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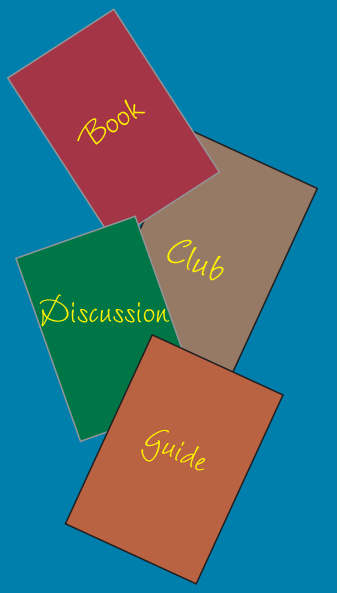

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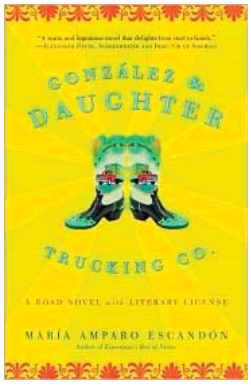
González & Daughter Trucking Co.:
A Road Novel with Literary License

About the Book…



Set in a Mexican prison and on highways of the U.S. Southwest, *González & Daughter Trucking Co.* deals with women's relationships, corruption and forgiveness within the context of a hybrid border culture. This work also reflects a linguistic reality in bicultural California, exploring the merger of Spanish and English vernacular (Spanglish), as well as different subcultural "lingoes."

Serving a sentence in a prison in Mexico, Libertad González finds a clever way to pass the time with the weekly "Library Club,"—reading to her fellow inmates from whatever books she can find in the prison's meager supply. The story that emerges, though, has nothing to do with the words printed on the pages.

She tells of a former literature professor and fugitive of the Mexican government who reinvents himself as a trucker in the United States. There he falls in love with a wild woman with whom he shares his truck and his life—that is until Joaquín González unexpectedly finds himself alone on the road with a baby girl, and thus *González & Daughter Trucking Co*. is born.

Joaquín and his daughter make the cab of an 18-wheeler their home, sharing everything—adventures, books, truck-stop chow, and memories of the girl's mother—until one day the girl grows into a woman, and a chance encounter with one man causes her to rebel against another.

With her stories, Libertad enthralls a group of female prisoners every bit as eccentric as the tales she tells. In *González and Daughter Trucking Co*., bestselling author María Amparo Escandón seamlessly blends together these elements into one compelling and unexpected conclusion that will have you cheering for Libertad and filled with joy.

About the Author…

Born in Mexico City and currently a U.S. resident, María Amparo Escandón is a best selling bilingual novelist, short story writer, screenwriter, and film producer. Her award winning work has been recognized for addressing bicultural themes such as the immigration experience of Mexicans in the United States. Her stories focus on family relationships,

loss, forgiveness, and self-discovery.

Her innovative style places her among the top contemporary Latin American female writers. Her work has been translated into over 21 languages and is currently read in more than 85 countries.

Escandón wrote her first novel, *Esperanza's Box of Saints* and its Spanish version, *Santitos*, in 1999. She addresses the universal fear of losing a child, a woman's search for identity, and a journey—both geographical and spiritual—that takes Esperanza, the protagonist, through sordid brothels from Mexico to Los Angeles.

It was the number one best seller on the Los Angeles Times Best Sellers List. She was named writer to watch for 1999 by Newsweek magazine, and by the Los Angeles Times for 2000. John Sayles produced the film Santitos, based on her novel, for which she wrote the screenplay. To date, the film has received awards in fourteen film festivals worldwide.

For a detailed bio: **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/María_Amparo_Escandón.**

From Booklist...

From the author of Esperanza's Box of Saints (1999) comes this semi-surreal tale of Libertad Gonzalez, imprisoned in the Mexicali Penal Institute for Women. The jail has a decidedly looser environment than its name implies—one of the wealthier inmates has transformed the yard into a beachfront—and model prisoner Libertad decides to start a book club.

No matter what book she chooses to read aloud from, though, she always has the same story to tell. In telenovela fashion, complete with cliff-hanging chapter endings, she tells her increasingly large audience a story about a former literature professor and fugitive from the Mexican government who becomes a truck driver in the U.S., and his loving but controlling relationship with his daughter.

Libertad's audience grows hooked on the story line (much like Escandon's will), chiming in with heated opinions on the twists and turns of the plot. It soon becomes apparent that the story is Libertad's own, and it has become her way of making sense of her life and her crime.

This highly readable novel is a paean both to storytelling and to freedom.

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Reviews...

"A warm and ingenious novel that delights from start to finish."

—Alexander Payne, Screenwriter and Director of Sideways

"1,001 nights in a Mexicali women's prison... González and Daughter Trucking Co. is about our compulsion to make events into stories and stories into bridges of understanding."

—John Sayles, Screenwriter and Director

"Escandón has delivered us yet another work of art...A whimsical, humorous, and passionate mystery that explores the love and hurt of a father and daughter on the run."

—Jorge Ramos, News Anchor for Univision and Bestselling Author

"An ingenious retelling of Scheherazade's odyssey—but on wheels."

—Ilan Stavans, author of Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language

Topics for Discussion . . .

The Power of Storytelling

From cave painting to the modern novelists, storytelling has been a critical component of how humans make sense of the world. Storytelling gives shape to our experiences and helps us share with others what is meaningful and important to us.

Think about how storytelling plays a role in your life.

1. The subtitle of the novel is a pun (A Road Novel with Literary License). To take literary license is to distort the truth to make a story better. ***How is literary license evident in the novel? Why does Libertad embellish, and is it important to her prison audience or to you that she has taken literary license?***

2. Literature has a cathartic power in that it allows both writers and readers opportunities to experience, resolve, or confront issues. ***How is Libertad's storytelling cathartic for her and her prison audience?***

3. Libertad learns to read by being read to by her father, and reading to her father helps her remember and appreciate fiction. However, for Libertad, books are ephemeral. To keep them would take up valuable room in the truck cab, so Libertad must throw them out the window. She learns to remember and retell the stories she has read. ***What does this say about oral storytelling versus literature?***

4. Libertad's writing serves a purpose. She is "talking" to those she is unable to communicate with directly (her mother, those killed in the truck accident). ***What does she accomplish by writing to those she can no longer communicate with directly?***

5. The truckers in the novel serve as a "Greek chorus" by commenting on the happenings of the novel in ways that you and other readers might comment. ***What do we learn about González and his daughter through the truckers? Why was it important for Escandón to include the truckers' perspective?***

6. ***How is Escandón's use of humor throughout the novel successful?***

7. ***Is there significance to the books that Libertad "reads" to the prisoners? What about the books she reads to her father?***

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Freedom vs. Self-Imposed Prisons

Prisons can be emotional as well as physical. The walls of the prisons we construct for ourselves are just as hard to penetrate as the walls of the most secure institution. Consider your own personal prisons and what it might take to scale them.

1. ***Why does Libertad feel a greater sense of freedom behind prison walls than she did on the road with her father?***

2. The act of naming is powerful. What we call ourselves defines how we see each other. ***Consider the names characters in the novel give themselves and what insight we are given into these characters.***

3. ***Discuss the prison Joaquín has constructed for himself. Discuss the irony of his life on the road and the paranoia that rules him.***

4. ***Discuss why the women embrace prison life so readily.***

5. ***Who are the characters in the novel that enjoy the most freedom? Why?***

Family

We make for ourselves different families as we navigate life's highways. Families give us support and acceptance and can be found in the usual places as well as the unexpected. Think about the "families" to which you belong.

1. ***Describe the different "family" groups in Libertad's life and the different functions they serve for her and the reader.***

2. The women in the prison form a type of family. ***Discuss some of the examples of this family and how it functions.***

3. ***How is Warden Guzmán similar to Joaquín in terms of being a parental figure or guardian?***

Forgiveness and Redemption

As in many classic tales, forgiveness and redemption and how we go about achieving them are at the center of the novel. *What makes forgiveness and redemption such critical issues that we examine them over and over again?*

1. ***What does Libertad discover through storytelling? How does storytelling help her forgive herself and her father?***

2. ***How is Libertad's story similar to, yet different from, a confession of guilt? Does telling her story relieve her guilt?***

3. In an interview on National Public Radio's program, "Day to Day," Escandón asks: *"Who is forgiveness for? For the one forgiving or for the one being forgiven?"* ***What do you think?***

Our thanks to Deschutes Public Library, Deschutes County, Oregon, for these discussion questions.