**Sandra Cisneros**

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954, to a Mexican father and a Chicana mother; she has six brothers and is the only daughter in the family. She moved frequently during her childhood and visited Mexico often, to visit her paternal grandmother. Like Esperanza, the main character in The House on Mango Street, Cisneros recalls these moves as painful experiences: "'Because we moved so much, and always in neighborhoods that appeared like France after World War II--empty lots and burned-out-buildings--I retreated inside myself'" (Sagel 74). Cisneros found an outlet in writing; in high school she wrote poetry and was the literary magazine editor. She earned a BA in English from Loyola University of Chicago in 1976. However, it wasn't until working on her master's degree at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop in the late 1970's that she says she found her particular voice, as a working-class, Mexican-American woman with an independent sexuality. The experience of recognizing her difference from other students at Iowa eventually led to the writing of The House on Mango Street, which was published by Arte Publico Press of Houston in 1984 and won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in in 1985. Returning to Chicago after graduate school, Cisneros worked various jobs that engaged with the Chicano community, including teaching high school drop outs; she also returned to Loyola University as an administrative assistant. In the late 1980s, she divided her time between California and Texas, earning a variety of fellowships and guest lectureships. She won two fellowships from the National Endowment for the arts, one for fiction (1982) and one for poetry (1987). During this time, she wrote her first well received book of poetry, My Wicked, Wicked Ways (1987). She also met her literary agent, Susan Bergholz, who after seeing a small packet of short stories encouraged Cisneros to develop them into what was to becomeWoman Hollering Creek (1991). This collection won the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction of 1991, the Qualitiy Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the Lannan Foundation Literary Award, and was selected as a noteworthy book of the year by The New York Times and the American Library Journal. In 1995, Cisneros won the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; one hour after winning the $225,000 grant, she was back in San Antonio--where she has made her home in this decade--lecturing to students at a local arts center. Much as the writer Esperanza promises to return to Mango Street at the end of that novel, Cisneros has continually returned to her community, showing the powerful connecton between art, politics, and everyday life.

Works Cited

Sagel, Jim. "Sandra Cisneros." Interview. Publishers Weekly 29 March 1991. 74-75.