

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

October 25, 2016

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From Migrant Child to University Professor

As a child, Francisco Jiménez didn't stay in one place for very long. Born in Tlaquepaque, Mexico, in 1943, he and his family came to United States and found migrant work in the fields of California.

Moving from one place to the next made it impossible for Jiménez to attend school with any regularity, but he didn't let that stop him from pursuing an education. And now, decades later, he is a professor emeritus in the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at Santa Clara University.

He also is an award-winning author and the recipient of UC Santa Barbara's 13th annual Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. The award will be presented during a ceremony at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 1, in Corwin Pavilion at UCSB. The event is free and open to the public.

Jiménez's collection of autobiographical short stories, "The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child" (University of New Mexico Press, 1997) has won several literary awards, including a Booklist Editors' Choice; the Boston Globe Horn Book Award for Fiction; the Americas Award; the California Library Association John and Patricia Beatty Award; a Jane Addams Honor Book Award; an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults; the FOCAL Award given by the Los Angeles Public Library System; and the University of San Francisco's Reading the World Award.

“The Circuit,” or “Cajas de Cartón,” has been published in Spanish, English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Italian. In addition, the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts adapted portions for a one-act play that has been performed in various schools and colleges in California and at the 2005 Fringe Festival in Edinburgh.

“Francisco Jiménez’ stories are those of the courage and dedication of Latino immigrants and their children to achieve the American Dream despite many discriminatory obstacles,” said Mario T. García, professor of Chicana and Chicano studies and of history at UCSB, and the organizer of the annual Leal Award. “They are stories of the quest by Latinos for educational justice and opportunity.”

“Breaking Through” (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2002), the critically acclaimed sequel to “The Circuit,” follows Francisco and his family as they are forced to leave California, and “Reaching Out” (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2008), the third in the memoir series, follows the narrator’s journey from high school through college. In “Taking Hold: From Migrant Childhood to Columbia University” (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2015), Francisco leaves everything behind to attend Columbia University in New York.

Among Jiménez’s other works are “La Mariposa” (2002), which won a Parent’s Choice Recommended Award and was a Smithsonian’s Notable Book for Children. His book “The Christmas Gift/El Regalo de Navidad” (2008), an illustrated bilingual book for children, was named a Notable Children’s Book by the Library Association, and received the Américas Commanded List Award and the Cuffie Award from Publisher’s Weekly.

Jiménez received his Bachelor of Arts from Santa Clara University and his master’s and doctoral degrees from Columbia University under a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. He has served on various professional boards and commissions, including the California Council for the Humanities; the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities; the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; the Santa Clara University Board of Trustees; and the Far West Lab for Educational Research Development.

He is the recipient of numerous honors, including, most recently, the 2016 John Steinbeck Award, which is presented to artists and activists whose work exemplifies the spirit of Steinbeck’s social engagement. Previous recipients include musician Bruce Springsteen, MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, filmmaker Ken Burns and United

Farm Workers co-founder Dolores Huerta.

The Leal Award is named in honor of Luis Leal, a professor emeritus of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCSB, who was internationally recognized as a leading scholar of Chicano and Latino literature. Previous recipients of the award include Demetria Martínez, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Graciela Limón, Pat Mora, Alejandro Morales, Helena Maria Viramontes, Oscar Hijuelos, Rudolfo Anaya, Denise Chávez, Hector Tobar, John Rechy and Reyna Grande.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.