

'Farolitos' sheds a light on holiday tradition

Gonzales tells a warm story

By GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY

Edward Gonzales needed his young model to cry. In the children's book for which he was doing the illustrations, the character Luz tells her friend she doesn't know if her father, away at war and injured, will be home for Christmas. Her eyes fill with tears.

Consuelo Gonzales (not related to Edward) posed as Luz for Gonzales' paintings. When he told her she needed to cry, she was as undaunted as a professional actress.

"She gets up real quick and goes to the fridge and comes back crying (after cutting an onion)," Gonzales said. "Her mother was amazed."

The Santa Fe painter used friends and relatives as models for the paintings that became illustrations in the new hardback edition of Rudolfo Anaya's children's book, *The Farolitos of Christmas* (Hyperion Books for Children, 1995).

Gonzales' simply rendered warm portrayals of the characters, and his close attention to details, create a strong sense of authenticity in his illustrations.

Those who were part of a rural Northern New Mexico Hispanic family in the mid-1940s will recognize an accurate depiction of the time, place and ways of life. For those who weren't, Gonzales' illustrations give a window into the traditional Northern New Mexico family.

All 20 original acrylic paintings that illustrate *The Farolitos of Christmas* are part of a special holiday exhibition opening today, Dec. 15, running through Jan. 8, at the Governor's Gallery on the fourth floor of the State Capitol building.

Both Gonzales and Anaya will be on hand for a book signing and reception from 4 to 6 p.m. today at the gallery.

Also in the show are four folk art nativity scenes from the Museum of International Folk Art, selected by Mariah Coman.

A second book signing will take place from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Dec. 16, at Hasting's Books, Music & Video in the ElVargas Mall.

The Farolitos of Christmas was first published as a Christmas story in *New Mexico Magazine* in 1987. Santa Fe

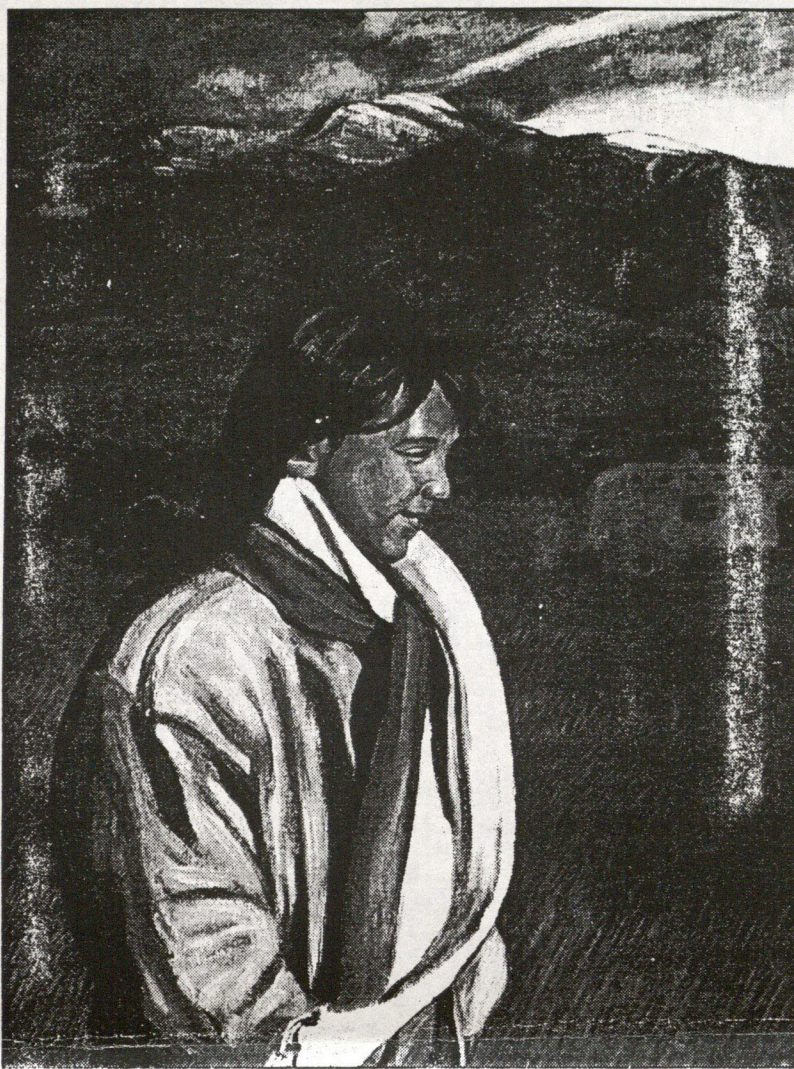


Illustration by Edward Gonzales from 'The Farolitos of Christmas'

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:

Edward Gonzales & Rudolfo Anaya/
'The Farolitos of Christmas'
Paintings & book signing

WHEN:

Reception
4-6 p.m. today
Dec. 15

WHERE:

Governor's Gallery,
The Roundhouse

INFO:

Exhibit through Jan. 8

artist Richard Sandoval did the illustrations for the original version.

Anaya, a professor emeritus of Chicano literature and creative writing at the University of New Mexico, said he made up the tale as one of the many stories he told his young granddaughter — this one about the possible origin of *farolitos*, the glowing, candle-lit paper bags that line New Mexican homes and buildings at Christmas.

When Hyperion expressed an interest in re-publishing the story, the author wanted his longtime friend, Gonzales, to do the illustrations.

"I think the book required a realism that would capture that time — about 1944, during

World War II," Anaya said.

"And (Gonzales) had been doing a lot of Hispanic faces."

Like Luz, the other faces in the book were drawn from real people. The artist's own step-father became the *abuelo*, Luz's grandfather, who is too ill to chop pi on wood to build *luminarias* — the small stacked-wood bonfires the family lights each Christmas Eve in front of their house.

Without *luminarias*, the villagers, who play *los pastores* in a traditional Christmas Eve performance about the shepherds' journey to see the Christ child, won't stop in front of Luz's house to sing and then be invited inside for *posole* and *biscochitos*.

So Luz comes up with the idea of putting candles in small paper bags to light *los pastores'* way to her house. She hopes the "little lanterns" also will surprise and delight her father if he comes home from the war in time.

Luz gets the idea for the *farolitos* while watching the village grocer pour sugar into a paper bag. As a model for the grocer, Gonzales used Don Ortiz, who owns Don Juan Gifts and Gallery in Sena Plaza.

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Ortiz's father used to own a grocery store in Santa Fe. When Gonzales asked him to pose, Ortiz pulled out his apron and scoop and was ready for the job.

Gonzales said he put realism into the illustrations through many small details as well.

"There's the woodstove and there are very few things on the walls — just family photos, a cross over the door, a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe," he said. "It was sparse and simple like my own grandparents' home."

Gonzales, who was raised in a barrio in Albuquerque's North Valley, has dedicated his career to portraying the Chicano experience in New Mexico. It has led many mural painting projects in schools, curated exhibits of Hispanic artists and was one of the founders and first chair of Contemporary Hispanic Market.

With his paintings for *The Farolitos of Christmas*, Gonzales said he wanted to reach out to New Mexican children who can identify with the book's imagery.

"Kids, and even adults, can say, 'That's me! That's my grandfather!'" he said.

And with his use of strong colors and light, he created a visual sense of the special character of Luz and her family.

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