

OTHER

To My Dear Friend on a Hill in the Clouds — In Memory of Marjorie Agosín

by Dolores Hunskey



In early March 2025, Marjorie Agosín, a Jewish Chilean American poet, human rights activist and professor of Spanish at Wellesley College, passed away. Born in the U.S. to Chilean parents, she returned to Chile at the age of three months, only to come back to the U.S. at the age of 15 as her family fled the Pinochet regime. There, she obtained her PhD in Latin American Literature at Indiana University Bloomington, and went on to teach at Wellesley College as one of the youngest women ever to gain the rank of full professor in the history of the institution. Marjorie Agosín received several awards for her contribution to literature, among them the Orden al Mérito Docente y Cultural Gabriela Mistral, the United Nations Leadership Award, the Fritz Reidlich Award for her work on human rights, and the Pura Belpre Award for her YA novel *I Lived on Butterfly Hill*.

At *Tint Journal*, we had the incredible honour to collaborate with Marjorie on our *Tinted Trails* anthology, a project that she had joined as guest editor and enriched with her manifold learnings and warmhearted thoughts. Receiving the news of her passing, we wanted to pay tribute to this great mind and soul, and are grateful to Dolores Hunskey for sharing the following words with us and the world.

– Lisa Schantl



© Roberta Maierhofer

“Hi. Maybe the sad news has reached you already, but if it hasn’t, I wanted to let you know that Marjorie has passed.”

A message from a friend on the 10th of March 2025 stabbed me. The piercing pain in my chest rendered me motionless and I needed to remind myself to breathe. The words kept echoing in my brain — “Marjorie has passed” — like a broken record, trying to continue but repeatedly getting stuck and starting all over again just to hit the same spot over and over. A calm evening turned into a tempest of emotions and a sleepless night filled with tears and sorrow.

A week or two later, when asked if I was willing to write a few words in the memory of this amazing poet and incredible friend, Marjorie Agosín, I could not have been more honoured.

I sat down and started writing and as I kept trying to do this text justice, I realized that in order to do so, I would have to tear my heart open and let the poetry and pain flow onto the pages and let the love and kindness that were her essence somehow shine through.

Born on the 15th of June 1955, Marjorie left this world a few months before her 70th birthday. In almost seven decades, she built a strong artistic legacy and touched everyone who had the pleasure of her company. She was an exceptional poet, an outspoken activist, an inspiring teacher, and a generous friend. She wrote numerous texts and won various awards. All of that will live on in history books, in academic papers, in stories, and especially in her poetry. Anyone interested in her career, creativity, and activism will easily find testaments to her greatness and will be able to experience them through her writings. However, should somebody be more interested in getting to know Marjorie as a person — a strong woman with a sharp mind and gentle soul — I want to offer them a glimpse of her love and her light instead.

After meeting Marjorie in 2019, our paths continued crossing here and there and our conversations became more and more frequent, until these two misplaced humans (as we liked to call each other) began what would later become a continuous correspondence filled with poetry, love, and mutual yearning for a peaceful world that would enable happy and fulfilling lives for all. Having been given the honour of capturing her voice in an interview was a life-changing opportunity, and her saying that “I’ve captured [her] voice with beauty and love” and that she found the interview “splendid” was all a young artist could wish for.



© Dolores Hunsky

The emails I’ve had the pleasure of receiving came from different places around the world, including Lisbon, Córdoba, Hamburg, Graz, Ljubljana, and Maine. Regardless of where she was, Marjorie always managed to find beauty in it. She managed to inspire me (and countless others) and fill me with hope. Sometimes it felt as if she held my soul in her embrace, refusing to let go until she was convinced that it was safe. No matter where she went, she always spoke of love and art, of beauty and inspiration, of memory and remembering, of joy and hope. As she wrote in one of her emails:

“We must hope and try and simply be in the spirit of joy.”

Marjorie shared my sentiment of wanting this world to be a kinder place and she understood the need for (what we called) “discussing the whispers of our souls.” She always walked with confidence, carrying the wisdom of the sagacious women who came before her, veiled in the spirit of rebellion and child-like mischief. She talked about trauma as if it were her old friend and praised memory for its power of bringing the past to life and for granting a person knowledge, comfort, and place — a sense of company and belonging.

Despite the world breaking her heart again and again with its violence and greed, she remained hopeful and continued to fight. She knew that the only way to stand against the horrors was to be the exact opposite and to keep choosing honesty, justice, and faith.

“Life in this world as we once knew it and imagined it has changed. It seems that violence and the loss of innocent lives is the new world order [...] These are dark times for our polarized world and more than ever we need love, civility, and most importantly dialogue [...] Amidst so much destruction and so much hatred, we will overcome these extraordinary tragedies with love and good will.”

One of the things that I admire the most about her is her refusal to give in, her refusal to surrender. Regardless of the darkness that settled in, she saw the light and she believed in it. She saw through the people, their words, their expressions, their pretence. She wasn't interested in the exterior — she focused on the heart. Perhaps that is why she loved the sea and the clouds so much — their existence is beyond human encroachment and their beauty cannot be measured or conditioned by their tameness. They are comfortable in their vastness and their might.



© Sonia Wiggins Agosín

She always knew what to say and how to say it. When trying to describe her, I would always say that she speaks in poetry. To this day, I believe this is the only way one can describe the manner in which she spoke and the fluidity of her words. For years, I wanted to write a poem that would convey the elegance that emanated from her speech, but the inspiration came only after the word of her passing. I can now only ponder what she would think of it — perhaps she would be flattered, perhaps she would encourage me to publish it, and perhaps she would feel for a moment how deeply I loved and admired her.

Still, I know that her words and her wisdom will never disappear from this world. Her voice will continue to resound with all of those who will dare open their hearts to it. Nowadays, even more so, as the world is busy destroying itself and its beauty. This is partly why I have chosen to share parts of our correspondence here. Her warmth kept my heart beating through various hardships — perhaps it can offer the same asylum to somebody else. Perhaps it will offer shelter and some much-needed company to the lonely souls out there who feel hopeless and abandoned as tyranny and the fast-moving capitalist society oppress them. And perhaps, if I dare to hope and dream the way Marjorie had wanted me to — beyond limits and rationality — perhaps somebody will stumble upon this text and open their heart. Perhaps they will be inspired to give love, poetry, memory, rebellion or hope another chance.

“I feel that the world needs silence. It has become too loud. People taking sides and so many ignorant of historical events. For me, there are not two sides. Only a frail humanity bathed in blood and senseless violence.”

Regardless of how hard I try, I doubt I will ever dare to hope as much as Marjorie encouraged me to. Yet, I will keep trying. And although words repeatedly fail to describe

who Marjorie Agosín is and was, her presence lingers. All her works combined, all the testimonies put together, the collages of memories and the endless lists of adjectives — nothing seems to be able to describe her interaction with the world, the tenderness and warmth that she radiated. She will continue to live on in her work, in the people she influenced, in the hearts of those she held dear, and in the murmurs of love, hope, kindness, and creativity. To anyone wanting to pay tribute to her, here is one of the wishes that kept recurring through our correspondence:

“I want people to feel, to love, to embrace.”

The hole in my heart remains and I imagine it will stay until the day when I am reunited with those who have taught me how to love, sympathize, and inspire. Certainly, Marjorie Agosín is one of the people who touched me and my (he)art the most. I miss her warm presence, the devotion and nonconformity that only she was able to verbalize. Nevertheless, I am grateful to have had the opportunity of meeting her, staying in touch, and calling her a friend. I wish everyone would get a chance to meet their own Marjorie — somebody who loves, inspires and embraces them. Somebody who encourages them and tells them to believe in benevolence, peace, and poetry. Perhaps then — if I dare to dream for a moment longer — humanity would choose acceptance over prejudice.



© Dolores Hunsky