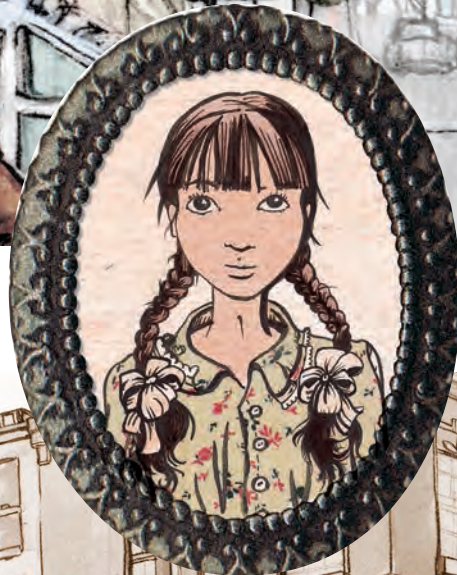




LOS PIRINEOS



*The mostly true memoirs of
Esperancita Gómez*



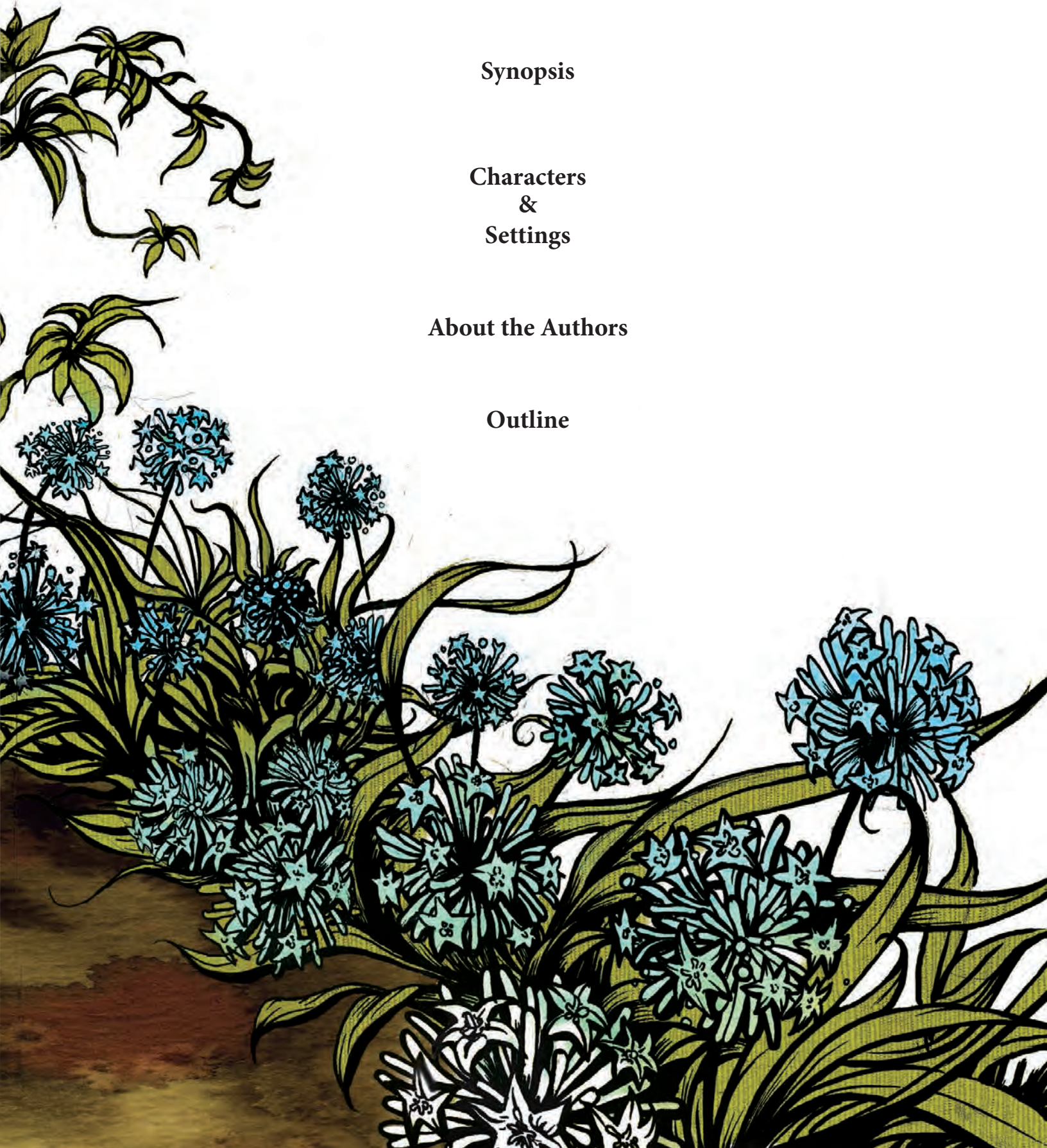
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PITCH FOR LOS PIRINEOS

Los Pirineos chronicles young Esperancita Gómez's upbringing in and eventual exile from the political turmoil of 1940's Colombia. Told in graphic novel format, through the eyes of a youth migrant and the lens of childhood imagination, Los Pirineos, presents a story filled with humor and tenderness, juxtaposed with alienation and loss.

Esperancita is a lovable tomboy, trapped between the conservative social culture of 1940's Colombia, and her natural inclination to act like anything other than the "señoritinga" or little lady, she is expected to be. In the city of Bogotá it seems like she can never do anything right, but at Los Pirineos the family ranch, high up in the Andes, Esperancita is free to explore the world and get into countless hilarious scrapes with her best friend, Guillermo.

But a heavy shadow lingers over the relative safety and security of Esperancita's world. The adults have mysterious conversations, which change as she approaches, and her father, a union organizer, has secret meetings and begins to disappear for longer and longer periods of time. On April 9th, 1948, two events occur which shape Esperancita's future : She is expelled from school for biting the chubby arm of a particularly cruel nun, and the leftist presidential candidate, Jorge Ecelier Gaitan, is brutally assassinated, abruptly ending her father's career and sparking a political powder keg which plunges the country into a reign of violence. Esperancita's world is dramatically altered and she must flee Colombia, seeking asylum in the US, and abandoning the only home she has ever known.

Now as a new American, Esperancita struggles to make sense of her past while at the same time adjusting to a new language, new roles and responsibilities, and navigating a culture which seems so incredibly foreign.

Los Pirineos is comparable to well known graphic novels Persepolis and American Born Chinese, but is uniquely distinguished by being the product of a mother/daughter team, it's ability to appeal to multiple age groups, it's sense of humor, and it's award winning illustrative style.



*From Bogotá 1948
to Nueva York 1952*





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Synopsis

Act 1

New York City, Spanish Harlem 1952 Fall & Colombia 1947

Ten year old, ESPERANCITA GOMEZ is a new immigrant to the US. She has narrowly escaped the violence of El Bogotazo, the harrowing start of a civil war now raging in her native Colombia. She fled along with her older sister MEISI, her MAMI, and her grandmother MA SARITA, but her beloved PAPI, a political leader in the workers party, has been left behind.

Esperancita's family now live in a drab but furnished, two-room apartment, above a bar in Spanish Harlem. She misses Colombia desperately and fears she will never see Papi, Guillermo, or her country again. Everything is unfamiliar and she feels isolated by language and loneliness, but at the same time curious about her new surroundings. Ma Sarita, gives her a journal as a welcome gift. Through the journal we are transported back to Colombia and the people and places Esperancita longs for.

The women must adjust to their new home and sudden change in status. Mami, who came from privilege, gets a job working in a factory, sewing fancy ladies' undergarments. She enrolls the girls in school. They have no appropriate clothing and must wear the outfits they wore on the plane. Though teased for her fancy party dress and unfamiliar accent, Esperancita makes some new friends who remind her a lot of Guillermo.

Characters & Settings



The Kids

Esperancita Gómez



Esperancita age 7
Colombia

Esperancita is too tall and too bony, with long braids and dark skin. With an impulsive, curious nature and a big mouth, in the city of Bogotá it seems like she is always doing something wrong. Here she is oppressed by the expectation that she act like a *señorita* (little lady) a role for which she is definitely not cut out.

This contrasts with Los Pirineos, where Esperancita is free to wear overalls and *alparagatas* (straw sandals) instead of scratchy dresses and tight leather shoes. Here she can go without bathing and keeping her fingernails clean, and spend time with her best friend and favor-

ite cousin Guillermo, doing everything from debating social issues to going exploring. In both places, though tormented herself for her awkwardness, she can be just as cruel to others; she and Guillermo constantly tease each other and their peers, mimicking the adults' preoccupation with race, skin color, and class in their constant flow of insults.

When Esperancita is forced to migrate to the United States, she finds that many of her problems follow her. Her difficulties with school are compounded by not understanding English and feeling like an outsider. Even her sister pretends not to know her. But she still has her family and her freedom, and making sense of her Colombian memories in her journal gives her the foundation to start a new life.



Esperancita age 10
Nueva York



*Meisi age 13
Nueva York*

Meisi Gómez

Esperancita's older sister Meisi (May-see) is her perfect opposite. Able to read at age three, Meisi is beautiful, wellspoken, and graceful—in other words, a recreation of Mami. Her embroidery is neat and pretty. She's a good dancer. Her clothing never gets wrinkled or stained, nor does her skin get freckled or dark.

Meisi always feels embarrassed by Esperancita, especially in America where her sister's rambunctiousness makes their status as immigrants all the more obvious.

Guillermo Carvajal

Guillermo is a short boy with a slender build, pale skin, blond hair and dancing blue eyes. Their difference in coloring becomes a constant source of teasing between himself and Esperancita. Despite their bickering it is obvious the children love each other deeply. Guillermo is a lonely child whose father, a macho cattleman, mistreats him terribly. Papi however treats him like the son he never had. Though leaving Colombia is very hard on Esperancita, dealing with the family's emigration in many ways is harder on Guillermo.

Guillermo's greatest gift is a sense of otherworldly knowledge which pulls Esperancita away from the mundane sides of her life. He's very funny, good with a slingshot, can draw maps that expose the lo-



*Guillermo age 7
Colombia*

cation of secret rooms, and tell ghost stories so frightening that the little hairs on the back of Esperancita's neck stand up. He even unravels the truth when a mysterious cross of flowers suddenly appears on the lawn of Los Pirineos!

Aurora Carvajal



Aurorita is Guillermo's older sister, and the oldest in the group. To the adults, she can do no wrong. To the other children she is notorious tattletale and is universally disliked. Aurorita has a nasty streak, which only gets worse as the political turmoil takes its toll on the family.

Remedios, the daughter of a ranch hands at Yalu befriends Esperancita and Guillermo. She a little older than them and shares Esperancita's dark complexion and straight dark hair, in fact looking more like a sister to her than Meisi does. Remedios loves her home and shares its natural beauty with Esperancita and Guillermo. Papi treats Remedios like one of the family, with no regards to class. In the end, Remedios risks her life to warn the Gomezes of a plot to assassinate them.

Remedios



Los Muchachitos



A group of Puerto Rican boys Esperancita befriends in New York at her first school in Spanish Harlem. They are bigger and louder than Guillermo, but they are welcoming and funny and their senses of humor remind her of home.



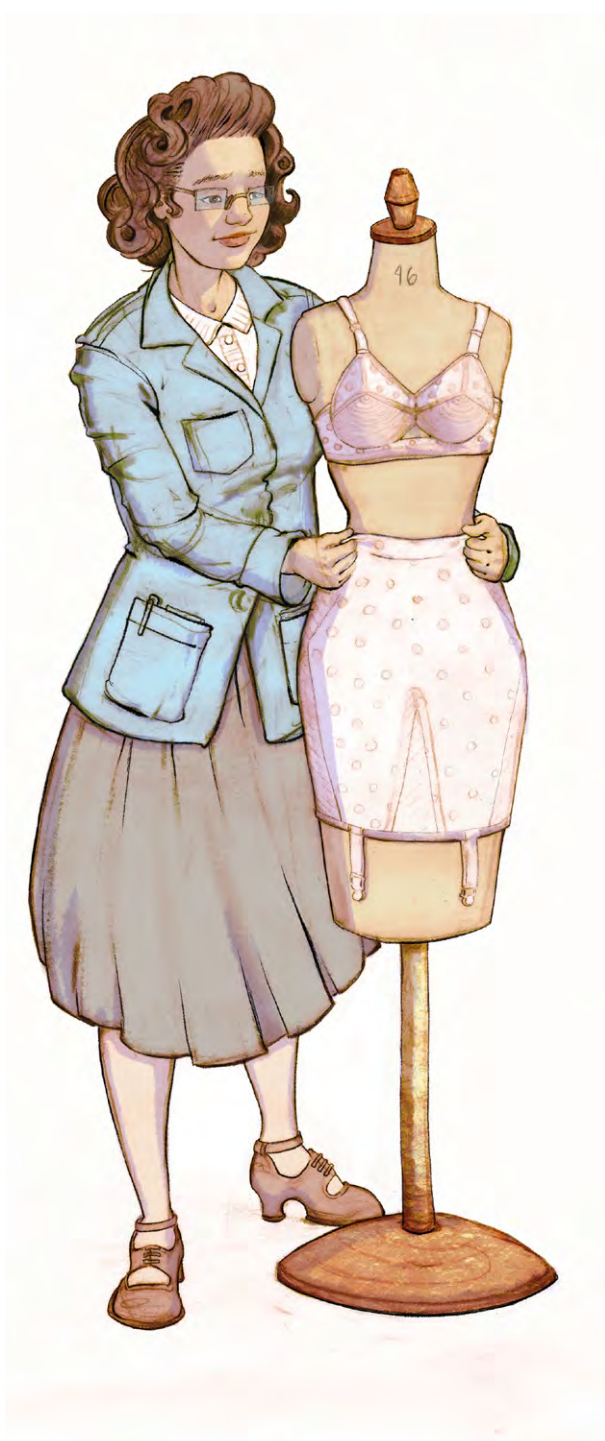
The Adults

Gustavo Gómez Zárate (Papi)

Gustavo is a giant of a man who mixes shrewd intelligence with a youthful spirit and faith in others. He is a loving father, but his family comes second to his politics. Gustavo leads the railroad workers' union and devotes every minute possible to widespread rallying for Jorge Elíecer Gaitán, the presidential candidate to whom he tied their all of their fates, and who he believes will lead Colombia to a modern workers' state.

Politics was not Gustavo's first ambition. What he wanted more than anything else was to become a fighter pilot! Ma Pina however, wouldn't hear of it, threatening to cut him out of the family should he pursue it. Gustavo's popularity among Colombians lies in his how he can come across as a big kid. This manifests itself most in his love of children. Not only is he a second father to Guillermo, but he is the one adult who remains undisturbed by Esperancita's inability to fit into societal norms. He has faith in her ability to do anything, including ride and shoot. When Gaitan is assassinated, Gustavo has plans on top of plans to protect his family, but ultimately it is his kindness to children which ends up saving all their lives.

Marina Maldonado Gómez



Marina, Nueva York

Marina is a beauty from the Caribbean coast, with skin the color of cream and pillowy chestnut curls; friends say that when Gustavo met Marina, it was like he'd heard the call of a *sirena*. They may often argue about politics and the precarious position he lands them in, but Marina and Gustavo have a very loving marriage. Marina is very fashionable, smart and well mannered, a proper Colombian lady and is raising her girls to be the same. Since Gustavo is both too kind and too busy, Marina becomes a full-time parent.

Marina's projection of force and bravery is a mask. In Colombia, she is as petrified by all the violence as anyone. And in New York, to provide for her family she must adjust from being a privileged woman to an immigrant factory worker who terribly misses her husband. When Marina lets the façade crack, she and Esperancita achieve their closest moments. Though she pushes her girls to learn English as quickly as possible, she herself makes no attempt.



Ma Pina - Delfina Zárate de Gómez

Delfina is a sharp, life-worn woman who wears the black of perpetual mourning, with a pearl-handled pistol strapped to her leg and a leather whip dangling from her hip. A very beautiful young girl, she was the second wife to a very wealthy old man and was soon a widow with four children and a ranch to manage. Ma Pina is now the meanest grandmother in Colombia.

She rides out at first light to patrol her property on *Pólboro*, (Gunpowder) the biggest horse on the ranch. She considers her grandchildren as annoying additions to the livestock. Her own children are little better in her eyes, especially Papi, whose political work she regards as traitorous, working against the interests of ranchers like themselves. The reality is that Delfina relishes having choke hold over the family, but the country's instability makes that control begin to slip.

Mamá Sarita - Sara Maldonado de Gómez

If Ma Pina was the meanest grandmother in all of Colombia, Mamá Sarita was the kindest. From the day her two daughters married the two Gómez sons, the fate of the Gómez family became completely entwined with her own, and she shapes it as much in her soft ways as Ma Pina does in her hard ones.

Mama Sarita was born in poverty, married into wealth, and was widowed into poverty again. She was used change and to supporting herself and her girls, and perhaps for that reason, quickly finds her footing in a new life in the US. When Esperancita's family flees to the US, it is Mama Sarita who greets them at the airport, and helps them to adjust.



And when Esperancita cries after being coated with smelly bleaching cream for the millionth time, it is Mama Sarita who tells her, “Don’t worry that dark skin of yours is beautiful...and I promise, it’s going to drive the Gringos crazy!”

Blanca



Blanca is a servant at Los Pirineos, but the unspoken truth about her is that she is also Ma Pina’s niece. Left crippled and stunted by Polio, she now lives as a charity case under her aunt, assigned to take care of the grandchildren. The other unspoken truth about Blanca is that her disability means nothing. A fast thinker and actor, she anticipates the children’s every move and keeps troublesome things from happening. More importantly, her love for the youngest members of the family warms up Ma Pina’s cold house.

Conchita

Conchita is the Gómez girls’ nanny in Bogotá. A lively woman with an eye for a handsome man, she comes from a poorer upbringing than the Gómez family; something Esperancita reminds her of in angry moments. But Conchita is kind and scrappy. She’s had to plan in the past on how to find her next meal. During the 9 de abril, her resourcefulness, cleverness, and forethought keeps the family from starving.



The Settings



Los Pirineos (Los Pee-ree-nay-os)

Los Pirineos the family ranch, nestled high in the Andes Mountains, outside the city of Bogotá, has been in the family for at least 3 generations on Gómezes. It took seven days for a rider on horseback to circle the ranch completely and at it's highest elevation was snow, at its lowest, coffee and orange groves. You could go from winter to summer, never leaving Los Pirineos. There was no running water or electricity. Instead it offered endless blue skies, rolling fields of the thickest greenest grass, a wood fire hearth with a cook who made the best arepas in the world, and most importantly to the children, almost perfect freedom.

As Colombia becomes less and less safe, Los Pirineos becomes a sanctuary where the Gómez family take refuge from the violence. It is a place they can hide, until they find their way to Spanish Harlem and a new life in Los Estados Unidos.



Bogotá, Colombia

Bogotá, a very modern and cosmopolitan city high in the Andes mountains, is the capitol of Colombia. During the school year, Esperancita and the Gómez family live in Bogotá in a big apartment, in a nice neighborhood, in the middle of town.

Bogotá is also the site of *El Bogotazo*, April 9th 1948, the infamous day of Gaitan's assassination and the start of the civil war. Esperancita's never forgets the sound of guns, the smell of fire, and the petrifying fear. It sets the family on the run, eventually leading them to seek asylum in the US as political refugees.





Yalu (Yah- loo) in Tolima, Colombia

Yalu, is a modern ranch in the tropical climate of *Tolima*, closer to the Pacific Coast. Sugar cane grows tall. Bananas and plantains thrive in the hot, humid air, as do snakes, parrots, and millions upon millions of insects.

As the violence of *El nueve de abril*, takes hold of their native region of Colombia, Rancho Yalu seems like the perfect place for Papi and the family to hide. Owned by distant relatives of Guillermo's father, no one knows them there and the battle is very far away.

New York, Spanish Harlem 1951



Upon arrival in New York, Esperancita and her family live in a furnished two room apartment in Spanish Harlem, on a busy street and above a bar with loud music and bright blinking lights that keep her awake at night.

Mami and Mama Sarita work in an undergarment factory, and she and Meisi attend the neighborhood public school. Full of curiosity, Esperancita enjoys observing the neighborhood from the perch of her second floor window. But things that should be fun about her new home, like her first trip to Midtown Manhattan to go to the Automat, are full of mystery and only serve to make her feel less American.

Meanwhile, Papi is still danger in Colombia, hiding from the government and trying to get papers. Esperancita fears he will never be able to join them.

About the Authors



Leila Esperanza Gómez was born in Colombia and is now a retired NYC public school Science teacher. She holds graduate degrees in her first language, Spanish and Latin American Literature, and in her first love, the Environmental Sciences. She is a proud alumna of the City University of New York. Now in her second career, Leila Esperanza works helping new immigrants, just like herself, traverse the complex New York City Department of Education enrollment system. In her spare time she weaves fanciful shawls, and of course, she writes.



Sara Gómez Woolley is an award-winning, graphic novelist, illustrator, and educator living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been recognized by the New York Society of Illustrators, the Society of Illustrators Los Angeles, and 3×3 Magazine.

She has worked on a variety of exciting projects for clients including DC COMICS, Image Comics, Scholastic, Random House, Parallax Press, For Beginners Books, The New Castle Science Convention UK, and Round Robin Editrice, Italy. Her most recent project *Wonder Woman Warbringer* which she is coloring for DC Comics is due out January 2020.



She was honored this year to be chosen by the US State Department as a cultural ambassador to Algeria, representing the US at the Algiers International Comics Festival (FIBDA). The largest festival of it's kind in Africa or the Middle East, it featured artists from all over the world, with The United States as the country of honor.

Sara's ongoing personal project, a fictionalized graphic memoir written collaboratively with her mother and art partner Leila Gómez Woolley, *Los Pirineos the mostly true memoirs of Esperancita Gómez*, was singled out for award by the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, the largest Latino arts organization in the US.

Her children's book *Charlotte and the Quiet Place* Parallax Press 2015, a picture book featuring a young girl of color growing up in the big city, and searching for a quiet place, won a Foreword Reviews, Book of the Year Gold Medal, an IPPY Award (Independent Publisher Book Awards) Silver Medal, a National Parenting Publications Award Bronze Medal, and is featured in *Creative Quarterly Journal of Art & Design* issue 41.

Sara was a panelist at San Diego Comicon 2019 on the Art of the Graphic Memoir. She is a comics academic, regularly facilitating events and discussion around race, gender, and multiculturalism in the comic book medium. She is a proud alumna of the City University of New York, where she is now illustration faculty for the New York City College of Technology, Department of Communication Design.