

# SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Antonio López

## **County of My Name**

Por la señal de la santa cruz mountains,  
lies a tomb with my own name.

Antonio López II. Feb 5th, 1938.  
There's a happy ending to all this.

Else, there's no point in being here, this here  
that hulled your parents into a country

of a county, taken for gold & granite,  
that was once Ohlone, Spanish,

Mexican, American. No wonder your name  
bounces off the walls of every hyphen

no wonder the taste of blood in sea salt  
where surfers chase their death wish. Breath-taking,

isn't it? The Devil's Trail off Highway 1, the west  
-side of East Palo Alto nested within Palo Alto,

the Four Seasons. What man-made bluff, the U.S.  
101, the sheer force of a zip. I think about this a lot.

What if I was born in Mex? If father never crossed?  
If a republican president never signed the amnesty

into law? I would've never learned to sing  
the pledge of allegiance at kindergarten,

Would've never had Slocum sign my birth  
certificate as then-county clerk assessor,

would've been a resident, a son of EPA,  
What a strange act. For papers to ask

a newborn, do you wish to run?  
As if there is a divine rite reason

for the stroke of citizenship.  
As if the once upon your bloodline

a ship wasn't granted safe passage.  
A guard didn't doze off. A policeman

didn't rubber stamp the face of your face  
of your face of Manilla or Michoacán

or Louisiana or a lil' place in Polynesia  
called Samoa. We all from these shores

of somewhere. We come from a tradition  
where you learn to grow up fast

by giving speeches to the dead. Not a day  
goes by I don't see Mama Dee again

at First United Methodist. The body  
as light as a proclamation. Truth is,

no politician is born to do this.  
You learn to lead the ship amidst

an ocean of Pacific Islanders.  
Look, whatever side of the island

you hail mary, we all just want  
a woman who looks like our mothers

to whisper, *You're gonna be okay without me,*  
*my son.* To be loved enough that someone drove

halfway to the edges of this earth for you,  
westbound, down the 92, to attend a six-hour

study session in the City of Half Moon Bay,  
wade through six hours of slides and Q&A

*and each speaker will have approximately 60 seconds*  
to convince me of their humanity, to convince 3

out of the 5, yes on 555 Kelly. Yes on 555 Kelly.  
O Mercy, Mercy Housing, may we live in a country

where the people who pick our food, have a roof  
over their bullets, may they never have to wake Marciano

Martinez again, may they never walk the green rows  
of ICE, may a child never fear a uniform or color

leaving 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. May all the living things in SMC  
Have free enjoyment of their liberty, and Wi-Fi

from the elfin butterfly of San Bruno  
from the man dressed as a crow

selling Fiesta Insurance down Middlefield,  
and give us this day our Daly

City, those foghorns in the distance  
guiding ships home. From the roar

of planes in Millbrae, to the Dungeness crab,  
to the sea urchin of Moss beach, to the salty benches

inside courtroom 6A where I saw Fabián,  
after six years and a private school later

get sentenced for life with the possibility  
of a poem, from the superior courts,

just two football fields from where we stand,  
from having to take your belt off before getting in,

from our nation's capital, where I learned to put on  
a tie, from South San Francisco, post-Industrial City

from old factories and meatpacking plants and warehouses  
from sprawling research parks of Genentech, from Gilead

in Foster City, from curing the world's diseases  
hepatitis C, from First Five Families,

from finding a damn day care for your babies,  
from this deep ancestral need to adapt

we the people of San Mateo County.