

FUSION

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Martha Batiz Zuk

Writer without borders

By Jeannine Pitás

Mexican-born fiction writer Martha Batiz Zuk was no stranger to success before immigrating to Canada in 2003. At the age of 20, she received a prestigious arts grant from the Mexican government and spent the next several years building a career as a fiction writer and journalist while working as a professional actress and completing a bachelor's degree in English literature.

Soon after meeting and marrying her husband, she moved to El Paso, Texas. Life in the new country provided quite a culture

shock compared to her former life among Mexico City's cultural and intellectual community. "I don't think I gave El Paso a fair chance," she says. "I like it now, but at the time I couldn't relate to the Chicano culture there, and I missed Mexico so much."

However, returning home was not an easy option for Zuk, her husband and their newly born twin daughters. After much consideration, they decided to move to Canada.

"It was a very freeing experience," she says. "We knew no one here; we were starting completely from zero. But I felt like I could do what I wanted."



Martha Batiz Zuk is a Mexican-born writer.



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Soon, Zuk made connections with the Hispanic Canadian community. She took several writing workshops and enrolled in the postdoctoral program at University of Toronto's Spanish department. After participating in a three-day summer writing marathon, she completed the Spanish version of her first novel, *The Wolf's Mouth*, which placed second in the Dominican Republic's prestigious Case de Teatro literary contest. Following its huge success, she was offered the chance to publish an English version of the book with publisher Exile Editions.

"I'd already had a translation done, but it was too literal, and I was not satisfied. It changed the register of the language too much," says Zuk. Fortunately, the editorial staff at the publishing house helped her to translate and revise the book, which was released in 2010.

She has also taught at several universities, including University

of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies, where in 2009 she founded a Spanish creative writing program. "I've always found writing workshops helpful," she says. "I wanted other immigrant writers to have this same opportunity to develop their own voice in a workshop setting."

"All students begin by writing about the trauma of having left their home behind, the experience of starting a new life," she states. "Later, they write about returning home and finding that they don't quite fit in as they once did — that a hybrid identity is their only true option."

For herself, she says, "I cannot go back to being just Mexican, and I will never be only Canadian. The marvel of this country, though, is that the hyphen is normal here," she says.

"I firmly believe that everything needs to be understood from more than just one angle, and in Canada this happens. This is why I love it here so much." ❁