BOOKMARKS

BILL FINLEY

From left: Geneva Escobedo, Sylvia Merino and Flora Grateron met in a writers group. All three are now published authors.

3 Latinas' shared journey from writers to authors

BILL FINLEY
Special to the Arizona Daily Star

Rincon Writers is a small, informal group of retired women who meet monthly to chat, have lunch, and help one another sharpen their prose.

One of these days soon, they might want to consider a new name.

"Rincon Authors," maybe, because three of group's nine members have published a book this year.

Meet Geneva Escobedo, who has remembered many of those who have touched her life with 60 poems and stories in "Reflections of the Heart."

Then there is Flora Grateron, whose "Open Doors, Cuentos de Familia" is a collection that looks at her Hispanic heritage and features her father, who died in December at age 102.

The third Rincon author is Sylvia Merino, who recounts how she became a person she never thought she could be in a memoir called "Unraveled."

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Authors

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All three titles are available at Antigone Books, 411 N. Fourth Ave., and online at Barnes & Noble.

"I'm so proud of us!" Escobedo said, happily, and for good reason.

Each of them had a hand in each of the books.

Each is now a published author.

Escobedo, Grateron and Merino met through a larger writing collective, Sowing the Seeds. When retirement gave them more time to write, the new group began meeting every month for lunch.

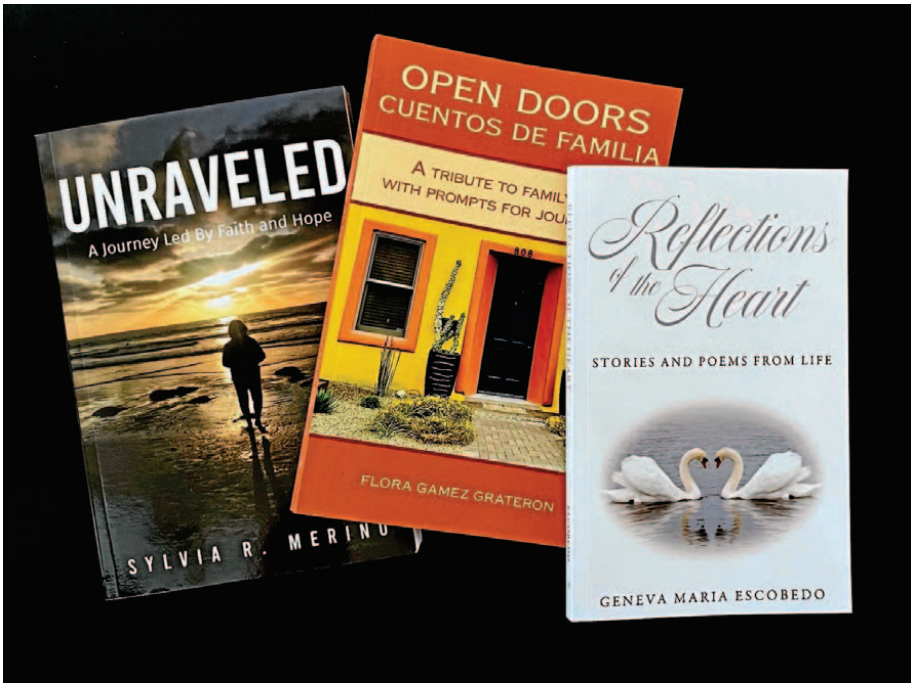
"We started calling ourselves Rincon Writers because we would meet at Rincon Market," Escobedo recalled. "I think there were six of us when we started, about 10 years ago. We'd catch up for a while, have lunch, and then work on our writing. We'd all share our own work, then listen to feedback from the others. What they liked, didn't like, things we might add. More than anything, it just encouraged us to keep on writing."

The three retired Latinas continued to meet during the pandemic, albeit on Zoom, and now their sessions are held in each other's homes.

Typically, there will be three "prompts," or topics, and each member will write a short story reflecting on one of the prompts. On other occasions, they will share excerpts from their current project. Together, the group will help polish each one.

"Not all of us want to publish, but we all love to write," Escobedo said. "It's a great way to keep our creative juices going."

Escobedo was the first in the group to see her name on the cover of a book. Released in 2017, "Dichos de mi Padre" is a collection of sayings she heard while sitting at the kitchen table growing up in Safford.



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"I started journaling when I was in college at (Arizona State University)," she recalled, "and started collecting my parents' dichos way back then. Dichos are words of wisdom that become Spanish-language cliches. They can be poetic, funny, serious. They would come out in conversation and I'd write them down."

Years later, while the director of academic and multicultural programs at Pima Community College, she began thinking about getting them published.

"My No. 1 goal when I retired in 2016 was to finish that book," she said. "By the time it came out, I wanted to write more."

Grateron grew up in Texas but later moved to Tucson and became a middle-school teacher in the Sunnyside School District. Mid-career, she took classes in creative writing at the University of Arizona.

"I was older than most of the others in the class, so my perspective was different than a lot of theirs, but they were really interested in my culture," she said. "My culture and my language have always been important to me. They encouraged me to write more about those things, so I did."

Grateron retired in 2020, and debuted with "Through the Door, Cuentos de Casa" in 2023.

"It's hard to tell when I started writing this book," she confessed. "I wrote bits and pieces of it for a long time. I've always had a notebook with me. I'm always writing things down."

Her more recent book is something of a sequel, featuring her late father.

"Unraveled: A Journey Led by Faith and Hope" is the first book by Merino, a native Tucsonan whose career included 30 years at IBM before she retired in 2019.

She, too, grew up in a traditional Hispanic home, but constant criticism from her mother — and the teasing she heard at school — left scars that took a lifetime to heal.

"When I retired is when I seriously thought of writing," Merino said. "It was very therapeutic for me. It let me go back through my life, and realize I became the person I never thought I could be. The writing group really helped me with my story. I would write, they would critique, I would correct. I owe them a lot."

Not surprisingly, all three women already have new books under way.

They are, after all, authors now. That's what authors do.

FOOTNOTES

■ "Haunted Ever After," the latest book by Tucson author Jen DeLuca, will release Tuesday, Aug. 13. Mostly Books, 6208 E. Speedway, will help DeLuca celebrate by hosting a pub-day party that evening at 6 p.m. For more, visit mostlybooksaz.com.

■ Sarah T. Dubb, author of "Birding with Benefits," will be featured at a Bookstore Romance Day event Aug. 19 at Stacks Book Club, 1880 E. Tangerine Road, in Oro Valley. The Tucson author will be in conversation with Bonnie Callahan. For more, visit stacksbookclub.com/events. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. Admission is $7.

■ The University of Arizona Campus Store, closed all summer for renovations, will reopen Aug. 19. Among the things renovated: the store's name. Until now, it had been known as the UA Bookstore.

■ Retired Pima Community College writing professor Meg Files will be the Pima County Public Library's Writer in Residence this fall. Aspiring authors are invited to attend her workshops or arrange private sessions to discuss their work. For more, visit library.pima.gov/writer.

■ This year's Sealey Challenge is well underway. Each August, poet Nicole Sealey invites us to read one book of poetry every day of the month. The University of Arizona Poetry Center co-hosts the event with Sealey, and welcomes participants to utilize its collection. For more, visit poetry.arizona.edu.

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