

'Coco' author Diana Lopez on why a Corpus Christi native can best tell Selena's story

[Victoria Camarillo](#), Corpus Christi Caller Times Published 6:30 a.m. CT Oct. 31, 2019 | Updated 8:31 a.m. CT Nov. 1, 2019

If you ask author Diana Lopez, a Corpus Christi native is perhaps best equipped to tell the story of one of the city's most beloved icons.

Full Circle Literary, which represents Lopez, recently announced that Lopez will write a picture book called “¡Canta Conmigo! The Story of Selena Quintanilla,” about the life of the Queen of Cumbia. Publication is set for April 2021 to coincide with what would have been Selena's 50th birthday.

Selena was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2017, and as buzz over Selena ensued, Lopez heard talk that someone should write a picture book about her life.

Lopez, a creative writing instructor at the University of Houston-Victoria, has published several young adult novels, including an adaptation of the Disney movie “Coco.” She thought: “I need to write that book about Selena because I live in Corpus Christi.”

In early 2018, a Los Angeles-based company published “The Life of/La vida de Selena,” a board book targeted to children up to 3 years old. But no one had yet written a picture book about Selena for slightly older children.

“¡Canta Conmigo!” will touch on Selena's childhood, her early interest in singing and her family's time in Lake Jackson, including the restaurant they ran. But mostly, Lopez said, the book will focus on the highlights of her life and themes of family and connecting with an audience.

To prepare for her book, Lopez visited the Selena Museum, in Corpus Christi's west side, and took photos, and she watched and read multiple interviews with Selena's family. She also read books analyzing Selena's influence on Latino culture.

The book will be illustrated by Mexican artist Teresa Martinez, whose “whimsical” style, Lopez said, will “carry Selena's spirit through.”

The story will also feature Selena's journey with Spanish, which many Latino readers may find relatable, Lopez said. “I think a lot of us from this part of Texas have the same

experience of not knowing Spanish and her desire to learn Spanish so she could connect with more people.”

At 52, Lopez is close in age to Selena. She said she can’t remember the first time she heard of Selena; it was like Selena was “always around,” performing at rodeos and quinceañeras, Lopez said. But, like many people, she remembers the day Selena died.

On that day — March 31, 1995 — Lopez was at Horace Mann Middle School in San Antonio, where she was a teacher. It was probably the end of the school day, Lopez recalled, because she didn’t have a class at the time. A student named Roy appeared at Lopez’s door, crying. Lopez assumed other students had been picking on him.

She asked him what had happened. He told her, “Selena died.” Even then, Selena’s influence was so ubiquitous that she was known by her first name.

Lopez ventured into the hallway to find students and teachers crying.

“It was this communal grief that her death brought about,” Lopez said. “It was felt by a lot of people, and it’s a hard thing to forget.”



This new Selena mural by San Siguenza was installed on the exterior of the Food Store on Elvira Drive in the Molina neighborhood on Tuesday, July 30, 2019. The previous mural was painted by West Oso High School students in 1995 as a neighborhood tribute to Selena Quintanilla-Perez. (Photo: Rachel Denny Clow/Caller-Times)

It's important for someone who shares a part of Selena's history to tell her story, Lopez said. "There's little details about living in Corpus that I don't think you're going to get from just looking at pictures or even a weekend visit," such as taquerías and other popular locales, she said.

But Lopez also hopes that she can help inspire Corpus Christi kids to chase their dreams, whether they're interested in music, writing or other fields.

She frequently visits area schools to read from and discuss her books. During those visits, she sees Selena on students' shirts, on their collectible cups. She's "ingrained in the Corpus Christi psyche," Lopez said.

"I always think of my books as for somebody, and this is for the children of Corpus Christi," Lopez said. "I fantasize that when the book comes out, I'll get to go to all these schools in Corpus Christi and talk to kids about somebody who lived in Corpus Christi ... and give them the idea that, 'Selena was from Corpus Christi and look what she did. I can do it, too. She was just like us.'

"And I don't think you can have that same impact if you're not a Corpus Christi writer. You wouldn't be living here in the midst of Selenaland," Lopez said with a laugh.

Vicky Camarillo covers education, immigration and other issues in South Texas and the rest of the Lone Star State. [Support local journalism with a subscription to the Corpus Christi Caller-Times.](#)