

Tortuga
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Novel pokes head out of shell

by Jessica Del Curto
Daily Lobo

When author Rudolfo Anaya was a young man, he had an encounter with La Llorona, the ditch witch.

Anaya grew up in the barrios of Albuquerque where there were no public pools. One summer, he and some friends went swimming in an arroyo and he severely injured himself. He ended up in the hospital wearing a full upper-body cast and for the rest of the summer, he was confined to a bed like a turtle.

Thus sprung *Tortuga*, Anaya's third novel in what has become known as the New Mexican trilogy.

"I had written *Bless Me, Ultima* and *Heart of Aztlán*," he said. "In essence, I was following my growing-up years. *Bless Me, Ultima* is my hometown and childhood. *Heart of Aztlán* was about me growing-up in the '50s. It was logical that when I wound up in the hospital, it had to be about that experience."

Tortuga chronicles a young man's stay in a hospital for crippled chil-

dren, and Anaya weaves fiction into his tale of recovery. Along the way he meets other patients, each with their own story and dreams of escaping the hospital.

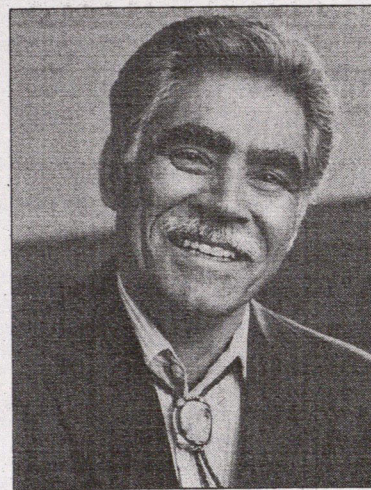
"When you throw a bunch of young people (together) like that who all have different diseases or illnesses, it's no different from adults," he said. "I see it as a reflection of mankind and the heroics of mankind."

Writing *Tortuga* didn't come easy for Anaya.

"This was the hardest one to write in a sense," he said. "In the others, it was easier to reveal parts of me, but in *Tortuga*, it took a lot more to reveal all those emotions the other kids and I had gone through.

Tortuga was first published in 1979 and is being re-released by UNM Press, which Anaya said pleases him.

"I am very proud of the novel," he said. "It's not read as much as some of my others, but people that do read it give me very positive responses. Maybe releasing it after 25 years will give it a new boost, a new life."



Courtesy of Amanda Sutton
Rudolfo Anaya

Anaya is known as one of the founders of modern Chicano literature, and was presented with the National Medal of Arts for Literature in 2001 by President George Bush for his novel *Albuquerque*. He said

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his writing has brought him great things.

"I have had the opportunity to teach, to travel," he said. "I have a wonderful marriage. People don't realize how much work writing is, but that is what I was destined to do, so I have no complaints."

Anaya, who once taught English at UNM, says he has learned the rule

of writing.

"To write like hell, that is the first rule," he said. "Maybe that's the only rule. Writing is something you do, not something you talk about. Otherwise you just become a great conversationalist at parties."

He said in order to really connect to his work, readers may need to know New Mexico.

"You have to know the place, the cultures, the languages and ceremonies," Anaya said. "Then my writing makes sense because it has a context."

Not much has changed in 25 years since the first release of *Tortuga*, Anaya said.

"I got older," he said. "I don't know if I got wiser."