all he had done," Urrea said.

Juan died a week later.

Big Angel passed seven days after his at-home birthday party. After his death, Urrea writes, Big Angel's family would find the "details trailing any good story. Like tin cans on the back bumper of a newlywed's car.

"Rattles and pings and wonderful small moments spinning in the wake of a great life."

Urrea lives outside Chicago and is a distinguished professor of creative writing at the University of Illinois-Chicago.



Luis Alberto Urrea gives a talk about "The House of Broken Angels" at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 13, at the ASNMSU Center for the Arts. Urrea is New Mexico State University's spring keynote speaker. The event is free. And at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 14, Urrea will speak at the KiMo Theatre, 423 Central NW. Tickets are \$35 for general seating and \$45 preferred seating. Admission includes a signed hardcover copy of "The House of Broken Angels." Tickets are available in advance at Bookworks, 4022 Rio Grande NW, at bkwrks.com or at the door.



NEW MEXICO BOOK NOTES

Historical account details a slave's rise to power

AT BOOKWORKS: Leslie Peirce will read from "Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire" at 6 p.m. Thursday, March 15.

Peirce tells the remarkable story of a Christian slave girl, Roxelana, who was abducted by slave traders from her Ruthenian homeland and taken to the harem of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in Istanbul. Suleyman became besotted with her and foreswore all other concubines. Then, in an unprecedented step, he freed her and married her. The bold and canny Roxelana soon became a shrewd diplomat and philanthropist, who helped Suleyman keep pace with a changing world in which women, from Isabella of Hungary to Catherine de Medici, increasingly held the reins of power.

Bookworks is at 4022 Rio Grande Blvd. NW. Call 344-8139.

AT COLLECTED WORKS: Pam Roy, executive director of the Santa Fe nonprofit Farm-to-Table, will discuss why Santa Fe needs a food plan at 11 a.m. today. Roy is coordinator of the city's Food Policy Council. With Journey Santa Fe hosts Alan Webber and Bill Dupuy.

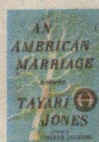
Collected Works Bookstore is at 202 Galisteo St., Santa Fe. Call 505-988-4226.

IN THE SID CUTTER PILOTS' PAVILION AT BALLOON FIESTA PARK: The 2018 Albuquerque Antiquarian Book Fair brings 31 exhibitors from 4 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, March 16, and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 17. The fair features booksellers from the Four Corners states (New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado) and California with such items as fine and collectible books, art prints, autographed novels and nonfiction books, postcards, maps, photographs and other printed collectibles. A food truck will be on site for lunch on Saturday.

Sid Cutter Pilots' Pavilion is at 4900 Balloon Fiesta Parkway NE. Entry fee is \$5 for both days, \$2 for Saturday only. See 345-1945 or abqbookfair.com.

BEST-SELLERS

FICTION



1. "An American Marriage," by Tayari Jones. Algonquin.
2. "Asymmetry," by Lisa Halliday. Simon & Schuster.
3. "Little Fires Everywhere," by Celeste Ng. Penguin Press.
4. "The Woman in the Window," by A.J. Finn. Morrow.
5. "The Great Alone," by Kristin Hannah. St. Martin's.
6. "A Gentleman in Moscow," by Amor Towles. Viking.
7. "The Immortalists," by Chloe Benjamin. Putnam.
8. "Manhattan Beach," by Jennifer Egan. Scribner.
9. "The Power," by Naomi Alderman. Little, Brown.
10. "Still Me," by Jojo Moyes. Pamela Dorman Books.

NONFICTION



1. "Fire and Fury," by Michael Wolff. Holt.
2. "12 Rules for Life," by Jordan B. Peterson. Random House
3. "Educated," by Tara Westover. Random House.
4. "Astrophysics for People in a Hurry," by Neil Degraese Tyson. Norton.
5. "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F***," by Mark Manson. HarperOne.
6. "Hillbilly Elegy," by J.D. Vance. Harper.
7. "Barking to the Choir," by Gregory Boyle. S&S.
8. "The Healing Self," by Deepak Chopra and Rudolph E. Tanzi. Harmony.
9. "Leonardo da Vinci," by Walter Isaacson. Simon & Schuster.
10. "Feel Free," by Zadie Smith. Penguin Press