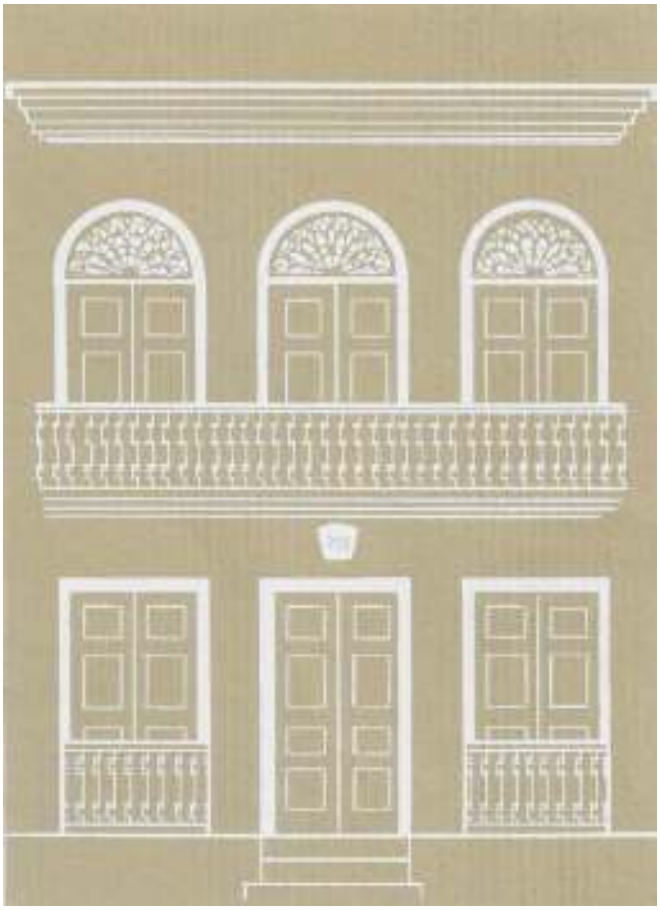
Trouble in Puerto Rico

Barbara E. Lachman
with R. John Blackley



Facade of La Casa del Libro
in its first location, Calle del Cristo 255.
Design by Irene Delano.

This is dedicated to real books and real libraries everywhere.

Schola Antiqua Press
Lexington, Virginia
2016

[titled with apologies to Leonard Bernstein's opera Trouble in Tahiti*]*

Trouble in Puerto Rico

El Fantasma:

Para mi, they came in waves. One after another, mostly in pairs. They rolled in like the waves in the harbor. *Porto Rico*. Who knows where waves begin or end, but while they're on the Island they're filled with a kind of energy very strange to us. We've actually lived our lives here. We have our own rhythms. The eager, energetic Outsiders, with so certain drives they call visions—their energy is all about change, change, push forward. Work hard every day. Most of us don't want to make waves. We dig our toes into the sand and wait for the waves to wash over us, knowing they can't last too long. Inevitably the tide will turn against them, and they'll go home.

How we began the job as co-directors is almost as bizarre as how we lost it.

La Casa del Libro was known in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, as a library-museum of fine printing and rare books. When we arrived in 1988, there was a single, seemingly permanent exhibition behind sliding-glass-fronted cases against one long wall. Behind the glass was an exhibition of posters, prints, and books in honor of Irene Delano, a well-loved pioneer in creating and teaching the art of silk-screen printing on the island; she died in 1982. No collection of rare books to be seen. I was confused and horrified, though friends back home were not at all surprised: who'd ever heard of rare Puerto Rican books anyway?

The collection actually began with a chance meeting in 1955, prompted by Muñoz Marin, the first time the governor of Puerto Rico actually *was* a Puerto Rican. In his efforts to create a middle class on the island, Muñoz Marin had launched a kind of two-pronged plan. One was economic and industrial, called Operation Bootstrap; it provided generous tax incentives for American companies to establish businesses in Puerto Rico (many of these, as it turned out, were pharmaceutical). The other was known as Operation Serenidad, which included most notably the new Conservatory of Music and an annual Casals Festival in honor of the world-famous cellist, whose mother was Puerto Rican. Somewhere between the artistic and the economic, Muñoz Marin conceived the idea of developing fine printing on the Island. When he was informed that Elmer Adler, founder of Pynson Printers in New York, happened to be vacationing on the Island, the governor dispatched one of the leading figures in his Department of Economic Development, Teodoro Moscoso, to invite Adler for lunch, treat him royally, and pick his brain about developing fine printing on the Island.

Adler had just recently retired from Princeton, where he had created the first Graphic Arts Department and was instrumental in developing a world-class collection of rare books for the university. Adler was over 60 at the time and needed a vacation in a warm, sunny spot. Miles of seacoast, endless green, constant Mediterranean breezes, with mountains in the center of the Island were perfect. In the midst of the vacation came Moscoso's invitation and his presentation of the fine-printing idea. Adler's first response was entirely negative, saying "There's no way of encouraging a fine art in an area where it quite simply does not exist." But their discussion did not end there. Adler and Ted Moscoso *did* get along royally: by the time lunch was over they had hatched a plan to create a library-museum in Old San Juan devoted to the art of the book, complete with regular exhibitions open to everyone. Silkscreen posters would be made by local artists to announce them, thus encouraging yet another form of visual

art. With some kind of vague plan to keep in touch—perhaps be available for advice from time to time—Adler was about to leave when Moscoso suggested that if he wasn't terribly busy, he might remain on the island and shepherd the project, if he liked.

All they needed now was a large, attractive old building—preferably of Spanish colonial architecture—and a quantity of beautifully printed books, as many as possible illustrated with woodcuts and wood engravings, etchings, metal engravings, lithographs—illustrations that have adorned the most beautiful books since Gutenberg started using moveable type, and that had decorated hand-lettered manuscripts before that.

Anyone roaming the streets of Old San Juan, cobbled blue and surrounded mostly with restored Spanish colonial houses in a whole variety of soft pastel colors, knows that behind their plain-looking flat façades lie exotic courtyards open to sky and stars, many planted with tropical trees and sweet-smelling flowering plants. Not so in 1955. Adler reported that the house he chose, 255 Calle del Cristo, was, like many others on the block, a falling-apart tenement housing many families and one bathroom. On the other hand, it was the penultimate building on the block, diagonally across from what would eventually become a little park, and within sight of the bay, catching those wonderful sea breezes that make it possible to sweat perpetually and dry in the sun at the same time.

El Fantasma:

I can give you before and after. First everything was dirt and brick and one bathroom for 20 families. Liveable barely, walls like fly-paper. I was a prostitute most of the time, so I pretty much stayed in my room. Sailors galore succumbed to my wishes about what kept disease and babies at bay. At one time, I think it was in the '50s, government told us they wanted us all out. I thought "*¡Ay bendito*! they're going to move us to *La Perla* or even *El Fanguita*!" But of course they promised us better than that.

As it turns out, some Jewish guy from *nueva york* wanted to start a library in our house, 255 Cristo. He said it had character. How could he tell, and what did he know? We'd actually lived our lives here, and nobody missed having a library. In time, however, they got us all out, and most of us moved to *La Perla*. It's one of the worst slums in Puerto Rico, but with a great view of the bay.

Going back to the library idea itself, I wonder why? Somebody told me that when the *americanos* took us over 50 or 60 years ago, almost three-quarters couldn't read or write at all and it's probably not much better now. A library in *Viejo San Juan*? Anyway, they plastered the bricks and put these gorgeous black and white tiles over the dirt. Even now, revisiting years later as a ghost, I can almost feel how cool and smooth they feel on bare feet. Not just floors though, they built a huge room upstairs with metal shelves for the special books, and it was cold in there. Once it was all fixed up, the man from up north moved in to keep watch over them, and he seemed to be adding books all the time.Of course the second floor wasn't open to ordinary Puerto Rican people, but you could see that ancient blue-and-white painted Dutch tiles faced the stair risers, every single one different from the other. Everything was subtle. I mean there was no actual sign that said we weren't welcome on the second floor, only one of those velvet ropes like they have in some fancy movie theaters casually stretched across the stairs. Every once in a while, you might see some fancy-dressed guy being allowed up the stairs to examine the valuable books.

And that library idea was only the latest strange thing to hit Puerto Rico from the mainland. Before that, when the last *americano* Rex Tugwell lived in *La Fortaleza*, the governor's mansion, a bunch of eager, fresh-faced photographers came down from the States to take pictures of the way we lived, especially out in the countryside. I heard them say they were *documenting* everything with their cameras, amazing cameras. This had started under some farm security administration of President FDR, somehow thinking if they took pictures of the awful way poor farmers lived through the depression, people would pay attention and help. That's the way it was supposed to work on the mainland. But down here they were stuck on the idea of our poor farmer they called the *jíbaro*, seeing him as some sort of popular symbol of the Island. So while we would get "modern" and "civilized," they wanted to hang onto the idea that we were first of all *puertorequeños*.

And it wasn't just these *americanos* either. Along with Tugwell, and Muñoz with his *Populares* in power in the '40s, the Rosskams and the Delanos were sent down by Franklin Roosevelt to set up DIVEDCO to educate *jíbaros* out in the mountains and the cane workers on the edges. Quite a few *puertoriqueños* got hired for the project. It wasn't in schools. It was really adult education, pretty much available to everybody. Actually you didn't even have to be any kind of reader to get educated by DIVEDCO. For example if they thought people didn't pay enough attention to what they called *hygiene*, they'd make a great poster of a plain-looking mother holding out a bar of *jabón* and a bowl filled with water so her small daughter can wash her hands before she eats. They both looked Puerto Rican (a nice brown color), and all you have to read is in big letters across the top that say *DEFIENDALOS*, then slightly smaller it says *Làveles las manos ante de comer*. Across the bottom, again in block letters, *LO SUCIO CAUSA ENFERMEDADES*.

Another one along the same lines is even simpler. The only living thing in the whole poster is a huge fly in black and gray, with lots of barbed, hairy legs. The only other color in the whole thing is the word *PELIGRO* written across the top, but on a slant in red that looks like blood. Some other instructions say that flies carry germs, so we should bury our garbage and cover our food, but all you really need to know here to get the message is to take a look at the thing!

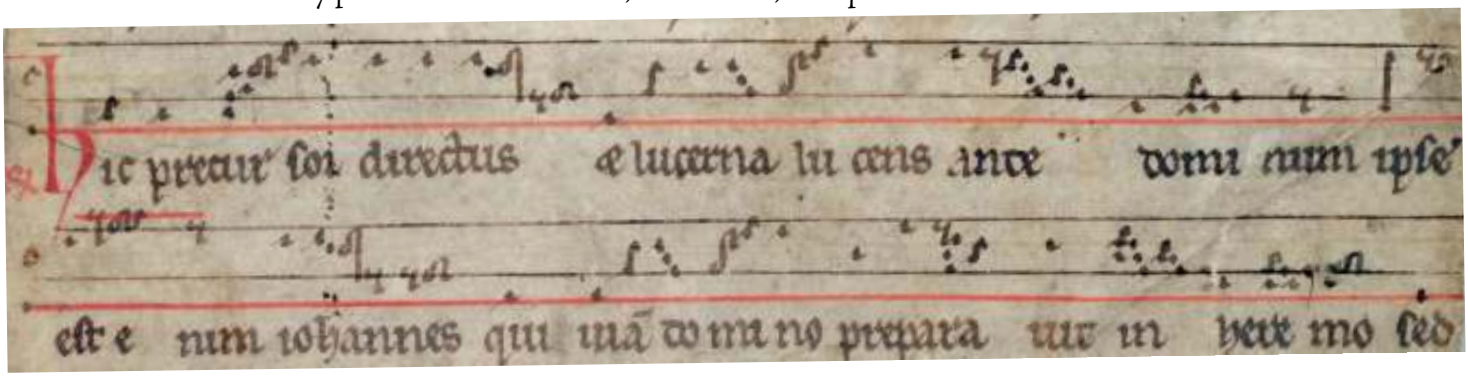
And the DIVEDCO people brought down all the equipment they needed—all the film, cameras, generators, whatever they needed to make and develop and show real films out in the countryside, sometimes from the backs of pickup trucks. Some of our Island artists who had lived in *nueva york* like Homar and Tufiño came back here because DIVEDCO needed people to make posters to announce dates and times for showing the films.

I doubt any Puerto Rican artists had been able to earn a living here before DIVEDCO and the Delanos. Sure it's true that artists get born everywhere and anywhere, but then to learn their trade

and then get paid to practice it, that's another story. Might be they'd go to Europe or the States, but they hardly ever stayed here.

Apparently there really *was* a collection of beautifully printed books—though in October of 1988, when John and I arrived with two cats and everything else either of us owned, and even as the turn of the year approached—I was still doubtful. It wasn't until we took a trip to the *Archivo General* building in greater San Juan that I saw the books as a physical reality. (John had seen them in the 1960s when he lived on the island and visited La Casa each Saturday, learning about their history from La Casa's second director, David Jackson McWilliams, who had assisted Adler from the beginning. John and Jack became good friends, and John was at the hospital with Jack when he died in 1986.) When we went to visit the books in the *Archivo*, they were in cartons stuffed onto many metal storage shelves about eight feet tall. The room that housed them was air-conditioned but not dehumidified. The books had never been calalogued, though we found a few loose pages that listed the names of the incunabula—that wonderful Latin term among book collectors that means literally "in the cradle" and refers to books printed in the first half-century after the invention of the moveable-type printing press, culminating in the year 1501. John climbed one of the shelves, pulled down a carton or two, and we found that someone—probably Jack Delano, who helped McWilliams as his health failed—had listed the books that were housed in each carton before sealing it. That meant that as we began to arrange exhibitions, we wouldn't have to take each book out of a particular carton to find out its contents, just open the carton and find the list.

On the other hand, reading the title of a book from a little slip of paper was but a bare shadow of handling the physical thing itself, feeling its weight, seeing how carefully the pages were designed. The font was always easy on the eye, large enough to read whether Latin, German, Spanish, or English. The margins were generous, as was the leading between the lines of print. Often the early books would be rubricated: the initial letter of a section would be capitalized, artfully enlarged, and painted in red (relating to the Latin *rubor*). This was particularly helpful in an early text that often lacked what we consider ordinary punctuation—commas, semicolons, even periods.



The rare book room on the second floor of Calle del Cristo 255 was large, the width of the building, and high-ceilinged. As I first saw it, of course, its shelves were empty. Storing the collection at the *Archivo* had been an act of desperation for Jack McWilliams. According to some notes he had written that we found in an old file cabinet upstairs, the air-conditioning and dehumidification in the book room had broken down in 1976 or '77, as he also had reported in a phonecall with John (who then

lived in New York but made frequent vacation visits to the island and the collection). In addition to lack of air-conditioning and dehumidification, the roof leaked badly. Yet the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, which technically owned the building, was unwilling to make the necessary repairs.

Jack feared for the damage already underway and visible among some of the books. "Foxing," a type of rust caused by heat and moisture, was in frequent evidence in them. Jack requested advice from the Assistant Director for Preservation at the Library of Congress, Frazer G. Poole, who came to San Juan, did a thorough inspection, and wrote a report in 1977…

> When the glass doors to the collection room were opened for the consultant, the stench of live mold was overpowering and unmistakable. Examination of dozens of volumes, both those in leather bindings and those in fabric bindings, showed many of them to be covered with live mold (mildew). Mold was also observed on the ends of the bookstacks, on shelves, and elsewhere in the room. Fortunately, nearly all mold growth appeared to be limited to the covers and bindings of the books....
>
> At this time the temperature in the room was 87 degrees farenheit; relative humidity registered 68%. On many occasions, especially during the rainy season, the humidity has undoubtedly been higher for long periods of time. The room was almost completely sealed and there was no detectable air motion. Mold spores require favorable conditions of temperature and humidity in order to develop. Such development always takes place more rapidly in unventilated areas (areas where the air is still) and in the dark. Thus the present space housing the collection provides nearly ideal cultural conditions for the development of a serious infestation of mold....
>
> It may be pertinent here to raise questions as to why a collection as valuable as that of La Casa del Libro was permitted to reach such a condition in the first place. These are questions for which this consultant has no answers, but for which answers should be sought and on which action should be taken.

I was shocked to learn of the threat to material possessions by the climate of the island. The temperatures and breezes seemed so benign to me. I knew nothing of the damaging effects of that perpetually salt-laden breeze that so effectively ruins pianos and books. My New England background had been filled with snowstorms, icy winds, and yearly preparations for winter. I had heated my little house in Connecticut with a wood stove, and it took only one experience of not loading up on dry kindling and logs before the first snowstorm arrived for me to learn the value of those preparations. Our houses were typically designed with rain gutters, with gables and steep roofs to ward off collections of rain, but more especially of snow.

The roofs in Old San Juan are flat. The first time we walked around the roof of our building was when we were trying to locate the sources of several leaks, some of which were on the second floor; others led directly into the exhibition space where Jack Delano had mounted his homage to his wife, Irene, six months before our arrival. We found that we could easily cross from La Casa's roof to those of the adjoining buildings, and so we did. Observing the way our roof and those adjoining were laced over with what looked like giant swathes of shiny duct tape, interspersed with many puddles of water, it became clear that repairing and replacing roofs in Puerto Rico was a regular and necessary business.

So the *climate* was generally benign, but not necessarily the *weather*. As we went through our first hurricane season, John assured me that the island had not been directly hit by a hurricane in about fifty years. Nevertheless, our local hardware store gave out black-&-white maps that traced the projected route of each hurricane once it reached the Caribbean. They looked like paper placemats, and we followed them regularly as our first summer went on.

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture had by this time acquired the funds from the legislature to join and renovate both Calle del Cristo 255 and 257, which included our own quarters on the second floor directly above the exhibition areas of 255. That means there had been a gap of at least 10 years between the time that Jack McWilliams had submitted the official Poole report about the damage to the building and books and the awarding of funds. During most of that time the collection was not available to artists, scholars, or any other interested people, because the books were all stored away at the *Archivo*. The extent of the Institute's neglect was not obvious to us when we first arrived, though we soon learned from legal papers that Jack McWilliams had latterly decided to leave his own considerable rare book collection not to La Case del Libro, which he had directed and devoted his life to for at least 20 years, but to the University of Texas at Austin, his alma mater.

The shape of the renovated space would become a very large H. On the ground floor, two large brick patios filled the white spaces of this design, divided by the crosspiece itself, whose flooring, like that of all of the first floor, was large black & white marble squares that were installed before the time Elmer Adler presided at the public opening in 1958. This crosspiece was open to wind and rain, though there were huge wooden doors along its two sides that could be used as shutters, available for protection from storms and closed routinely each evening, usually by the caretaker. Manuel, a Puerto Rican who walked to La Casa from his home at *La Perla* Mondays through Fridays, was employed by the Institute, and it was he who presided over La Casa faithfully during the two years that separated Jack McWilliams' last hospitalization from our arrival two years later. He was also the skilled gardener who maintained with great care the plants in the front and back patios.

Similarly, on the second floor, the crosspiece of the H was a kind of bridge that overlooked both patios and joined the two inner balconies that held the upstairs rooms of each building—the two "legs" of the H—and the bridge also was exposed to the elements. There we enjoyed sun, rain, stars, and clouds. Huge door-like shutters were provided in that second-story space as well, available for closing at our discretion. But I remember shutting them only two or three times during our tenure, against the worst storms we experienced.

Our belongings didn't arrive right away, and the youngest member of La Casa's Board of Directors had arranged for a double bed mattress and sheets; we slept on the floor of what would eventually become our living room. No one had lived in the building since Adler's death in 1962, Jack McWilliams having retained his own living quarters when he became the second director. The two designated bedrooms had ordinary wooden floors that were dangerously unreliable, and the appliances in the kitchen (overlooking the back patio) had rusted out long before our arrival; they remained standing as they had been during Adler's residence. A tiny kitcheonette was built off the downstairs exhibition space to be used for keeping the food for openings. For preparing our own meals, we bought an electric hotplate and cooked on it in the moribund kitchen upstairs.

We felt like pioneers—more like explorers—as we began to search for La Casa's more recent history in the original bulding itself. We had been interviewed twice for the position—together for the interview with the Board of Directors, which would be responsible for my salary as co-director; John alone met with the director of the Institute, which would pay his. At neither meeting had we been informed about the gap in La Casa's history following Jack's demise, nor any details that had brought about the removal of the Collection a decade before. As we went through the hiring process, we were simply told by a few members of the Board that, after two years of seeking a director, they had found no Puerto Rican willing to take on the task. I quickly realized that it was John's dream to bring back La Casa as he had known it first in the 1960s. Our devotion to one another made it easy to become part of that dream. Though I had not had his experience, it didn't take long for the historian in me to wonder at the beauty and possibilities that surrounded us. We persevered in our explorations.

In one of the upstairs rooms, Elmer Adler had left some personal belongings at his death (a sudden, unexpected heart attack in 1962), most of which were boxed up and taken away by officials from the Institute within the first months of our stay, but not before we had delighted in examining most of them. They were all beautiful, and it was hard to believe that they had been lying around untouched for over twenty years. The majority of these items were Asian: delicately carved stone netsukes, an ancient but shapely beaten copper teapot from China, and a few hand-painted rice bowls of thin porcelain, for example. From pre-Columbian Puerto Rico, there was a small triangularly-shaped head, probably Taino, with primitive but very expressive features carved out of the stone. We were never informed about where the boxed items were taken or how they might be cared for. Another of many mysteries.

In addition to Jack's notes on the poor state of the building, plus the Poole report, we found original legal documents pertaining to La Casa's founding and operation. According to the bylaws of *Amigos de Calle del Cristo 255 Incorporado*, the rare books pointedly belonged to the people of Puerto Rico; they had without exception been supplied by Elmer Adler or purchased through donations by *Amigos*. Occasional reference books were purchased for La Casa by the Institute, but these were the only exceptions. The Institute had and has no right over the rare books themselves. One of the reasons for Adler's particular legal structure is that Puerto Rico's government changes as often as every four years, usually in wide swings, requiring a complete change of guard for the head and staffing of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (henceforth the ICP), which threatens a lack of consistency in the policies toward museums and other venues of culture. The man who first created La Casa wanted consistency and dependability for the care of the valued collection of books he envisioned. Adler's papers and letters chronicling the beginnings of La Casa attest to the care and attention he paid to these details, though they were to be tested many times.

Handwritten notes by Jack described his despair and discouragement at the gradual deterioration of the building during his long tenure as director, the dangers he perceived for the books, and, ultimately, the stripping of the Collection and its delivery to the *Archivo General* eight years before his own death.

Uncovering and reading these documents carefully was the beginning of a long discovery process for us, though we remained politically naïve to the end.

El Fantasma:

So you probably want to know how I became a prostitute, how I got to *Viejo San Juan* in the first place, because I sure wasn't born there. I come from sevaral generations of cane workers, the men that is. Women mostly had babies and tried to keep house in what were really no more than shacks that suffered near destruction every time we had a tropical storm or worse. We were in the southern part of the Island, near Santa Isabel. Ponce is the nearest big city, but my family rarely got there, pretty much stuck to the little *barrio* they were born and died in. I remember when I was about eight the scariness of huricane *San Felipe Segundo* tearing through. It destroyed lots of the cane and coffee farms. We didn't worry about losing electricity in 1928, because we never had it till later.

Our family and all the others around us grew sugar cane. That is, they worked in the cane fields. They certainly didn't own them. Sometimes they didn't even own the land their shacks stood on, and sometimes their shacks were actually nothing more than *bohíos*, if you can picture them. It's complicated about the land. Officially there was a law against any person or company owning more than 500 acres. I guess it had been that way ever since the *norteamericanos* took over. But for nearly 50 years after that, most of the land in our part of the Island was actually owned by huge sugar companies, mostly owned by *norteamericanos* and most of those guys owned a lot more than 500 acres—more like several thousand acres.

Once again it was actually Tugwell, governor during the war when Muñoz and his *Populares* were gaining power, who tried to change that. With some success I'm told, but I was already out of there by that time. I had pretty early on made up my mind that having more than a dozen children, as my mother and grandmother had, was something I would not be a part of if I could possibly help it. If you have an idea how few choices men in our *barrio* had, that's still more than women had. There were really no jobs for women where we lived. Some men (and later in life, widows) rented the land their shacks stood on; very few *owned* land. If some Puerto Rican cane workers actually owned land, it would be the sons who inherited, not the daughters.

Keeping my eyes and ears open while I was growing up, I saw that there were always a few "different" women who moved away and escaped what they were automatically expected to do. There were also nuns, of course, but my family wasn't very observant, just used to thinking themselves Catholic without doing much about it. Besides, the nuns we once in a while came into contact with were pretty well-off women whose families gave money to the convent when they joined. A few widowed women without too many children could support themselves by practicing a trade. The trades were mainly in the cities, but even then there weren't good choices. In some part of the Island there were women making lace, or sewing with special skill, but none of the women in my large family could teach me these, because they never learned the skills from their *own* mothers. A few women had jobs in the tobacco trade, wrapping cigars for instance, but for some reason that whole business was dying out as I grew up.

One other thing about the land: *norteamericanos* in the army and navy were taking over chunks of it, some on the northwest side of the Island, some not far from San Juan, and a big chunk of the little island off the coast, Viecques. They were probably there from the time the Spanish were beaten out, but my memory of it started in the 1940s, the Second World War time. Some war planners figured out that Puerto Rico was critical for keeping the Germans out of creeping into the Carib-

bean with their U-boats. It was serious stuff, and I dimly remember hearing about complete blackouts in San Juan, though it didn't affect us so much in the south. Electricity had come to our part of the island only in the '30s, and even then it was sparse and spotty.

One thing it *did* do, bringing all those guys down here, was create a big market for women to satisfy a whole lot of sex-starved men, especially the sailors who had already been out at sea for big stretches of time. Not that we didn't have that kind of work for women already, but World War II sure beefed up the trade, and it's what brought me to San Juan. My only other option at the time was slaving away at Ponce Cement, so it was not a hard decision.

Hugo, September 18, 1989.

We had been following those hurricane trajectory maps for most of our first summer, but it wasn't until we noticed Manuel, the caretaker, quietly moving around upstairs in our quarters, which was an unusual occurrence. He didn't say anything to us, but he was collecting a whole variety of the reconstruction workers' tools left casually on several of the roof overhangs; we began to realize everyone and everything around us might be in danger. What had begun as a tropical wave near the Cape Verde Islands off the west coast of Africa rushed across the Atlantic first as a "tropical depression," then as a tropical storm, emerging in the Caribbean within a week as a severe type 3–4 hurricane, with winds in Puerto Rico that averaged 140 miles per hour.

I had lived through several hurricanes as a child growing up, one in New London on Long Island Sound; the other, at Rockaway, New York, where my grandmother had a house. I remembered the strange yellowish light and deceptive stillness that preceded each of them; it made everyone disbelieve that high winds could possibly be in the offing. During hurricane season in the States, people taped diagonal crosses of masking tape on exposed glass—windows, doors, wherever shattering damage was anticipated.

There was no exposed glass at La Casa, but there was a lot to secure. The bridge that formed our living room was entirely open to the coutyards down below and the sky above, so the floor-to-ceiling wooden shutters needed to be closed and bolted. Manuel completed what he could, then returned to his own home in *La Perla*, the notorious slum that had the best view of the sea on all of San Juan. My daughter Erika had arrived from Baltimore the previous day, so now there were three of us scurrying around to secure what seemed obviously vulnerable, light enough to be blown away but heavy enough to do damage wherever it landed. Before the winds reached their zenith, everything had already started rattling and screaming. The three of us humans together, plus the two cats, holed up in our windowless bedroom, enclosed with the door to the balcony shut, stretched out on the carefully made bed. By now, John and I were accustomed to having all the inside doors open to sky above and courtyards below, being able to see every detail of the weather each day, the stars, birds flying overhead, the pale pink wall of the house next over from us with green plants sprouting out of its cracks in crazy but pleasant patterns. We could gauge the direction of the wind and pick up the constant evening smell of the gardenias on the largest tree in the front patio, which our clever female cat used as her personal elevator between the two floors. Now, quite suddenly, everything was closed as tightly as possible. For about four hours, the only sensory information to us was through our ears, and it was terrifying. John quite sensibly took a nap, along with the cats.

Erika and I talked each other through the devastating noise, and when it seemed to have subsided, we decided we'd investigate the damage. We tried to follow the route of the daily walk I took each morning: Calle del Cristo, La Fortaleza, through the ancient stone gate that led to a verdant path along the bay. Telephone and electricity lines were down and dangerous. Litter was everywhere, but the most striking to our eyes were the giant ficus trees, their strong trunks that looked so much like giant elephant legs, torn out of the ground with dozens of ancient roots exposed. Most of the palm trees survived, slim and elegant as they were, simply swaying in the directions they were forced by the enormous winds.

Over the days that followed we learned of a particular peril that came about from hurricanes in Puerto Rico. Of course, the damage to banana, coffee, and sugar cane crops was enormous each time, but so were the mud slides that threatened people living in the mountains, whose shacks were swept down muddy ravines and who sometimes died. One of the enchantments of living on an island for me had been that sense of separateness, of chosen isolation and privacy, seeing the limits of the land we actually lived on. It wasn't until Hurricane Hugo and, later, reading about Puerto Rico during World War II, that I realized that living on an island means there's no place to go when threatened from outside forces.

Soon we learned of the damage to the Museum of Art and History up the hill, where no one had taken the time to secure the building sufficiently to prevent major damage to its current exhibition. More and more damage revealed itself on the Island, but our immediate post-hurricane concern, paradoxically, was lack of water. So, as it turned out, water was once again a big issue. With sea water surrounding the Island, rain water flooding roofs and producing expensive leaks, storm-driven rain ruining whole buildings and their contents, now we were facing several days without water. For John, cleanliness is a large part of an issue he has struggled with since he was formed and schooled by the Catholic Church. One of its remnants is a habit of taking hot showers that last for at least twenty minutes. When he first came to live in my little house in Connecticut, I worried that my well and hot water tank, accustomed to providing water for just one during of the five years I lived there, would somehow give way under this demand, but it worked out fine.

In Connecticut we had harsh storms, remnants of hurricanes, and lost electricity which meant the pump in the well failed to provide water, but there was a stream within easy walking distance. There I could fill pails and gallon containers for flushing, washing dishes, and other necessary ablutions. Not so in the city of San Juan. Sanitizers, bottled water—other than the rare bottle of Perrier—were to be marketed in the future, but the aftermath of Hugo in 1989 was a struggle for water. Eventually a truck carrying a huge tank of clean water arrived in Old San Juan at intervals regular enough to provide drinking water. We were able to keep the museum doors open to visitors until, the third day into this waterless period, a hefty rain began about midday. John and I looked at each other, shooed the tourists out, closed the doors, and ran upstairs to fetch all the half-cleaned plates and mugs, the cats' food dishes, and some dirty clothes. We removed our own clothes, got some soap and—standing naked in the front patio—luxuriated in the nice heavy rainfall.

John's first thought after the hurricane hit was the books, all but the ones in our current exhibit still housed in the *Archivo*. As soon as we could navigate the streets in a car, we made the brief trip to Avenida Constitution just before Avenida Ponce de Leon; Erika and I stayed in the car while John jumped out and was stunned to find both the outer side door to the *Archivo* and the one leading to the storage room holding La Casa's collection **unlocked**. Anyone could have walked off with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of books. After finding the person in charge and insisting that the doors be locked, he returned to the car and wept out of pure anger. We determined to fix La Casa's new rare book room as soon as possible and oversee the return of the books to their proper home.

Some time over the last years of Jack McWilliams' directorship, the ICP, supported by the legislature, had made the decision to buy and connect the building next door (Cristo 257). Downstairs, the front room would be dedicated to more exhibition space. It was floored in the same beautiful black and white tiles as that of the original building, the white walls were finished, and a slim statue of St. Francis of Assisi echoed the 16th century St. John that stood in the main room of 255 and whose image graced the letterhead of some of La Casa's stationery. Very little else had been done to the space before our arrival.

On the second floor of this added building, forming one arm of the H, a room had been designated as the new rare book room. Our hearts sank when we first looked at it. Behind a dull brown door, a long, narrow, dark room with raw concrete floor, a walkway of about three feet with a wide step up to a slightly higher level—also concrete—where tracks supported a dozen sliding metal library units. Each was six feet tall and unpainted, a leaden gray. As yet, there was no air conditioning or de-humidification, and that same flat roof so prone to leaks loomed over the top. Apparently the room had stood this way at least since 1977, because the report of Frazer Poole, the man Jack had hired from the Library of Congres, submitted that year, included the following paragraph:

> Unfortunately, the renovation and conversion of the facilities adjacent to Calle del Cristo 255 [i.e., Cristo 257] has proceeded with no advice or consultation from either a knowledgeable librarian or a library building consultant. The architect clearly knew little about library needs or functions, and cared less, since even such basic requests of the Director [Jack MWilliams]as those for better lighting in the new stacks and proper placement of the air conditioning units went unheeded.

I think it still did not occur to us how slowly things moved when several government agencies were involved and monies to be allocated. The long hiatus between starting and finishing renovations was normal, but we were impatient and determined. We could see that there was no possibility of bringing the books back until they had a properly equipped room. Money was finally allocated through the ICP and Zonas y Monumentas. We had warm globe lights hung from the ceiling, and the cold metal shelving painted a dusty gray-blue. Large terra cotta tiles on the walkway and smaller ones on the step and next level began to change the cold appearance of the room. Once the tiles were laid, we began to fret about possible roof leaks, and John thought of a plexiglass roof over the stacks that would be canted slightly. The light would shine through the plexiglass, but if and when leaks began, the water would be shunted to the tile floor. The idea seemed perfect, but we were neither engineers nor architects. John remembered meeting a young Puerto Rican architect named Mignucci, who lived directly across the street from La Casa; he precisely designed what we needed, and our skilled and accomodating work-

man named Alfredo suspended the plexiglass sheets at just the right angle. The airconditioning and dehumidification units came last. From then on, it was simply a matter of framing and hanging several of La Casa's silkscreen posters, pages of old manuscripts, and samples of calligraphy on the ends of each of the stacks. A man from Old San Juan generously loaned colorful pieces from his wonderful collection of papier-mâché *masceras*, colorful masks that we hung on the long remaining bare wall. We were ready for the books. We were pleased and excited.

El Fantasmo:

Of course there was a big rupture in my business when they finally forced us out of Cristo 255 and of course the rents were too high for me when I looked for another place to live. The good thing is that, just at that time Ted Moscoso saw how great these old buildings fixed up. He figured tourism was going to be the thing that put Puerto Rico on the map, especially with more of the grand old buildings in *Viejo San Juan* being made beautiful, with pastel-colored outer walls that gleamed in our hot sun. Some rich guy, or a group of them, would buy an old building, gut it, and *re-do every inch of it* until it looked amazing and "authentic Spanish colonial." Then they would sell it at a fantastic price.

I ended up in *La Perla* after all, but I didn't work there. It was too grim. Often there was mud everywhere, and the sailors and soldiers didn't want to wade through the messy parts. So a girlfriend and I shared a small shack—not that different from my birthplace in the South—and I had my business elsewhere. For my workplace, I chipped in with some other girls, and we would find an old SRO to rent. Then, when it was sold, we'd set up shop in another one. It was like a game—staying one step ahead of those ambitious renovators.

I was always in walking distance from my old home at 255, so I kept my eye on what went on. I'd peek through the open door and watch things change. The old book collector was first living in some nearby barracks, but he seemed to be there every time I looked, and he never chased me away. He could see I was genuinely interested. I may even have told him that I had lived there before, I don't remember clearly, just that he never discouraged me from coming around.

Some ideas were building in my head about what made things ugly and what made them beautiful. One day as construction things settled down, a big wooden statue arrived. It was not life-size, but about half that; placed on a white platform, it seemed even bigger. You could tell it was old, ancient maybe, and it was a man in a long robe with a rope belt. You could see the folds of the robe even though it was all carved from some really hard wood. A book with the edges of pages carved out was hanging from the belt, and you could tell from the way his head was tilted up that he was maybe trying to talk to God or trying to hear Him maybe. I finally asked one of the workmen about it. He looked really full of himself when he explained to me that the statue was John the Evangelist, carrying his own gospel, and it was made overseas in Germany. He said it was some time in the 16th century, which seemed a bit of a stretch to me, and that it had been part of a carved Crucifixion scene. The next time I stopped by, the guy remembered me and insisted on showing me a piece of stationery that wasn't quite white, a delicate cream with that same statue somehow transferred to the paper in inky black with delicate red lines drawn for margins. I could just imagine getting a letter that looked like that, even before there was anything written on it. It wasn't till a lot later, after the

old collector had moved in upstairs and taken on an assistant he called Jack, that I found out the thing hanging from the belt of St. John was called something like "girdle-book," having to do with the way scholars long ago would walk around with some precious book always with them. I could dimly see how girdle might be a word they used for the belt, but it remained one of the mysteries that seemed to fill the place.

By the early '60s, a lot more people were visiting La Casa every day, and it was Jack who was downstairs talking to them most of the times I dropped in. I was still a little inimidated when I came through that open door with the light filtering through the big *sol trunco* above. I was pretty enough to fold in, but most of the visitors were tourists, pretty rich, and dressed to the nines in fancy sundresses and handmade sandals. They spoke English with all kinds of strange accents, but Jack could speak Spanish, so that worked well for me. It's just that I rarely saw anyone who looked much like me. As I said, I was pretty enough in those days, but it was easy to see that I was Puerto Rican, and not many of the other visitors were.

Jack was fun. He had a good singing voice, and I sometimes heard him humming tunes to himself when people weren't asking him questions. He taught English at the University, seemed easygoing and always wanted to tell people interesting facts about the books, how they were printed, what kind of artwork was in them, and things like that, things you might not notice right away on your own. The writing on some of the oldest ones I saw behind the glass exhibition case just ran on and on. You couldn't tell where one sentence began and the last one ended. Sometimes they were in Latin or even Greek, according to the little white caption cards, and I wondered how many of these privileged visitors could actually read what they were looking at. One time I heard one of the tourists ask Jack about the difficulty of reading some of those texts (that's what he called them—texts). I heard Jack laugh as he said "You don't *read* them—you hold them, look at them, even smell them, appreciate their beauty—but you don't *read* them!"

Not long after Hurricane Hugo, John and I were approached by Marta Perez, a painter of great imagination who lived in Old San Juan. She was beside herself with anxiety and told us that an exhibition due to open at the Museum of Art and History up the hill had to be cancelled because of severe storm damage. The Museum had to be closed for extensive repairs, and she begged us to let them open the exhibition instead at La Casa. It was titled *Una Muestra de Pintura Universal*, with paintings by Jorge Zeno, Rafael Trelles, and Marta.

John made a hasty visit uptown to Rafael Fabregas, chair of our Board and head of Navierras at the time, who gave permission for this "emergency arrangement"; we thought our board would be enthusiastic about La Casa's facilitating some of the Island's up-and-coming local artists. By now, we had become aware of being the "ugly Americans" at a time when learning English in Puerto Rican schools was no longer a virtue, and our own ability to speak and understand Spanish was minimal. (After carefully viewing the first exhibition we mounted, called *Religion, Musica y el Libro*, a member of the Board pointedly said that our carefully researched and worded captions on exhibition items were obviously written first in English, then translated into Spanish. She found that insulting.) We were tired and frustrated. We were putting in very long days and made some attempts at learning Spanish. A

priest with a marvelous sense of humor and loving spirit befriended us and began giving us Spanish lessons once a week in the evening. I began translating some poems of Julia de Burgos into English, which I thought would help my Spanish. Still, it was slow going. We comforted outselves with the thought that Elmer Adler, the founder of La Casa, didn't have Spanish, but the attitude about language in the 1980s was far different from that of the 1950s.

Marta and John hung the paintings for the exhibition as it had been originally planned, which included oils, watercolors, and a boldly hand-painted and covered soft sofa placed at the far end of the downstairs space of 255. We saw many new local first-time visitors, and it was fun to see people's reactions to the art works. We were brought up short at a much later Board meeting to discover that some of the members felt that the idea of hanging an exhibition of paintings at La Casa, whose mission was dedicated to the art of the book, was setting a bad precedent.

The cartons of books arrived the first week in December 1989. It was a joyous but hair-raising experience.

Alfredo Vélez had done such an artful job at readying the new rare book room exactly as we had planned it, that we asked whether he was willing to participate in bringing the books back from the *Archivo*. As we talked about it, his eyes lit up, and he told us he had a wife, extended family, and some friends, all of whom were capable of working happily together on projects. It promised to be a complex operation: we needed a lot of willing hands in two different locations simultaneously, the *Archivo* and La Casa. At the same time, downstairs at Cristo 255 we were preparing for a Christmas exhibition of original hand-made cards that the late Carlos Marichal had created annually for his beloved wife, Flavia. We invited Araceli Ortiz-Azancot to guest curate the show, and it worked out beautifully. As of that December, multi-tasking became the order of the day, and La Casa shifted into permanent high gear.

We had decided in advance that the most efficient way of getting the cartons of books into the building was via the narrow seond-story balcony that opened into the front room of Cristo 257. The room itself was extremely large, and nearly empty of furniture, plus it was on the same floor as the new rare book room, just down a short corridor, and completely air conditioned. It turned out there were well over six hundred cartons and carefully wrapped art works to be moved. We hadn't realized there were so many of them as we planned the operation, since they had never been catalogued. Alfredo had figured out that they would use a small van to shuttle cartons back and forth between the two locations, while a cousin of his who was practised at using a fork-lift would be stationed in the street directly below 257 to transport the many loads of cartons up to the balcony, where someone else would carefully receive and stack them in the high-ceilinged room. We all started promptly at seven in the morning. I was at the *Archivo*, directing Alfredo's crew, while John stayed at the receiving end. We were all terribly excited and bursting with energy, though I think there was a break at some point for something to eat. We were lucky with the weather, no rain predicted but the the day was blazing hot, the work was exhausting, and the fork-lift operator had a few beers during the pause. And following the pause, he refreshed himself with beer at irregular intervals. By this time, I was back at La Casa as well, and John and I crossed our fingers as dusk approached and the aim of the forklift began to waver. Everyone cheered loudly when the last batch arrived safely, and even neighbors who had gathered in the street below were jubilant and relieved.

The next big task at La Casa was planning for a week-long visit from Donald Jackson, the world renowned calligrapher from England who has been fondly dubbed "the Queen's Scribe." He had been commissioned by the Benedictine monastery of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, to create for them a hand-written, illuminated Bible just as the monks had in the Middle Ages. Calligraphy, most certainly an important book art since the time of the earliest manuscripts, had gathered a small but enthusiastic following in Puerto Rico, encouraged by Jack McWilliams during the 1970s. One member of La Casa's Board, Guillermo Rodriguez-Benitez, had become a student of Donald Jackson and made several visits to the UK in order to study with him directly. Sadly, Guillermo died within a few months of our arrival, so we were never able to find out more about those visits, but an auction of art works he left behind attested to his deep appreciation for calligraphy. We had hoped that current Board members would buy some pieces to add to La Casa's collection, but instead the pieces they bought were added to their personal collections. It seemed that the philanthropic generosity that had characterized the original Board and Amigos was part of a bygone era. Still, it was indicative of the interest in well-made calligraphic works on the Island, and a there was ample support for a visit from Donald Jackson: funding was granted by the Puerto Rican Foundation for the Humanities. The calligraphy exhibition at La Casa was dedicated to the memory of Guillermo Rodriguez-Benitez.

Further interest in the art of calligraphy was evidenced when we found correspondence between Jack and the British author of several wonder-filled children's books, Marie Angel—her letters to Jack written in handsomely pencilled calligraphy and decorated with lively sketches of her three cats done in colored pencils. Angel, who died in 2010, was one of those charming eccentric single British ladies one often imagines, but rarely meets in actuality. She wrote highly imaginative children's books, all of them featuring her wonderful calligraphic hand for the texts, with cavorting creatures for illustration. Adding to her medieval aura, Harvard University had published two Bestiaries by Marie Angel, featuring fanciful as well as actual animals tucked into each letter of the alphabet. Just as Bestiaries created in the Middle Ages regularly included carefully imagined literary animals such as U for Unicorn, Angel's alphabets include P for Flying Phalanger and N for Nyctalus Noctula, medieval Latin for "bat."

For the first time since our arrival, John and I felt at home: steeped in the rich medieval traditions we both loved. John's unique area was transcribing (from facsimiles of manuscripts) and singing chants of the 9th and 10th centuries; he had formed the Schola Antiqua in New York for regular concerts and recordings. He had spent seven years in a religious order as a young man, and knew intimately all of the liturgy as it was sung at the time of Charlemagne. I had begun writing an imagined Journal of the 12th century German Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, after twenty years of research and Latin re-learning. We sang her music as well, at a time when she was not yet "discovered" in this country.

The joyfulness of Donald Jackson's visit and the activities that accompanied it marked a real start for bringing La Casa "back to life." In fact the greatest joy of directing LCdL was connecting great art and artists with eager students and appreciators.

In residence to participate in the calligraphy events were William and Vera Filby. By this time, the dangerously unsafe flooring in the two bedrooms had been repaired, and we had a real bedroom for

our own sleeping and one for housing guests. The Puerto Rican Foundation for the Humanities contributed money so that, in addition to having a special night with Donald Jackson, William Filby was invited to present two lectures on calligraphy, which he illustrated with slides as part of the celebration. The Filbys were a lively older couple, both retired from their somewhat mysterious professional lives (which we speculated might have been as part of the CIA, though we were never certain). They were terribly well educated in the humanities and knew La Casa's collection from its early days. As soon as the calligraphy event was finished, the Filbys stayed on to help unpack and catalogue the hundreds of cartons of books stacked several deep on the floor of the big front room of Cristo 257.

El Fantasma:

The time finally came when I was able to get out of *La Perla*, where the government had stuck us. A girlfriend of mine asked me to join her working in a brothel in Arecibo, on the northwest coast. The place was real small, but the Ramsey Air Force Base nearby in Aguadillo provided the kind of customers I was used to, and they had good salaries. After being in the heart of San Juan for so many years, the quiet of the place was almost spooky, but for the first time in my life I noticed sounds—the Atlantic Ocean was less than a city block's distance away from us, and there were no houses in between. Sea sounds, bird sounds, even the sounds the winds made in the trees around the place you could hear, especially nights when I wasn't working.

In fact, you couldn't see other houses or even a *cantina* from our place, but we *were* at a big curve in the road, meaning that sometimes the glare of car headlights would reflect on my bare walls. It was startling in all that quiet, because it would happen suddenly, and the driver might be going fast and jam on his breaks at the surprise of the curve, so there was that as well. For the first time I started being curious about the water, which I had simply ignored at *La Perla*. I hadn't noticed much at that point in my life, just eking out a living. Now I started to wonder at the fact that I had lived on an island all my life but never learned to swim, never even tried it. I guess I thought swimming was intended for the growing number of rich tourists who were coming down to soak up the sun and had plenty of time to be lazy.

One very sunny afternoon, with nothing better to do, I put on pants instead of a skirt and began following a narrow path towards the ocean. First it wandered through a whole bunch of lilies—I found out later from my girlfriend they're called spider lilies. They all had long green leaves like strong sword blades and spidery white flowers spread all over the tops. Not much smell, but I could start to smell the salt water at that point. Next things I saw farther in front of me were huge boulders that practically made a wall of themselves, but I could see chinks of sky and water in cracks between some of them.

I had on flimsy flip-flops, and the boulders looked slippery, though the sides closest to me didn't actually

have water on them. I took the sandals off. Feeling a little braver then, and reminding myself that all my sex work had kept me strong and fit, I climbed one of the monster rocks and towards the top found a large hole. It looked like the hole in a giant doughnut, not perfectly circular, but definitely round. I started looking down and thought this must be what it's like to look through a porthole in one of those big cruise ships I had seen bulging into the San Juan harbor once in awhile.

The next part started with a lurch in my belly that told me it was scary to do this, because I had no idea what was at the bottom of that big hole. It looked like over fifteen feet more or less straight down. There could be something alive down there. Once again, I thought how dumb it was to have lived on an island all my life without learning anything about sea creatures. But my life was on land; the water was not a part of my world—except for rainstorms, hurricanes, mud slides, things that had drastic results.

I *do* remember once in a while seeing some photos in a newspaper showing strangely shaped sea creatures—there was one of a beached *manati* found in Mayaguez that looked a little like a gigantic gray butterfly. I'd eaten fish from the sea, but even that probably had breadcrumbs on it, so who knows what it looked like live? The idea of a library seemed not so crazy. There are probably books there with drawings or photos of many kinds of sea creatures. On the other hand I thought, as I stared some more into what must be some kind of a cave, it might not be a sea creature at all, but a land creature. Puerto Rico is full of feral dogs and cats. People who could afford them don't want them inside their houses, but you see plenty of dogs slinking around the beaches and even the streets in San Juan.

The light was very dim because the hole was so deep, and even straining my eyes to the limit, I couldn't really make out what might be curled up at the bottom. If it did turn out to be a feral dog that had fallen in, it would surely be dead or dying from such a steep fall. Anyway, there was no way I could get down there. The rock sides were sheer, with no toe-holds visible to me. I took one last look, hiking my body farther over the hole, so I could support myself with my arms and let my whole top half dangle from the hips.

The only thing that wasn't either sand or a shallow puddle of salt water was an image way down against the far wall that looked for all the world like a little kid's drawing: a round circle of a head with lines coming from it like sun's rays. As my eyes adjusted to the dimness a few other shapes emerged, though not so clearly. They also seemed to be circular heads—just the outlines of them and maybe crude eyes, nose, and mouth—but there were several of them squished together in a way that seemed to change slightly each one's shape.

At that point I decided that inching any farther at all would be a disaster. Rather than unbalance myself altogether, I pushed back with a big shove until I was on hands and knees, all of me firmly on the outside of the deep hole, bright sunlight hurting my eyes.

I climbed down off the rocks, put my sandals back on, and noticed as I headed back that it was now late afternoon. I had no idea so much time had passed. Now those white lilies smelled much stronger than they had before, and I wondered what would happen if I cut a few and brought them into the house. I had seen farmers selling things like tuberoses on Sunday mornings in front of San José Cathedral in San Juan, but the people who bought them had money galore just for pleasing themselves. I sometimes saw lobster claws and tuberoses in vases at La Casa once they had fancied it

up. Why not, I thought, there's a knife at the house, and these are free for the picking. I did it, cutting just a few long stems bursting with their smell, and it was easy. I rinsed out an empty greenish wine bottle for them, and they sort of spilled out around the neck.

Opening the first cartons of books was like Christmas! The Filbys were there to help for the first few days. The three of us would wait in the living room of 255 while John brought in four full cartons from 257, one for each of us. Quickly it would turn into something much less orderly, full of exclamations. One or another of us would inevitably say, "Wait a minute. Sorry to interrupt, but you have to come take a quick look at this!" or this, or this! The books had been put into the boxes in no particular order, so one published in the 20th century might be found right next to one from the 15th. Some of the titles that excited me most from that first unpacking were one or two by Dard Hunter, who in the 1920s began gathering information and samples of handmade paper from all over the world. The first one we found was from 1923, simply titled *Old Papermaking*. Inside were actual examples of paper, the earliest from China and southeast Asia. He included watermarks, as well, those barely visible designs embossed on each full-sized paper by its maker, a practice still used in the 21st century by the very finest paper makers. Paper samples in a whole panoply of colors would be glued onto individual pages, usually attached at the top only, which allowed the lucky browser to actually feel the individual sheets of paper—thickness, smell, everything was there for the seeking. We later found several other books of paper and papermaking collected by Hunter, all of them with samples attached.

Most of the books were finely illustrated; sometimes they were in folios, for example one of lithographs by Whistler, others by equally celebrated artists. Sometimes, especially in the earliest printed books, the incunabula, it was the printing *itself*, the delicacy or strength of the typeface, its spacing, the elaboration of particular initial letters, the amount of leading between lines that made the volume so remarkable. A 9th century poem by a monk named Walahfrid Strabo with its Latin title *Hortulus* [A Little Garden], filled with down-to-earth gardening information and appreciation, was illustrated with charming woodcuts by Elinor Lambert, a 20th-century printmaker. Strabo's medieval poem was encased in a cardboard envelope of sorts, snugly fitted in and protected.

Once the Filbys left us, John and I continued unpacking. Lots of decisions were made as we went along. It was what my artist daughter calls a "haptic" process, one that evolves from the work itself rather than from a carefully pre-conceived plan or outline. The first of these was a decision about where to put each book after we had delectated over it, acquiring ideas as we went along how we might best display particular ones. Since the new rare book room was safe and clean, we knew we could place the books there, but in what order? We decided to arrange them chronologically by year of publication, but of course we had absolutely no idea at that point how much shelf space to assign for each year, or even for each century. We made crude estimates about space, and began placing the books, a task which we had to amend and repeat many times over the coming few years, as it began to be apparent which years were most heavily populated, and which were a bit barren.

It began to occur to us as we went along that almost any theme we might entertain could be supported by the collection: illustrated fairy tales through the years, bookbinding, early experiments in air travel, children's books, scientific studies, and, perhaps most of all, religious books. We tended the

visitors to the exhibitions downstairs in the museum from 11 to 5, then worked on the cartons upstairs after making dinner. We were working twelve to eighteen hours each day, but we were in pig heaven poring over those books, and I suppose people began to notice we were having much too much fun in that beautiful building.

El Fantasma:

A few days after I first discovered that cave, I hatched a plan I thought would satisfy my curiosity. I decided I'd ask Herbie to help me out. I had seen him for a time in San Juan, then he was transferred to Ramsey and glad to get together when he heard I was in Arecibo. I had aged some since he had seen me last and not so sure of his reaction, but he was glad to see me and our meetings became regular. The reason I chose Herbie for my plan was because he was strong and street-smart. Before military, he had lived his whole life in Brooklyn, and nothing scared him. He was also the guy who took the time to improve my English in a way that wasn't insulting, so I trusted him.

When I told him I need his help and needed him to bring about 20 feet of strong rope next time, he first gave a funny grin and winked at me. I figured out pretty quickly what he was thinking, and I told him that I had no intention of tying him to the bed! I told him about my plan, and he agreed to come in the morning on his next day off, wearing climbing clothes and shoes, with the 20 feet of rope. One other thing happened that was funny. I noticed he had been staring hard at the bunch of white lilies I had on my bureau. They were hard to miss anyway, because by this time their smell filled the room. He looked at them once more as he got ready to leave and said, "That from a special admirer? They look as good as they smell. I'm surprised you didn't ask the guy who gave you those flowers to come with the rope." I let him squirm and blush for a while before I decided to tell him I had picked them for my own pleasure.

Herbie surprised me by arriving the very next morning, carrying what looked like a ton of strong rope neatly looped around one arm and carrying a huge flashlight in that hand. Another thing: he wore what he called "regulation" work boots and pants with a khaki short-sleeved T-shirt, and he carried a pair of tall black basketball sneakers that looked about my size in his other hand. He said he checked around to find shoes for me to climb in, and these were the best he could figure out. I was surprised and I told him so.

"Listen, Herbie, first of all I wouldn't wear those ugly shoes if my life depended on it, and second, I thought you'd lower me down into the cave with the rope, but I thought you'd stay and hold the rope for me. It wasn't my idea that you'd go down too."

He looked like I had slapped him hard. "You listen yourself, babe," he said. "You asked me to help you, and this is the way I'm doing it. It's not my fault that you seem to limit your wardrobe to flip-flops or bare feet. And naturally I plan to go down. From what you described to me, it sounds plenty worth investigating, or did you make up that stuff?"

He was mad, he'd never talked to me like that, and we were both quiet for a while.

I took the basketball sneakers from him, put them on and laced them up part way to keep my ankles roomy inside them, and we set out. We were so quiet you could hear the sound of the waves crashing against the big rocks and, by the time we got there, we were both okay again.

The first thing he did when we got to the top of the biggest one was turn on the flashlight and shine it slowly down and around into the hole. "Jesu becky" he said under his breath, "you weren't kidding." I was happy about his reaction and right away grabbed one end of the rope and began tying it around my waist. His head popped up and he said, "Hey girl, hold on! You know how you're always reminding me to slow down, well, now I'm asking *you* to be patient for a minute. I think I found something that'll make it easier on both of us. Take a good look. Right there," pointing the flashlight at a different angle. Then I saw it: a really rickety ladder was somehow attached inside one wall of the cave. It dangled close to the wall but sort of free-falling since the wall itself was curved. I guess I had missed it the first time without the flashlight. Still, it was good news and meant we could both go down, and we didn't need an anchor for the rope.

I insisted on being the first one down, "I discovered this, you know, it's my discovery" I said proudly to Herbie. He was decent about it when I changed my mind. As soon as I put my foot on the first rung I could find, I realized that the ladder was free-floating, not attached to any wall. "Not good," I mumbled, scrambling back, "you go first and hold the ladder for me." He saluted me and started down. As soon as he got down I heard a lot of exclamations as he started looking around. "Hey babe, shine the flashlight on me and get a good bead on me if you can. Then toss it gently down to me before you come down yourself." When I heard that he had caught the flashlight, I announced that I was starting and he should hold the laddder as steady as he could. "That was my plan to begin with," he said smartly. And so he did, and I did too, glad for those ugly basketball sneakers that kept me from slipping on the rungs, which were slightly wet, or at least pretty damp.

Having the flashlight was great, 'cause it was really dim down there. Shallow pools of salty water showed up in different places. Herbie said it had to do with whether the tide was in or out, that probably some water splashed into the hole at the top when the tide was high or seeped through cracks in the walls of the rock itself. Then I took over the flashlight, anxious to see what it was I had glimpsed from the top the day before. Sure enough, they were mostly kinds of faces, those things that I thought were like children's drawings, a few by themselves, and then a whole group of them bunched together, like something was scaring them, maybe they were hiding there, they were scared, huddling. Then we were quiet for a while, just circling around with the flashlight and being surprised at all we saw.

"Do you think a bunch of kids got down here with chisels and hammers?" I asked quietly. (I don't know why. There was something about the whole place that was practically like a church that made you want to talk softly.)Herbie thought for a while, then said he thought these designs, the pictures, where much older. He thought maybe the original Indians on the island, the Tainos, must have

done this, which would mean they were hundreds of years older than we were. I was surprised when he said that, and I wanted to know more. "There's a guy in my outfit knows a lot about this stuff. He studied anthropology before signing up, and I think he'll know exactly what these are." I wasn't keen on letting a lot of other people know what we had found, but I wanted to know more about what it really was, so I agreed we would take the guy down with us, on the condition that he agreed beforehand that he'd tell us everything he knew about this stuff. I even thought we might charge money for anyone wanting to see what was down there, but Herbie convinced me that was a bad idea, that it wasn't even our property. Who even knew who really owned these rocks and the cave and the water?

As soon as we began unpacking the books, we became aware of the absolute necessity of cataloguing the collection, which required some carefully mapped-out decision making. The time was 1989–90, and very few people had private computers, much less any real idea of the enormous variety of tasks they could be used for. Sophisticated firms might have computers to accomodate a word-processing pool of skilled typists to do the scut work of the firm. Computer programmers were designing amazing programs that very few people knew how to use. La Casa had an old IBM *Executive* typewriter, using "Testamonial" typeface, that Elmer Adler and Jack had used, and it had long given out. (That fine salt air in San Juan was not only dangerous for books: it ruined fine steel scissors and all kinds of mechanical tools.)

When we moved to Puerto Rico, lock, stock, and barrel—since we hoped we would be there with the books forever—John brought along his IBM typewriter with the exchangeable ball that gave us options as to type fonts. He also brought a computer, which he had used in both his business and personal life, and we decided we would find a program that could facilitate any exhibition we wanted to mount: to find a name, a title, the name of an illustrator, or any particular subject with ease. Again, such a process seems commonplace now, but not in 1990.

Q&A produced a program that would enable us to mount exhibitions with ease. We described each book by Year, Author, Title, Publisher, City, Country, *Nota Bene* (anything special about the book), Condition, and Number of the storage box from which the book was pulled. The program would take us on the computer's screen to any word following a colon or any word following an inserted semicolon. Of all the incunabula, one of the most famous is the Nurenberg Chronicle, which shows in texts and woodcut illustrations the history of the world from the Creation to the Last Judgment. Here is the entry…

year: 1493 author:
title: Nürnburger;Cronicken
illustrations: 1809;woodcuts (645 originals, 1164 repeats), of which 70;cities (from 23) and 598;portraits (from 96)
publisher: Anthonien;Koberger
city: Nürnberg country: Germany
NB: German version;magnificent;original binding with;clasps;copy from;Salzburg ;monastery;Hildegard CCIV;Ursula CXXXVIII
condition:
number: 69

The entry tells us that this book was published in 1493, placing it among those incunabula that appeared before 1501. The author is unknown, no condition problems found, there are 1809 woodcuts, of which 645 are used only once and 1164 repeats some of them, and 70 of which depict cities (from 23 used only once) and 598 of which are portraits (from 96 used only once). It also gives the page numbers (here in Roman numerals, as was the custom at the time) that contain portraits of two of our favorite medieval women. If we were, say, to form an exhibition of La Casa's most impressive books, we would simply command the program to show us on the screen all books described as "magnificent." Since we were shelving the books themselves in order by year of publication, finding them would be easy, and the exhibition could be formed readily. We thought back to the very first exhibition we put up, when the books were still in cartons at the *Archivo*, John climbing around on the tall metal shelving to find books suitable for an exhibition titled *Religion, Musica, y el Libro*. Back then we remembered getting impatient scuttling around the shelves and randomly pulling down one carton at a time, finally turning to some of our own things: framed pieces of early chant notation, a miniature from Hildegard's first book of visions, and other books we ourselves had collected and cherished over the years. Clearly, having La Casa's books computer-catalogued would make everything much simpler.

We were on a roll. One of the volunteers I had solicited for general help was game for learning the Q&A program and began showing up regularly for cataloguing, which moved the process along faster.

It was time to add some music to the scene at La Casa.

From the beginning of our time there, we thought what a great venue it would be for hearing music—small, intimate groups or recitals. We also had been given a clear mandate by our Board to make La Casa more meaningful to the Puerto Rican people. A group of "old faithfuls" from Adler's time remained active as subscribers, Amigos who contributed a yearly membership and would likely attend exhibitions on vacations to the Island. Those Amigos living on the Island were either artists or well-educated, well-off men, and glad to serve on the Board. The cliché "old boys club" fitted uncomfortably well. We very deliberately suggested the names of a few women for the Board and added several women to my cadre of volunteers. Still, we never saw children at La Casa and seldom saw "ordinary" Puerto Rican people.

I think we spoke to our faithful caretaker, Manuel, about the possibility of having concerts and activities, and he was not in favor of it at all. It was almost as if we were intruding on his territory to begin with. Two sexual beings—a man and a woman—cavorting upstairs when he arrived weekday mornings at 5:30 or 6 was not something he was happy with. Similarly, when he left around 4, he expected that everything would be exactly as he left it when he arrived next morning. He had been sole proprieter for two years following Jack's death, and he was both punctual and ritualistic. Added to his dilemma, we had brought two cats with us whom we cherished. The graceful, wily female would occasionally use the beautiful magnolia tree in the front patio as her personal elevator and would suddenly appear in the exhibition space downstairs. The huge orange male, on the other hand, would occasionally creep downstairs during the night and relieve himself in the damp dirt of the patio in spite of our careful placing of a clean litter box in our quarters upstairs. Manuel was so unused to indoor pets and so disgusted by the process that he would take a little plastic glass and turn it upside down on each sordid little pile. John would find it before we opened the doors, and clean it up.

We felt strongly that having musical events, mostly with local performers, would bring a whole new group of people into La Casa, and—in spite of Manuel's discouragement—we decided we could hold any events in the evening or over the weekend, while Manuel was safely at home. The first music heard at La Casa was from a series of auditions for a workshop given by Susan Young, who was then married to Roselin Pabón, the first Puerto Rican conductor of the Puerto Rican Symphony Orchestra. Susan had a beautiful soprano voice, which we heard during our first months on the Island in a recital at the Conservatory of Music. We introduced ourselves, and we became friends. She had met Pabón in graduate school in Bloomington, Indiana, and spoke colloquial Spanish, having lived on the Island since her marriage. She started an opera program at the Conservatory and was eager to promote good music wherever possible.

Just at the time we were trying to figure out how best to develop a music program, Susan approached us with a request to hold a seminar on musical theater downstairs, where we already had an upright piano placed on the crosspiece of the H. It would be held once a week, after hours, for several weeks. It included any person on the Island, male or female, who passed her audition. Susan accompanied each of them on the piano, and it was our joy to hear the music float upstairs each week as we prepared dinner on the designated evenings.

Musical events began to happen regularly: Luis Enrique Juliá on guitar one evening, the Rondalla Canaria de Puerto Rico on another, then Susan gave a solo recital. Four string players from the Puerto Rican Symphony Orchestra formed a quartet and gave a program which was only slightly delayed when our big orange cat strolled downstairs and sauntered casually in front of the four of them just as they were about to begin. Susan was by that time part of John's schola group, so there were medieval chant concerts as well. We had found really inexpensive folding chairs at a hardware store in Old San Juan that was having a closing sale, so it was easy for us to set things up and take them down. The San Juan Star carried notices of our concerts, and we posted programs in advance out in front of the building on a rather formal, glass-fronted bulletin board, where information about current exhibitions was otherwise mounted.

El Fantasma:

I died last night around 3 in the morning. It went fast, and I heard someone say it was a heart attack. It surprised me that I could overhear their conversation, even more that I could talk with myself clearly like that, wherever I was, though it was obvious that the "me" people were looking at was in the coffin. There wasn't much fuss about burying me. It was 1976, I was 56 years old, and I had been ten years in Arecibo, mostly there, once in a while getting rides back home to add money to the family situation. They were always glad to see me, "the one who got away," and we never talked about where the money came from, though I'm sure they knew. I wasn't the only one.

Luckily I didn't die with my pants off! My girlfriend and I used to talk about that possibility, and we giggled endlessly when I taught her the phrase *in flagrante delicto*. It had appeared in a huge book they had behind glass in a show at La Casa del Libro, and the caption said that the whole book was written in Latin. I never would have known what it meant, except there was an illustration—a caption called it "black-and-white woodcut" —that made it absolutely clear what was going on. At the time, I was pretty amazed that something like that would appear in one of the sacred books they

prized, but it became just another thing I learned there about those rare books that could speak to anyone's real life.

As a matter of fact, I was at the time worried about La Casa, Jack McWilliams in particular. On my last visit to *Viejo San Juan*, I stopped into the place and saw him just for a few minutes, and he looked awful. Physically awful I mean, but also his good humor seemed buried in worry. I found Manuel, the caretaker out in the patio and asked what was wrong with Jack. Manuel said that upstairs the books were moulding in that special book room and getting spotted from all the *salitre* in the air. He said he thought the worries were actually making Jack physically sick. He had visited some doctors here and even in Baltimore, called Johns Hopkins, and they said it was serious, something scary about his blood. When I asked Manuel what would happen to the books, he winced and shrugged, and went back to pruning plants.

What a sad mess! Not the place itself, the situation. I mean the place looked as beautiful as ever—those tiled stair risers, silkscreen posters up and framed perfectly on the walls, and a pretty show behind glass. You'd never guess what was or wasn't going on behind the scenes. I could see from the lines in Jack's face—in just those few minutes that he came downstairs from whatever he had been doing—that the situation was killing him. I felt sorry for the guy.

I had money in my purse, and as I walked towards *Plaza des Armas*, I passed an antique store. What caught my eye was the square tile in the window. It looked a lot like the ones between each step of the stairs at La Casa. I went in and was surprised at how jammed up the place was. There was stuff everywhere that I could see. A guy came out of the back when he heard a bell ring (it was automatic, I thought, since I hadn't made any noise or pushed anything myself) and was perfectly pleasant to me. I asked about the tile, and he climbed over a bunch of things in the window, picked up the tile, and suggested we go outside where we could see it better. He asked what caught my interest in the tile, and I told him it looked like the ones at La Casa del Libro down the street. He knew right away what I was talking about. He said they were Dutch tiles, made in Holland, and with the same method as the old ones—same kind of clay, tin-glazing, decorating with a kind of stenciling plus painting, then glazed again—but his tile wasn't nearly as old. I asked him how he was so sure of that. He said that his was too fresh-looking to be old, and the style of painting was different and later.

John and I had been invited by various people to give occasional classes illustrated with books from La Casa's collection. Some were for college-age students, but a few were for younger students. The first time I took my turn, I asked the teacher what kinds of things she wanted me to talk about. She told me "Just show them any of the images in the books. These kids think when they look at the TV screen that the image they see there is the only possible one for that word or character. They need their imaginations enlarged to see a lot more possibilities." It turned out to be fruitful. I thought about the fact that we never saw Puerto Rican children at the exhibitions and began planning some activities designed specifically for children.

Poor Manuel! Even worse than evening activities and cats would be the possibility of having kids at La Casa. We brought up the idea of children's activities at the next Board meeting. It was approved, and we began having these on frequent Saturdays (a day when Manuel was never at La Casa), announced

by whimsical flyers that John dreamed up, usually derived from some book illustration in the Collection that suggested the subject of the workshop. The flyers were not "dumbed down" for the children: they were sophisticated and inviting at the same time, and we usually had more than a dozen youngsters in attendance.

We charged a small fee for the events. We did papermaking out in the patios, where we could hose down the mess we made. One Christmastide two young Japanese women living on the Island did an origami event that resulted in dozens of gaily colored origami figures that we used for decorating the Christmas tree. A violinist from the orchestra, who was the Suzuki teacher for the Island, brought his young students for periodic recitals. We made marbleized paper with the kids. I organized and facilitated the activities, but Marilyn Torrech and MaryAnn Mackinnon were the local artist-teachers whose talents (and Spanish language) really led the classes. Later, the two of them would produce the charming silkscreen poster for an exhibition entitled *Los Quartos Elementos* (earth, air, fire, and water). Marilyn was especially interested in printmaking and led several children's activities centered on it—in one case using found objects placed on paper sensitive to light, so we could spread them out in the sunny patio and watch them "appear." One notable Saturday we were making linoleum prints with the kids when the inevitable began to happen: little slices and cuts on little hands. John was upstairs working, and he soon became the "nurse" for children who were sent upstairs to the bathroom where he applied antiseptics and bandaids. The parents of the wounded children took it all in stride. We always prided ourselves on cleaning up so thoroughly after the children's activities (as well as musical events in the evenings) that Manuel could barely tell that anything untoward had happened during his absence.

A young Puerto Rican architect, Andrés Mignucci, and his wife, Gail, lived directly across the street from La Casa; he was the one who had helped John design the plexiglass "false ceiling" for the new rare book room, and we, in turn, arranged to have an exhibition of the 1990s prizewinning drawings of "Unbuilt Buildings" (juried by the Instituto Americano de Arquitectos), mounted in 257. By this time we had opened the downstairs space of 257 to the public as well, so that we could have several exhibitions going at the same time. Gail was a teacher in a local school and especially interested in children: the two of them suggested an activity for kids that entailed designing an island—locating thereon all the things people would need, like a power plant, a school, a church, placing each one carefully so each would serve the people well. We started with huge pieces of heavy brown paper on the tile floor of the H crosspiece, then had the youngsters divide up into small working groups, each group responsible for their own island. One person in each volunteered to curl up on the brown paper, centered as the island, while another, with a bold black marker, drew a clear outline of the island by following the contours of the child's body. From there on, each group got busy trying to mark where each important facility/building would be placed on their island. Eventually, one member of each presented his or her island to the rest of us, explaining why they had chosen the placement of the buildings.

I think none of the youngsters had ever thought consciously about some of the unique problems of living on an island. Gail noticed immediately that none of the designs allowed for garbage or trash disposal and asked one of the presenters what was to be done about these. The immediate answer was, "throw it in the water," with which the rest of them agreed. That was obviously one of the issues that Gail had hoped would surface with these kids, and we talked about it a lot. Thankfully, respect for clean air, water, and beaches was becoming an important issue on the Island.

Una Actividad para Niños
en
LA CASA DEL LIBRO

Calle del Cristo 255
Viejo San Juan

Sabado 11 de mayo 2-4 p.m.

ISLAS: TALLER DE DISEÑO URBANO

a cargo de
Gail Peters y Arq. Andrés Mignucci
Carmen Morales y Beatriz del Cueto

Edades 9-12; gratis

Matrícula limitada a 25 niños

Para apuntarse llamar
a La Casa del Libro
teléfono 723-0354

INSTITUTO
AMERICANO
DE
ARQUITECTOS

SALDAÑA
INSURANCE

Amigos de Calle del Cristo 255, Inc.

Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña

One of the perks of the children's activities that I most hoped for was to develop their awareness of how it feels to live in a space surrounded by beauty. Puerto Rico is green and lush. Its natural beauty is everywhere, but the houses that ordinary people live in don't consciously reflect that beauty. Not only slums, but suburban developments as well are usually built with cinder blocks, angular prison-like *rejas* at the windows and some doors as well, with little thought given to anything but utility. Not good for the spirit. John often quoted Augustine's "Everything we come into contact with becomes part of us."

El Fantasma:

It could have been years before I noticed how easy it was to move my attention wherever I wanted. Time was different, or it didn't count, which may sound wrong, but it just didn't matter any more. The sensation was peculiar until I realized what was happening. I once had a girlfriend who got pregnant. She decided not even to try getting rid of it. She loved kids anyway and got really excited about the whole thing. She kept waiting to feel the baby moving inside of her. Whenever I asked her about it, she would get a worried look and say, "I don't think so." Then one day she looked really happy and said, "I can feel it moving!" I asked her what it was like and she said it had probably been happening for quite a while. She just didn't know what it was she had been feeling, just something soft and strange she had not recognized. It was kind of like that with me. I certainly didn't meet a lot of dead friends or relatives the way some church people had promised, but I did find myself in unexpected places, watching all kinds of things going on.

The first time I found myself at La Casa was weird. It was real quiet and felt more ghostly than I did. Jack wasn't downstairs, not many visitors, and there was some kind of "secretary person" sitting at the desk, Manuel puttering around the plants. I thought Jack might be upstairs in his little office or showing special books to somebody. I realized I could easily be upstairs myself now. I had always been curious to know what went on up there. It turned out to be nothing special at all. Jack wasn't in that little office, just file folders and papers, and there were no special books on the shelves either. Actually no one was up there. The railings on the back balconies were falling apart, leading into an old kitchen with a refrigerator that didn't work and was all rusted out at the bottom.

I left, wondering what was going on, something had happened.

One of the questions most frequently asked by the many American and European tourists who visited La Casa was, "How and why did all these books get to Puerto Rico?" It wasn't simply a one-man operation on Adler's part. He had an incredible following of fellow book lovers and collectors throughout the world whom he had befriended in his earlier lives. Not only did he found the famed Pynson Printers in New York, he participated in the founding of the journal Colophon, devoted to the finest details of book printing—paper-making, colophons, printers' devices, every element in careful detail. Added to that were the friends and admirers he acquired during his time at Princeton. He himself was friend to Alfred Knopf, to the Beineke family, and had well educated wealthy friends from Rochester, New York, where the Adler family made their original fortune in men's clothing.

He was a fabulous letter writer, and quickly informed friends of his Puerto Rican venture. Duplicate copies in renowned libraries in the States were donated to the new collection, a group of book enthusiasts from Puerto Rico and many other countries donated membership fees each year from the

beginning. They were known as the Amigos, and it was from their membership that each person on La Casa's Board was to be legally elected at annual meetings. Dues from the Amigos contributed to the funding of books, and it's not clear whether anyone was paying salaries to Adler or his assistant, Jack, during those formative years. Early on, when Jack took a sabbatical year from his UPR teaching, Elmer sent him on a buying spree to Europe, and Jack paid for all his own expenses on that trip, adding to his own private collection as well as that of La Casa as he went along. When Adler died in 1964, he left $80,000 to be invested and used for books over the years to come.

From the very first days in October of 1988, it became obvious right away what a big difference it made for the two of us to be available during public hours to guide people through the beauties of the Delano exhibition, pointing out the relationship of the exhibited materials to Puerto Rican economic and social change, to describe the process and the medium used in printing individual posters and books. Bilingual captions on discreet white cards behind glass were essential, but did little to attract visitors unless they were particularly interested in books, well versed in the history of printing, or were themselves collectors or artists, especially printmakers.

Without some guidance, people—especially tourists—tended to come in, look very superficially at a few cases and leave. We realized, when we brought the books back, that walking people through an exhibition was even more important while showing the very old books. Some of the incunabula were without the kinds of illustrations that modern people could relate to. We dreamed of developing a permanent exhibition that could describe and illustrate the complexities of paper-making, binding, executing a good calligraphic hand, the copying of ancient manuscripts in monasteries, some of the things that made books, the writing, the illustrating and making of the thing itself so wondrous to us.

Some of our appreciation came from growing up with an abundance of public libraries wherever we might live in the States. One of my proudest moment at age five was proving that I could write my name so that I could have my own library card and make weekly trips to borrow books. We had each lived for over 20 years in New York City where generations of immigrants had taught themselves to read English for free at the 42nd Street library. Wondrous exhibitions were regularly mounted, and there was never an entrance fee. Perhaps equally important, there were always lots and lots of people sitting quietly, reading, exploring every possible subject. It was obviously a good and satisfying way to spend time.

Many well-off Puerto Ricans had large libraries in their homes, but they weren't open to the public. The whole concept of public space and how it is used was different. Most cities in Puerto Rico had open plazas—Old San Juan alone had Plaza des Armas and Plaza Colón, for example—but no one went to the plazas to *read*. Plazas were for meeting people, being seen, or, in the case of the huge and well-known Plaza las Americas, for shopping and looking at a huge array of consumer goods.

We found in talking to teachers that local schools rarely had budgets for their school libraries. We heard yearly amounts like $20 or $25. Often there were no funds at all for the libary, and it wasn't unusual to have no library at all. It wasn't expected that shool library books would be borrowed and brought home to read.

There was one public library that we knew of in San Juan. At the beginning of the 20th century, Andrew Carnegie had given $100,000 for the building of a public library in Puerto Rico as part of an educational initiative. It was to be governed by a Board of Directors named by the Governor (at that

time governors were sent down from the States) and approved by the Senate. A beautiful neo-classical building with Doric columns was designed by Ramón Carbia and opened to the public in 1917. Any books from libraries established under Spanish rule were transferred to the Carnegie.

Eventually, in 1950, control of the library was transferred to the Education Department of the government of Puerto Rico, and they attempted having traveling libraries visit schools. The Carnegie was closed because of deterioration in 1965, opened again about four years later. Funding and maintenance were the issues that periodically closed Carnegie over the years, and when Hurricane Hugo struck in 1989, very much damage was caused. We heard that copper sheets protecting the roof had earlier been stolen and not replaced.

Soon after, we saw many huge van-like shipping containers parked outside the Carnegie, filled with its hurt books, literally baking in the hot sun. It was not until 1995 that the library was able to re-open its doors.

El Fantasma:

Next time I visited La Casa, everything had changed, again! It was shortly after dawn when I got there, slipped upstairs, and now there were about 1,000 books on the old shelves, but it turned out they weren't La Casa's books. Inside each cover was inscribed either "R. John Blackley" or "Barbara Lachman." Some looked pretty old and worn, but I doubt they were the rare books: they weren't ancient or fine like the old collection was supposed to be. The people themselves, the two of them, were busy quietly having sex on a mattress that was on the second floor bridge between 255 and 257 while Manuel clanged his metal pail on the bricks in one of the patios. They paid no attention to the noise and of course couldn't see me at all.

When they finished what they were doing, they started talking about opening a public lending library, using their own books and turning the front room of 257 into a reading room for people who wanted to read the books there. These two were full of big plans, and, when I looked at the front room, it was certainly elegant enough, if that's what public reading rooms are supposed to be. Now I understood why all their own books were in that room that used to house the rare book collection when Adler and Jack were there, except now anybody could go upstairs and use it. I don't think they ever managed to get that far, but that was the plan.

The other thing they talked about was the lack of hot water. I guess the hot water heater had quit, along with most of the other old appliances on the second floor, and no one noticed because there were no people living up there for so many years. When Blackley—that was the name of the guy from the mainland—asked Manuel about it, Manuel apprently told him that only Americans from the mainland expected to have hot showers; Puerto Ricans were happy to bathe and shower in cold water. They swallowed that story for a while, until they spoke to Fábregas, the head of their Board, who smiled and told them the hot water must have busted, and Blackley found a local plumber who fixed it.

Towards the end of each month, there was a meeting of La Casa's Board of Directors. We tried at first to have the meetings held at La Casa, knowing that would be a good opportunity for the Board members to see the progress that we were making and—once the restoration work was actually started—the improvements in repair that were happening. Since Old San Juan is a long, skinny peninsula funneled off from the rest of the Island, and the rest of San Juan proper, driving in the old city was always a mess and parking next to impossible. We were on the dead end of Calle de Cristo. Not only was parking there difficult but it was actually against the law. There was a lovely restaurant that spilled out onto the street directly across from us, virtually making the whole block a walking mall. Visitors always stopped in on strolls around the old city, having left a car or tour bus parked some distance away.

Several members of the Board were elderly—the wonderful Ted Moscoso attended meetings as long as his health held out—and most of the rest were working men with offices in the business areas of greater San Juan, where parking and garages were available. I think we managed to have one meeting as planned, by the end of which it was obvious the plan wasn't working. They were all short tempered with the parking situation, resented the time spent walking to and from their cars, and we were anxious about how badly thought out and impractical the idea had been.

We immediately changed the plan, needing a quorum for decision-making and having the meetings at offices of various members, largely depending on their schedules and other business commitments at the chosen time. John and I regularly parked our little Honda Civic in a lot about 1/2 mile away from La Casa and collected the one Board member who lived in Old San Juan each month. It worked out much more smoothly.

The Board members were pleased, but it meant that they didn't have the opportunity to see what was really happening at La Casa. John spent hours and hours preparing precise agendas and more detailed reports on each item pending at La Casa based largely on the notes I had hurriedly scratched down at the last meeting. (One of my few prescribed duties as co-director of La Casa was that of "Acting Secretary" of the Amigos.) Often there were Financial Memoranda and ideas for future exhibitions and events to be presented in some written detail. One of John's recent jobs had been as closing co-ordinator for remortgaging over 90 Mitchell-Lama housing projects, which pulled millions of dollars into New York City, helped it out of a serious financial crisis, and provided much needed housing for thousands of people. The three lawyers he worked for were deeply appreciative of his work and had hired him after looking at a piece of 10th-century liturgical chant he had transcribed by hand for

his schola cantorum to sing from what look like tiny squiggles over a hand-lettered Latin text on a page with no music staff. Of the two of us, he was definitely the one more organized and capable of paying attention to all the details.

And there were details galore, especially during the renovation phase, since it was the ICP, Zonas y Monumentas, and the legislature that had to sign all the contracts. Bids had to be submitted, contracts drawn up and reviewed by all concerned, and finally an Order to Proceed from Zonas. Neither of us had ever worked for a bureaucracy before. An individual might "misplace" a contract for three weeks and need prodding to realize he had lost it and needed to find it, disagreements and jealousies within departments arose that we rarely knew about, and it was always amazing when something arrived at a clear beginning. It wasn't until much later, when we returned to the States in 1992, that we realized there were bureaucracies in every government. We thought Puerto Rico was unique.

If I had neglected to check the calendar, I could always tell when we were about to have a Board meeting, because John would start preparing his various documents a day or two before and spend most of the evening before the meeting typing furiously, checking details and notes. Mostly I could tell because he would play Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* as loud as the technical system could support it, and the music would resound off the stucco walls and through all the air surrounding us.

El Fantasma:

Next time I dropped in, it was late at night. I didn't see her anywhere, but he was at that big electric typewriter, flying through the keys like some secretary. He was concentrating like there was no tomorrow, big lines on his face that weren't there during regular daytime. How he could concentrate like that with the music blaring all over, I have no idea. The cover of the record said it was a *missa*, and I could even recognize some of the words here and there, like *christe eleison* and *sanctus* from when I dropped in at some church around here. Mostly the *padre* would say those words in a real soft voice while everybody else was quiet, maybe listening, maybe thinking their own stuff, but these people were singing so loud it was almost like shouting, trying to make people hear them over all the instruments playing at once. I guess the rest of *Viejo San Juan* was fast asleep at that hour, and it was mostly outside anyway, but I wondered how he could get away with that in an apartment in *nueva york* without having the cops after him.

When I looked over his shoulder it turns out he was typing a memo to the guy who was the head honcho of the crew that was fixing up the buildings, but there were carbons in the machine, so he must have been sending to a bunch of people. It went on and on. Apparently they were doing a sloppy job, and the floors in the two bedrooms had to be done more than once, and they had done something in one of the bathrooms that sprung a leak and damaged a book by Irene Delano in one of the glass cases. Tools were everywhere.

Then I saw her with a dustpan, sweeping up sawdust and nails and muttering to herself about how men never clean up their messes. Obviously they weren't sleeping on the floor in that "bridge-room" anymore, because it looked kind of like a living room in there. They had moved some huge, ancient table made of wood into the room, so they must be eating there too. They had some hand-made straight little chairs with rush seats around that looked like they had been made by hand on

the Island long ago, but also a couple of comfortable chairs that must have been their own. Their own stuff must have come since I was here last. The big orange cat was just sitting on one of the upholstered chairs like he owned the place.

I wasn't sure where they *were* sleeping now, because both bedrooms were completely empty except they had more construction mess that she didn't seem to bother with. Then, when she decided it was time to go to bed for her, she went into that tiny little cube of a room that used to have nothing but Jack's metal desk and a tall metal file cabinet jammed into it. The desk was now on the *balcon* outside the office and there was that mattress again, but now it was barely squeezed into that little room. At least they could have some privacy if they wanted, because there was a plain brown wood door that you could close, but there weren't any windows either, so it must have been pretty close in there if you closed it. I'm sure they weren't going to keep sleeping in there forever.

Downstairs St. John was still standing on his white pedestal, and you could see all those dark carved-out parts that were supposed to show where the long robe folded. Since nobody could see me, I put my hands all over it. I'd never touched anything quite like it. It seemed like I could feel the muscles in his neck the way he stretched it up to one side. I remembered when I was a kid there was a really old man who made *santos* out of wood who lived near us. He painted them in a way that made them look really old, but they were only about the size of your hand and they didn't seem to be moving in their bodies the way this guy is.

I really dreaded the actual meetings. It made me anxious that we seemed to need their permission for everything we did. Often it was hard to tell from their words and faces whether it was some kind of disapproval I saw or disbelief that there was so much happening at La Casa after a long dormant period. They often asked whether we had

finished cataloguing the books, having no idea what a complex task that was, and seeming to ignore the fact that no one else had managed to accomplish that task in the last thirty years. It's possible that the "elephant in the room" often was money. I suppose they would have liked us to be having fund raisers rather than free exhibitions with carefully designed and illustrated booklets.

I had fairly quickly developed a group of volunteers who met regularly with me and came in to help with the visitors on designated days. They were all women who were very interested in art and books and learned quickly the ins and outs of each exhibition we mounted. They kept careful track of the guest book, urging the visitors to leave comments and suggestions, and to leave their email addresses if they wanted to be kept apprised of events or bring their children to one of the special Saturday activities we had started.

At the time, the yearly membership fee was $25 for anyone who wanted to be an Amigo, and we had a stack of membership forms in plain view, typed on the beautiful paper and masthead—either the 16th-century St. John statue inspired by Rhiemenschneider's workshop or the intricate monogram Adler had long ago commissioned from the Dutch printer van Krimpen. We had a few things for sale in a small closed cabinet: silkscreen or engraved prints that had announced some of the previous exhibitions and printed in limited editions, some specially printed stationery and Christmas cards illustrated by artists in Puerto Rico such as the Delanos, Lorenzo Homar, Antonio Martorell, and a few new books illustrated by the same artists. Canvas bags were coming into fashion everywhere, and we had scores of them made with one of the two logos printed in black letters. Naturally we thought of them as "book bags" when we sold them, but lord only knows what items they actually carried for the visitors who bought them.

Becoming an Amigo entitled each member to be well-informed about what we were doing at La Casa del Libro through a Bulletin we sent out periodically by mail. It also entitled each Amigo to participate in a yearly meeting at which Board members were elected, but we only discovered this information when we finally found an old set of bylaws stored in that metal file cabinet in Jack's office. We notied that 35 years had passed since any such meeting was held. It became a point of contention for us towards the end.

La Casa wasn't the only museum or "clarion of the arts" to be strapped for funds in the 1980s. The Museum of the City of New York had to close its doors for a time, and articles appeared regularly that museums were considering selling one or more treasured works in order to stay afloat. Trustees and boards disagreed and struggled; members resigned or were replaced. In Puerto Rico, the ICP strongly suggested charging an entrance fee, and we just as strongly vetoed the idea, knowing how that would immediately change the complexion of our visitors and reinforce the notion that it was really an "old boys club" aimed at only well-off American tourists and Puerto Ricans.

It was still the height of the women's movement, and I was outraged by the fact that no women sat on our Board. Two of the most regular volunteers were especially interested in La Casa. John and I suggested they be added to the Board at one of our monthly meetings, which was approved by a quorum at the very next meeting. (Little did we know at the time they should legally have been elected by the Amigos.) One was from the States and had long served at the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum; the other was Puerto Rican, originally from an old family in Mayaguez. She was especially well educated and expert in Spanish culture on the Island, and she had ambitious ideas for La Casa going forward. They were both wealthy.

The question of defining the exact function of a "board" in any cultural organization is to this day vexing and contested. Informed by visits and conversations with people at the Morgan Library before leaving New York, we both assumed that members of the board contributed ideas, expertise in precise areas, and periodic gifts of support in the form of money. Clearly, that had happened in the beginning, when Adler's original Board helped him to build the collection of rare books, with donations either in money or valuable books and art works. That never happened while we were in Puerto Rico.

El Fantasma:

It was a Sunday afternoon when I stopped by next, thinking La Casa would be closed and I could poke around in the quiet. I was pretty sure La Casa was now like all the galleries in old San Juan at the time—closed on Sunday, and open Tuesday evenings. Not that it made much difference to me, but I was surprised to find the doors wide open and light pouring in. Nobody was wandering around though, even though the lights in the cases behind glass were on as usual to show off the open pages of the books. There was a little buzz and whispering, but I didn't even see Manuel, and I wondered what the devil was going on.

I peeked in at the front room of 257. It was open to the public now with a lot of framed stuff on the walls and four or five squarish columns scattered around on the black-and-white tile floors. They were close to four feet tall, painted white on the bottoms, then some kind of clear plexiglass caps on the top. Inside each one you could see some precious book, sitting on a piece of fabric, sort of cradled in a carved book stand, and opened to some special page. Nobody was in *that* room either.

I didn't stop to read any of the captions, although once in a while I had taken the time. They were in English and Spanish, so I could usually read what they said, but a lot of the words could have been in Greek for all of me. Even in Spanish I didn't know what they meant, but when I really took the time and looked carefully, I could usually figure it out if I wanted.

You never knew what the captions were going to be talking about. There were so many things to be interested in with these books. They talked about special features of book bindings, page margins, vellum. The names they gave to special kinds of type was typography—like whether the printing was plain or fancy, squarish or with tails and more sweeping letters, that's the kind of thing they noticed. There was another term they liked to toss around, which was "colophon." That I just ignored, but then I kept looking at the book they were showing, which was really old. I could tell by the date on it, 1483 I think it was. Then I realized I was looking at the last page, not the first one, and I figured out colophon was the word for when they gave the basic information like the date, the place it was printed, and how many they printed—all the stuff you expected to find as soon as you open a book, but here it was on the last page. They didn't even have a page for a title to some of these ancient ones, the words just started right out on the first page.

I started to figure out that the way I had always ignored hard stuff as I was going along wasn't so much about what a good reader I was or wasn't. It turns out that just really looking at things a lot, and slowly, was good.

The whispering sounds had stopped, and I went through a door leading to one of the patios. Blackley was up there with a few other people, two of them with funny-looking instruments I hadn't seen before, the others just dressed up and waiting. A whole bunch of people were sitting on folding chairs around the patio, also just waiting. I saw they were holding open programs, and I looked over someone's shoulder, but I couldn't figure out most of the words. Okay, babe, I thought, just look and listen, and you'll figure out what's happening. Either they're going to talk about something or sing about it.

When they started singing, it was very different. The sounds were pretty quiet, and nobody was swaying or dancing around. The singers stood really still, people in the audience were very quiet, and even the music was kind of still. You certainly couldn't dance to it, but it sounded like the music itself had a movement of its own that just kept floating along. Every once in a while I would catch a word I'd heard before, like I did with the Beethoven that turned out to be a Mass, but this wasn't really a Mass, and it sure wasn't anything like that loud Beethoven piece he played upstairs on the phonograph.

Then Blackley started to sing some part by himself, a solo part. It went on a long time, and it seemed much wilder than before when they sang together. It kept going, and it almost sounded as though he was singing naked and something was after him, something was driving all those notes and sounds that wasn't ordinary. I wasn't sure whether I liked it or whether that mattered, but I was glad nobody could see me. Then I realized at the top of someone's program it said, "Schola Antiqua." No kidding, antique books, now antique music.

The Schola Antiqua was nearly 20 years old when it gave a concert as part of La Casa's second music series in May 1991. In the music world, interest in "early music" had started first with the "rediscovery" and performance of early Baroque works by such people as Pablo Casals and Thurston Dart. During the 1950s and '60s audiences grew to appreciate Renaissance madrigals and motets, then realized there was also a wealth of late and even early Medieval music. European monasteries held manuscripts containing chants and polyphonic pieces for all the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year. Some of the interest was probably fanned by the sense of what had been lost since Vatican II in 1963. Progres-

sive ideas had been floated, strictures relaxed, but what was lost was what propelled the whole rhythm of the liturgical year in the Catholic Church: its music.

The Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, France, had begun scholarly research into the world of chant in the 19th century. Old manuscripts were searched out and facsimiles published; universities in Europe and the United States picked up the research in their music departments and created cross-disciplinary programs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Noah Greenberg famously resurrected and performed medieval Church dramas, sung by his group, New York Pro Musica. John had been in a religious order for seven years, during which time he got thoroughly smitten with chant; he sang and conducted it and, after leaving the religious order, began his own research into 10th-century manuscripts—using Solesmes' facsimiles but, following leads provided by a Dutch and a British priest, came to an interpretation of rhythm wildly different from that of Solesmes. He transcribed 14 hours worth of chants and applied the findings to early polyphony as well. This music is, as Eliot writes, "At the still point of the turning world. …Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance, and there is only the dance."

Schola Antiqua gave concerts at the Cloisters and, regularly for some years, sang at St. Peter's City Corp and at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village. From New York, the Schola was invited for two summers to participate in early music festivals in Utrecht and also in London and Laon. In 1991 the Schola was offered a place in a festival called *Tage alter Musik Regensburg*, and this time Lufthansa Airlines offered to help fly us. John and I thought it would be a good opportunity to have the Schola first gather the singers in San Juan and give a concert at La Casa. We wondered how this music would be received in Puerto Rico, where no tradition for early music existed. John had sung a Latin Requiem at San José Church for La Casa's Board member, Guillermo Benitez-Rodriguez, but this was different. It included David Dyer on recorder and viol, whose regular job was playing violin with the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra, and our friend the soprano Susan Pabón, who was by that time a regular part of the the Schola.

It was Schola Antiqua's second outdoor concert, and the acoustics in the courtyard worked well for them, just as they had for the other chamber music concerts we had hosted there. (John had hooted around the courtyard when we were interviewed for the job, determining immediately that it would be a great place to sing.) It was an intimate, light-filled space, perfect for small instrumental groups and vocal recitals. We always delighted in seeing all the women in the audience fan themselves quietly as the music progressed. It was an unobtrusive gesture, an old tradition practiced by women throughout the Island, and some of the fans were made with great care and artistry.

We hoped that Donald Thompson of the *San Juan Star* would review the concert. He had written about a few of the concerts held at La Casa, but also had experienced that nasty driving/parking phenomenon that made Old San Juan a traffic hazard, especially at weekends. In March, he had come to a concert of three Puerto Rican guitarists playing classical music. In the course of his review, he wrote

> Trapped in the great aunt of all traffic jams and having taken two hours to get from Plaza Carolina to Cristo Street, your correspondent missed the opening third of the concert (Vivaldi and Franck) but arrived in time for the end of a fine trio arrangement of a work that should be much better known here than it is.

On May 22nd, he had no such problems. He wrote

> Before heading for a specialized "older music" conclave in Germany this week, the San Juan-based Schola Antiqua ensemble offered a concert of most unusual music at that hotbed of most unusual bibliophilic and artistic behavior, the Casa del Libro. Taking place in the Casa's light and airy headquarters in Old San Juan, Sunday afternoon's concert was based on European music from as early as the tenth century and as late as the fourteenth.

Thompson was a good musician and had also done his homework in preparation for our concert. He recognized the sources of pieces like "the Las Huelgas Codex of thirteenth-century Spain" and "the Codex Calixtinus of a century earlier." He pointed out that "memorizing some titles and dates for an exam is a very different thing from dancing barefoot in the music itself (if you can pardon the expression), and that's what Schola Antiqua does." After favorably discussing individual pieces and voices, he ends with a bang, saying

> My own belief is that no music lover who attends such a concert as Sunday's will ever be quite the same again, nor can such a person continue to believe that music began with Verdi and ended with Puccini, or Bach and Brahms respectively, or Vivaldi and Wagner. In other words, the great world of music is full of marvels which stretch the mind and bring light to the soul (could this be what music is for?), and Sunday's concert by the Schola Antiqua only brought this idea home again in full force.

We probably could have flown to Germany without a plane.

El Fantasma:

I visited while they were singing at some festival in Germany and found a new young woman sitting at the desk downstairs. She was some kind of secretary and what Lachman called "docent" who actually lived in a small room in the back of the first floor. Apparently she needed a place to live badly and they needed help badly. She was *americano* but had a Puerto Rican boyfriend and spoke our kind of Spanish really well. By this time there was more than one exhibition going at once, and so they had loads of captions and booklets to translate.

The day I slipped in, there weren't many visitors, so she and one of the volunteers were chattering and complaining about the prices of the things La Casa had for sale. One of them would pull out something from an old wooden cabinet and show it to the other, then check the price list and cluck. I'll bet the prices had been figured out years ago while Jack was still alive, and they hadn't been changed since. I'm no businessman, but I *did* set my own prices, and I knew enough to charge what other people were getting for goods and services like mine.

The old posters are now really popular, and I'm sure they could charge a lot more. Lachman and Blackley are really such *bobos* when it comes to this stuff. Not only are things way underpriced, but when La Casa sells things like that gorgeous book the Delanos made about *Los Aguinaldos*, the one with golden-colored *serigrafia* pictures glued to a lot of the pages, 60% of the money goes to Delano, so there's not much left for La Casa. It could be the same with that cute children's *ABC* book that Antonio Martorell filled with woodcuts, but I'm not sure. A lot of words in the book are really

Puerto Rican, I mean they're not from Spain. The letter "C" is for *cucubanos*, and there are big white stars all over two black pages. I remember as a kid catching fireflies at night and dancing around with them between all our toes so it looked like our feet were making shapes of light in the darkness all around us. "V" is for *vejigante*, and my grandmother told me ages ago that only the Puerto Ricans have those amazing big figures for their festivals. I'm sure *that's* underpriced, and think of all the tourist grandmothers who just have to bring home some kind of present for the grandkid!

Another thing that's pretty obvious to me is that they're still selling some of the cards for 35¢, and actually each one is a small work of art, a print on nice thick paper, that much I know! One of them is a small *seragrafia* of La Casa, *el frente*, done in unusual colors, some of them in an earthy light brown, others in a kind of lime green. Only the canvas bags have a price that's competitive, $10. The two women were talking about making T-shirts too, trying to figure out what should be printed across the front. I noticed they they wrote up the sales and the suggestions in a black ledger book that Lachman leaves on the desk for suggestions. Some fancy bookkeeping!

Speaking of children, I notice that for those workshops they give on Saturdays for kids, they charge $3 for each one, and that barely covers the cost of the materials. Same thing: they're practically giving stuff away. At least the women who teach these events—looks like mostly Marilyn Torrech teaches according to the notices must do it for free.

There's a new poster, *serigrafia*, for the exhibition of children's books that Lachman put together. At least that has a decent price, though I'm not sure whether 60% of that may go to the artist, but the little booklet Blackley designed for the exhibition has lots of swirly, slightly scary art work decorating the pages and that's for free! (At least I know they don't have to pay for the art work, since it says the artist did it in 1893.) The big poster announcing the exhibition has a lot of charm, but it's kind of subtle. The colors are dark, and it shows a little Puerto Rican girl really concentrating hard on an open book. It has the title *Descubriendo Nuevos Mundos*, not the book she's reading, but the whole exhibition is called that, plus the words *Libros Para Niños*. *Es asombroso* to think this museum of rare books includes so many illustrated books for kids that are outstanding, probably valuable, and a lot of them were done long before children got to be so important to the world.

Each *vitrina* has a different theme. Of course one of them is filled with books of fairy tales from all different times and places, just told a little differently each time with different art work. There's one case filled with books that have animals as the main characters, and one with books that are honestly pretty scary. Kids seem to love scary. And the fist *vitrina* is all books with the theme of books for children that "explore strange new worlds"—that's what the title of the exhibition refers to, and there's a lot of fantasy and exploring in books of different languages, like French, German, and Spanish. I guess the idea is that when Puerto Rican kids come in on Saturdays for the workshops , the books in the *vitrinas* will catch their eyes, and they'll want to read for fun, not just for school. Too bad they can't actually page through the books as well, and too bad not to have libraries for kids.

We had nearly finished cataloguing all the books, the children's Saturday activities were in full swing, and we held our first full-fledged exhibition drawn from the collection we had arranged chronologically on shelves in the new rare book room. Alfredo had very carefully repaired the entire roof of La Casa; still, we saw occasional dribbles of water slide off the room's plexiglass roof that was canted perfectly so they slid onto the terra cotta floor, and the books were safe and dry.

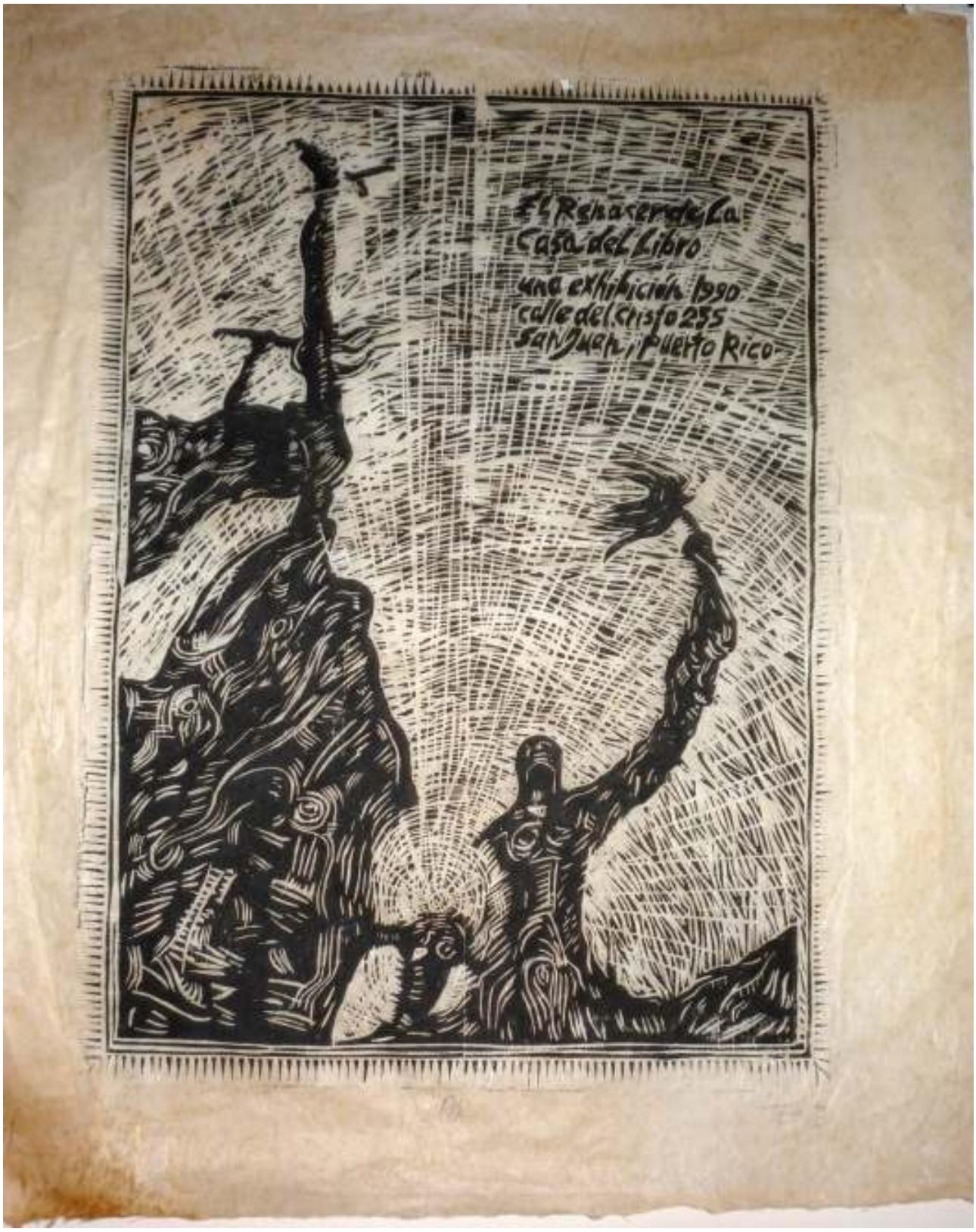
We had held smaller exhibitions at La Casa and contributed books to various exhibitions for Library Week, given a small exhibition at Inter-American University in San German, another at La Casa about the theme of the Negro in books in Puerto Rico, but this was to be a La Casa's own full exhibition, a real celebration. We tested the efficacy of the catalogue on the computer to choose the titles rather than digging through cartons. We called it, appropriately and with a certain amount of pride, the rebirth: *El Renacer de La Casa del Libro*.

The poster announcing the exhibition was a black-and-white woodcut that Teo Freytes based on an iconic sculpture by Lindsay Daen. Lindsay was born in New Zealand and spent most of his growing-up time in Australia, but, like so many other uniquely talented people, he arrived in Puerto Rico at the invitation of Governor Muñoz Marín. The Governor felt it was time for Puerto Ricans to see an inspiring body of sculpture and invited him to give an exhibition of his work in the 1950s. It was the first major exhibition of sculputure on the Island, attendance was in the thousands, and Lindsay stayed on, opening a studio in San Juan and marrying a Puerto Rican woman, Loulette Bouret.

At the time we met Lindsay, he was long widowed. He and his young wife and muse, Laura, now spent most of each year in Old San Juan, going to Spain briefly in order to have his pieces cast in bronze. Technically, his pieces are monuments, most are representative of nobility and hard work such as The Fisherman from 1960; others are airborne or might be, like the Boy with Wings, and the Falconer.

La Rogativa, which Lindsay completed in 1971, is twelve feet high and stands on a walkway in the Old City where it towers, directly overlooking San Juan Bay: three young women and a mitred bishop processing with torches held high above their heads. The sculpture calls to life an event that had happened in 1797 and soon became a legend. In an effort to save the city from the British, whose ships were all prepared to raid San Juan, the bishop ordered the young women of the town to process with lit torches, beseeching God for help. When the British saw the staggered lights on the hill, they assumed reinforcements had arrived from elsewhere on the Island, and they fled. The bishop wields his crozier.

The woodcut poster that Teo Freytes made for the exhibition is a highly stylized rendition of Lindsay's work. It borders on the abstract, and it catches the movement and nobility of the sculpture with great strength.



John and I had determined that each exhibition would be mounted for three months, and we made plans for several to come. I particularly wanted to curate an exhibition in honor of the four elements, and John was anxious to do one devoted to engravings of many styles in a whole variety of books.

In June, in conjunction with the annual Casals Festival in Puerto Rico, we hosted six noontime concerts, and people working in Old San Juan, plus tourists who were on the Island specifically for the Festival, came at the lunch hour to hear different combinations of chamber music. We were thrilled when La Casa's musical events and exhibitions began to be covered in the local newspapers, especially *The San Juan Star*, which was then the only English-language paper on the Island.

We were surprised when, at a monthly Board meeting, one of the members who worked for Paine Webber in Puerto Rico and was probably the most concerned with that elephant in the room, the need for money, announced that a wealthy friend of his was hiring Sotheby's to come down from New York to evaluate his private collection sometime around the first of the coming year. He pointed out that La Casa's collection had never been evaluated and, now that all the books were catalogued and safely in order, it would be an opportunity to find out just what the collection was worth. It was quite a turning point in our adventure, and we were excited when Sotheby's agreed to include La Casa in its planned trip to Puerto Rico.

El Fantasma:

Next time I dropped in at La Casa it was February 1991, if you're going by calendar time. *Libros Para Niños* was still showing in the exhibition cases, and this time I decided to really look more carefully. I could afford to linger as much as I wanted. Time meant nothing to me anymore, and, besides, I thought I blended right in with a couple of classes of Puerto Rican students who were touring the exhibition. Not that *that* mattered anymore either, silly girl, I realized to myself.

The third case was filled with children's books in a whole bunch of different languages. It said clearly in the booklet that Blackley made, *Los Libros para Niños nos ensefian en muchas idiomas*. I knew I wouldn't be able to read the foreign languages, but I remembered what Jack had told me ages ago about looking being more important than reading with La Casa's books.

I was surprised when I saw that the very first one was written in Spanish. It was called *Letras Romanas*, and it turned out to be a kind of ABC, with really beautifully shaped letters. I guess a lot of kids' books are ABC's for learning to read, but there weren't any of those in my house when I was little. I was even more surprised to find a Puerto Rican ABC with names that actually were familiar to me: poems by Isabel Freire de Matos and big, bold woodcuts by Antonio Martorell.

I remembered seeing Martorell's ABC in the cabinet once with other things for sale at La Casa. This time it was open to the page with B for *Boricua*. Martorell's illustration was a woodcut. You could tell by all the grain in the background that it was made that way, but this one was colored in blood red and black in a wild *huracán* of movement. Even though everything was swirling, it was pretty clear the figure was cutting cane by swinging a sharp machete.

I'm not sure whether it made me sad or proud that he had chosen the cane worker rather than some other kind of *jíbaro* to represent *Boricua*.

The word *Boricua* reminded me of the times Herbie and I would talk about the *Tainos* in Arecibo. I wasn't there when he brought his friend to see what we had found in that cave, but Herbie learned a lot from the anthropologist guy and told me everything he had picked up. Apparently the figures we saw were definitely done by the *Tainos* who lived there before the Spaniards wiped them out with diseases and forced labor. They called their island Boricua, meaning a place where proud and noble people lived.He told me that the first time Boricua was used in writing that we know about was in a letter of Columbus in 1493, where he identified Cuba and Borinquen. Herbie told me he wouldn't be surprised if La Casa had a copy of the letter, because in those days scribes always made several copies of important documents in case one was lost in war or stolen.Some scribes might not even be able to read, but they could write, and that was their job. *Dios mio*, just think of the difference between some guy sitting in a quiet, comfortable, fancy place putting letters on a page, compared to the guy who was hot and sweating in the cane field with the sun beating on him and his arm aching from chopping with the machete! I doubt my father ever thought about anything like this, but Herbie knew, and he made me feel proud.

Move on, babe, I heard him say, don't dwell on anything that makes you sad. It'll bring you down.

What I saw next was a Bible from 1841 that was made entirely of *grabado en madera*, woodcuts again. But there was no text at all, just the illustrations. I would have loved to have something like that as a kid, because it would have encouraged me to be a good story-teller. Just how much could Abraham have really loved his son if he was so ready to sacrifice him to a God who may or may not even exist? I'll never understand that one.

The best part of this visit for me was seeing two very different versions of Red Riding Hood, a story I've known forever. One of them, from 1815, had a pretty text and woodcuts again. The other one was really wild. It was done only about twenty years ago by some woman from Switzerland named Warja Honegger-Lavater.I'd never seen anything like it before. In the first place, it wasn't even shaped like a regular book. According to the caption it was a "concertina" shape, like that instrument, so you could see a lot of pages at once if it was stretched out a bit, which it was. At the beginning was something like the cast of characters in a play that told what the colored shapes stood for: a little round red circle for Red Riding Hood, a little circle in aquamarine stood for for the grandmother, lots of circles of all different greens for the forest, and a black one for the wolf. The whole story was told in those colored shapes, just the shapes. For example, one page showed the little red circle about to get lost in the big woods with maybe the wolf circle half-hidden in the middle. I loved this idea, and it even had its own clear plastic case to use when all the pages were folded together.

Just as I was leaving, I saw a little girl and Blackley trying to talk with one another and not doing so well. Then he heard the words "Pedro Martyr" and "Occeanea," said "Momentito, honey," and ran upstairs to the rare book room. He came back in a minute with a red covered book, showed her the title page and opened the book to a map (that I'll bet was a woodcut), pointed to a little oval shaped island, and said "Puerto Rico." The girl's father stood behind her with a proud smile on his face. Blackley pointed out the date on the book, which I think I read as 1511, almost five centuries ago. The girl was seated holding the book in her lap—a lovely picture! He also showed her a 1516 book by Pedro Martyr that (my heart went to my mouth as I looked) contained at its end an actual dictionary of the original native Taino and the Spanish languages—somebody had taken down the sounds of the words Tainos spoke using our alphabet, and then given their equivalents in Spanish!

Paul Needham and Jay Dillon arrived from Sotheby's to evaluate La Casa's collection. They were easy to spot, because they wore T-shirts sporting Sotheby's logo in large letters across their chests. Our secretary and a few of the volunteers caught the spirit, and we were quite suddenly so surrounded by Sotheby's logo that visitors to La Casa invariably asked about our connection to that venerable institution.

The two men weren't staying with us over nights, and John and I left them alone to do their work for the several days it took to complete the project. We were each deep in the planning stage for two different exhibitions at the time. John had a few brief conversations with Jay Dillon before they left, and they promised to send a written draft appraisal within a few months.

Marilyn Torrech and Mary-Ann Mackinnon, the two skilled artists who continued to guide the children's activities, collaborated on the silkscreen poster for *Los 4 Elementos: Fuego, Aire, Tierra y Agua.* Their design was as sunny as the Island itself. Spread out horizontally on single sheets of handmade tan paper were four sky-blue squares, one for each of the elements. In each case, the element itself breaks out of its borders, the way medieval miniatures often did: a brilliant sun, a soaring bird, the crown of an intensely green palm tree, and a swirling sea creature, maybe a whale.

The posters were printed at the *seragrafia taller* in the neighborhood, and this time I was able to watch the whole meticulous process. I had no idea of the intricacy that went into each print. Every colored shape that is to be printed has its own piece of heavy paper with that shape cut out of it; the paper is placed on top of a piece of silk in a frame, the frame is placed over the poster paper that is to be printed on, and the proper color paint passed over the cutout paper with a roller; the paint goes through the cutout, passes through the silk and is deposited in an even layer on the poster paper. This process has to be repeated with every colored shape, the print in the interim placed on an airy metal drying rack before the next stenciled color can be placed. It was fascinating to watch and know that, in Puerto Rico, this process had been perfected by Irene Delano and the DIVEDCO artists in the 1950s and '60s to produce arresting posters with messages for educating a largely illiterate population. They are valued today for their aesthetic beauty.

We made sure there were enough posters so they could be sold at La Casa—and they sold well.

Somehow, living on this thoroughly green island, surrounded by the turqoise sea, sharpened my awareness of the beauty and fragility of our environment, and it was thrilling to be able to celebrate so

many different aspects of the natural world. We had a case filled with books illustrating "Human Beings Transform the 4 Elements," which included a book made from bamboo from Sumatra, a piece of tapa cloth from Micronesia, and a Buddhist manuscript written in Pali on a palm leaf. A 16th-century book printed in Antwerp in Latin included recipes for medicines from Western India made entirely from their local plant life. There were books featuring handmade papers from Japan, from the Aztec and Mayan cultures, and from a community of indigenous people in Mexico.

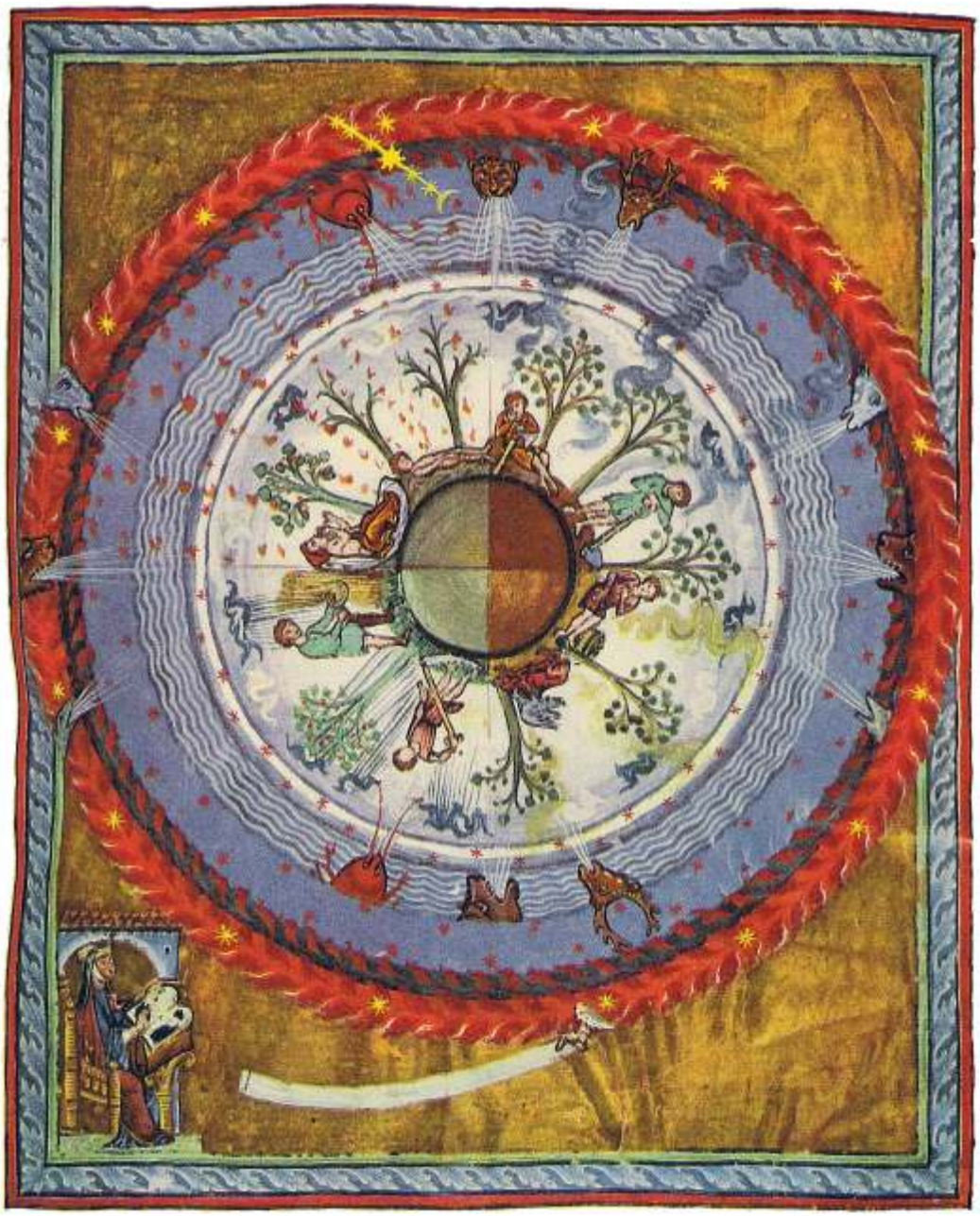
We displayed the other side of the coin in Case VI: *El mal uso de los 4 elementos* is what we called it. Included were eleven books that illustrate an assortment of abuses of nature by human intervention. Most striking among these for me was the Bartholomaei de las Casas narrative of the lands conquered and settled by Spain in the Western hemisphere. The book itself was in Latin of course, printed in Frankfurt in 1598, not long after the Domincan priest, de las Casas, wrote his stinging report, generously illustrated with 17 horrendous metal engravings that showed the brutal treatment of the indigenous peoples and lands. His searing honesty was singular at the time.

We devoted one case to books that set out to chart or diagram the 4 elements, and quite naturally these were from some of the oldest books in La Casa's collection, written and illustrated in times when people actually thought they could locate the ends of the universe itself. Most of them were based on information derived from the Judeo-Christian Bible, peppered with individual insights about the exact location of heaven and earth, the origin of the four winds, and the location of the stars and known planets of the time. These men were cosmologists, not at all fearful of committing themselves to taking on the entire universe, showing how perfectly everything fit together.

Then there was the woman who took it on twice in the 12th century: Hildegard von Bingen produced two large cosmological treatises during her long lifetime, both of them fully illustrated with colored miniatures that made crystal clear her beliefs about the structure of the universe. The earlier one was derived from her first book of visions, called *Scivias*, in which the world is represented as a cosmic egg. Sun, moon, stars, the four winds, known planets are all there with the four elements cradled in the middle, looking intimately female and erotic. Since women were strictly forbidden to teach or preach at the time, the imprimator of Pope Eugenius III was required to determine that her visions were not from the devil, but actually God-given, with Hildegard simply his mouthpiece.

Nearly thirty years later, Hildegard was still being spoken through. Scientific ideas had changed, and so did her visions of the universe. They are described and illustrated in *De Operatione dei* [The Work of God]. The cosmos is now a perfect sphere, sometimes showing a beautifully created naked human form at its center: the microcosm within the macrocosm. Creation is ongoing, enlivened by the breath of God, or *Spiritus*, represented by the visible breath of winds and creatures. Everything depends on balance in this gigantic wheel: health, morality, fertility. Upsetting this balance in the universe, as in a single human being, creates disturbance and ill health. The final vision in this collection shows the natural fruits of creation in the form of men and women, farmers, dreamers, plants and animals, and cosmic trees that look strangely similar to the World Tree of Eastern religions. Each of these visions depicts the 4-fold earth, perfectly round, at the very center of the round universe.

For years I have been immersed in Hildegard, translating her works from Latin and writing about her life in English. It seemed to me that we had lost something very important when we gave up the notion of an earth-centered universe, populated equally by humans, sea creatures, trees, and other forms of life. Even if it's primarily a psychic loss, the vision supported a reverence for the environment & the crucial need for balance among all forms of life that has become increasingly, even dangerously threatened within our cosmos.



El Fantasma:

One thing they clearly missed in the exhibition about *Fuego, Aire, Tierra y Agua* is what happens when the four elements get thrown together: nothing at all here about *huracán*, the Taino name for the god of chaos. Ages ago, when Herbie and I were exploring that cave in Arecibo—*Cueva del Indio*—we found out a lot about the Taino symbols we saw. His anthropologist friend said it was possible, probable even, that I had some Taino blood in me. I guess Herbie had showed him a photograph. Something about the shape of my eyes, he said. That got me even more curious, so Herbie arranged a threesome meeting at the local *cantina*, and he said he'd bring a small tape recorder.

Ismat was his name, from some Middle Eastern country, but his family had been American for a couple of generations and served in the military too. He didn't look like much—short, wide-faced, and kind of chubby—but Herbie said when he climbed around on the boulders he looked like a mountain goat. He'd studied anthropology at college and had a huge brain. I don't know whether Herbie had told him anything about how I earned my living, but he certainly never talked down to me or gave me the feeling that I wasn't up to understanding the stuff he told us.

He told us a lot of things about the Tainos that I'd never heard, and they certainly didn't teach it when I was in school in the '40s. He said that all those child-like drawings we saw were actually symbols, *Taino* symbols, and they probably fit into some myths the *Taino* people had long before the Spanish came to the Island.

"What kind of myths?" I asked, "like the ancient Greek myths?"

"To some degree, yes, just as every civilization has its creation myths and a pantheon of gods and goddesses to whom they can attribute their beginnings and the key events that transpire."

Herbie was listening quietly, recording everything Ismat said, and I thought he looked like he was also keeping an eye on me to make sure I didn't get out of line, interrupt him with too many questions, which sometimes happened when Herbie and I were talking.

Ismat told us what he said was just one version of the *Taino* creation myth.

"What do you mean one version?" I asked

He explained how hard it is to be sure of these things that happened so long ago when there was no written account of them, that they were mostly from oral tradition, mother and father to child, plus art work like those symbols we had seen.

He gave another example, asking whether the two of us had ever seen a symbol or even an object itself that looked like this, and he took a drawing out of his backpack to show us.

I immediately leaned over the table and shouted, "*Dios mio*," it looks just like the sign the weather forecasters use when they're mapping the hurricanes every year!"

Before Herbie could sit on me for bursting in, Ismat smiled at me and said, "Exactly right, *señorita*, that's the symbol used universally for hurricane nowadays, and it's derived from the *Taino* symbol for *huracán*."

"I'm surprised the Europeans hadn't already come up with their own name." That was me again.

"True, but you see, the Europeans had never experienced hurricanes before they came to the Caribbean. They often begin to form over the Cape Verde Islands, off the coast of Africa, but never in the Mediterranean or North Atlantic. Their storms are different, but our particular wind formation, swirling around what they call the "eye" within these wild winds that do spectacular damage to people and crops, is peculiar to this part of the world, to the West Indies and Central America, though it sometimes continues a route to the States as well."

This man was full of information, and I couldn't help asking him why he thought I had *Taino* blood. I had been thinking about what the rest of my family looked like—mother, father, uncles, and cousins, for example—and I wasn't sure what it was I was supposed to be on the lookout for.

He smiled again, saying, "It's largely something about the eyes, as I mentioned to Herbie when he showed me your photograph, perhaps your color as well, that particularly rich, bronzy brown."

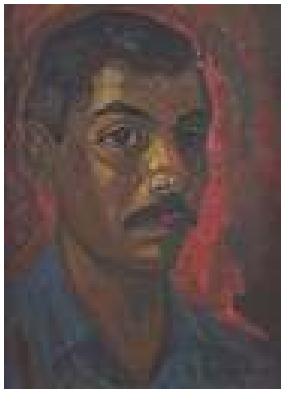
He was so open about this stuff, I couldn't help but ask him more about color, which I'd wondered about for a long time:

"Look, Ismat, you and Herbie come originally from entirely different backgrounds and countries. You say your family were Kurds from Iraq; Herbie's ancestors were probably from Eastern Europe, he thinks, but you're both clearly white. Here on the Island, we're such a mixture of colors, of different races, I guess they call them. Except for the people who call themselves "full-blooded Spanish." What's going on here?"

First he pointed out that his skin wasn't the same color as Herbie's, which was true when they both rolled up their sleeves and I looked closely. Then he told us that when the Europeans came to the West Indies they were all men, no women or families, not like the couples and whole families that came to the States like the Puritans or Pilgrims. "You know about us men," he said to us with a twinkle in his eye, "so one of the first things they did was hook up with some of the *Taino* women. That was before they killed them off with the diseases they brought to people who had no antibodies to fight them. After they had eliminated most of the *Tainos* with deadly diseases and heavy labor, they had to start buying slaves to do the hard physical work, to cut the cane and grow the crops. Those Portuguese and Spaniards were cerainly not going to take on any hard physical labor! So then you have black and brown Africans coming to the island, mixing up the colors even more.

"Anyway there's something around the eyes, and a certain nobility in the way you carry yourself that makes me think of a brave woman indigenous to this Island."

It was music to my ears. I threw him a kiss, and Herbie blushed.



Rafael Tufiño was 68 years old in September 1991, when we devoted the entirety of the large front room of Cristo 257 to an exhibition of his works, some old and some not seen before. John had visited him in his small apartment in Old San Juan and asked where we could find original graphics for an exhibition at La Casa. Tufiño smiled, crossed the room, and pulled out from under his bed a stack of carved plywood blocks from which the needed prints would be made by Lyzette Rosado. Despite his popularity among the people of Puerto Rico, who fondly called him "Tefo," his work had not been featured in an exhibition since 1967.

Ernesto J. Ruiz de la Mata, after attending the exhibition, wrote in *The San Juan Star*:

> Once again, in keeping with a well-established tradition of excellence, La Casa del Libro regales its visitors with a magnificent show, a welcome spectacle when so little of real worth is to be seen of late in Puerto Rico's commercial art galleries.
>
> Four woodcuts, 24 linoleum-cuts, all the works from "Portfolio del Café," and the final studies for five of Rafael Tufiño's most sought-after posters constitute this splendid exhibition, equivalent to a mini-retrospective of one of our most important modern masters.
>
> La Casa del Libro took the lead in accomplishing the show in collaboration with graphic artist Lyzette Rosado, who has lovingly dedicated herself over the last several months to the painstaking task of printing the works from the original blocks at her Old San Juan workshop.
>
> The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, entrusted by legislative mandate with safeguarding our cultural heritage, didn't come up with the idea.
>
> Why?

A beautifully printed portfolio of his works, titled *Rafael Tufiño Woodcuts and Linoleum Prints: A New Edition* was offered for sale at Lyzette Rosado's *taller*.

Although Tefo looked and was represented as that symbolic *jíbaro* so celebrated in prose and poetry in the 1950s and '60s, he was actually a very cosmopolitan man, dubbed "an international populist" by the director of El Museo del Barrio in New York in 2003. He was born in Brooklyn, where he lived until moving to the Island to stay with his grandmother at age 10, painting everything he saw around him as he grew up. He returned often to New York in later years when his artistic skills became recognized—once when he won a Guggenheim fellowship.

Since he had served in the army during World War II (in Panama with the Army Signal Corps), Tufiño was eligible for the G. I. Bill. This allowed him to receive his first formal art schooling, and he chose Mexico for that. The art scene in Mexico was perhaps at the height of its political awareness and popular expression at the time, and Tufiño soaked up its excitement along with the skills he nurtured there. He had every intention of bringing a tradition of mural painting back to the Island with him.

Fortunately for Tufiño and a whole generation of Puerto Rican artists, Muñoz Marín had been elected governor in 1948 and had created, as part of the Department of Community Education (DIVEDCO), a graphic arts workshop under the inspired and capable direction of Irene Delano. She had come to the Island a few years earlier with her husband Jack, a photographer originally sent by FDR as part of a large public works project; Jack became a film-maker for the Island.

On his return to the Island, Tufiño became a member of the *Generación del Cincuenta* [Offspring of the '50's], which included artists such as Lorenzo Homar, J. A. Torres Martinó, and Felix Rodriguez Benitez. Still convinced that mural painting and frescoes were the art form most needed in Puerto Rico, Tufiño wrote in 1950:

> It is obvious that we still have much to do, especially concerning the creation of true mural painting in Puerto Rico. The life of our people consists of dramatic elements, both in urban and in rural areas, life surrounded by one of the most beautiful landscapes of the orb, waiting to be transferred to cover the walls,


EXPOSICION DE DIBUJOS DE
21 DE ABRIL AL 10 DE MAYO DE 1967
RAFAEL TUFIÑO


PEDACITO DE TIERRA
VEALA EN:
DIA:
HORA:
UNA PELÍCULA HECHA EN PUERTO RICO POR LA DIVISIÓN DE EDUCACIÓN DE LA COMUNIDAD

> currently bare, of our public buildings and cultural institutions. But it is clear that mural painting, as an expression of a nation, does not emerge as a result simply of having individuals who know the technique or those who have the passion to devote themselves to the hard task of creating this kind of art. Before that, it is necessary that cultural counselors of this pictorial nation provide the necessary knowledge for the cultural advancement of that population. And Puerto Rico, unlike Mexico, whose government has provided its painters with all sorts of resources to encourage their creative work, seems to be still quite far from that... Our duty is to continue to work with passion, because when Puerto Rican painting reaches its full development, it will be one of the purest expressions of our people's way of life.

As things turned out, it was not mural painting but graphic arts—silk screen, wood and linoleum cuts, calligraphy and book arts that developed and flourished on the Island for the rest of the 20th century, starting with DIVEDCO in the late '40s and coming to even more prominence in 1957 with the groundbreaking graphic arts workshop begun by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) and directed for nearly 20 years by Lorenzo Homar.

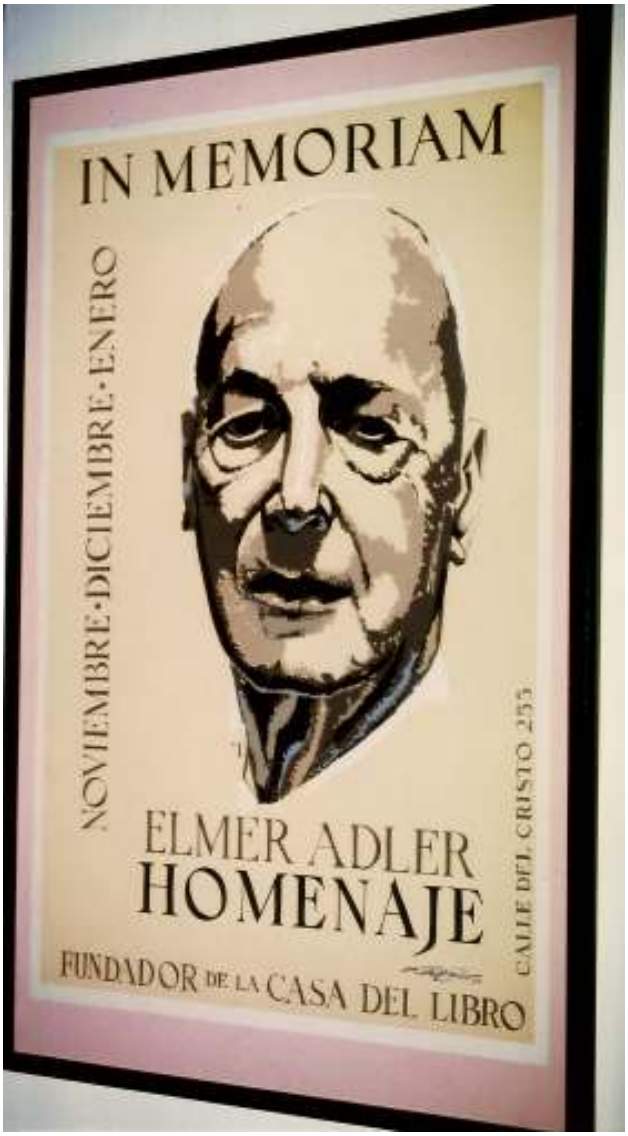
One of the theories concerning the lack of a one-man show for Tufiño between 1967 and 1991 is that he was not able to amass enough works to form a show: to keep himself going financially, he had to sell works as soon as he completed them. Of course his work was hanging all over the Island during that time, in plain sight, in the form of wonderful posters that announced everything from jazz workshops and documentary films to book exhibitions at La Casa del Libro. Many were in bold, primary, almost fauvist colors. Just as striking and bold are the stark black-and-white woodcuts that announce nothing but themselves: beautiful nude women and, in the countryside, men and women making music, men working in the cane fields, women pounding coffee beans, the whole plethora of backbreaking tasks assigned to the *pueblo* of pre-industrial Puerto Rico.

Rafael Tufiño died on March 13, 2008, at age 85, seventeen years after Ruiz de la Mata asked "Why?" in *The San Juan Star*. His obituary in *The New York Times* said

> An artist known as the "Painter of the People" for his canvases and posters depicting traditional aspects of life on the island, Mr. Tufiño will lie in state in the Galería Nacional del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña in San Juan before burial later this week. Aníbal-Acevedo-Vilá, the governor of Puerto Rico, ordered flags to be flown at half-staff over the weekend in his honor.

El Fantasma:

If I was alive and breathing, they would have taken my breath away—all his prints and posters covering that entire space like wallpaper. I even remembered a couple of the posters from home, I mean where I grew up as a kid. They would be plastered on the walls of our local *cantina*, telling us about the time and place for the next film. We would get all excited. I think some of the kids I knew had run off to San Juan to get into some of the films, because they were really all about us. Around 6 o'clock, a couple of pickup trucks would roll in, and, by the time it was really dark, everything would be set up



and ready to show. Even our parents acted like kids, they were so excited.

I knew who Tufiño was when I got to the City. He was an important part of "the scene" in the '60's in Old San Juan, and he could drink anybody under the table. A couple of my girfriends had gone out with him and said he was kind of a "courtly womanizer." And then he was married, at least part of the time, and had some kids, though I'm not sure whether they were on the Island or in *nueva york*. I heard there were five of them, but I don't know the number of wives. It doesn't matter. He was quite a character. Herbie used to say "he's not a self-effacing man." That'll do for part of it, but it's not enough.

For example, I didn't know he had his eyes focused on women so that he would be good at paint-

ing and engraving them. The big black-and-white nude he calls "Barbara" is hanging in a place very boldly where you can't miss it, and she's just sitting there looking beautiful and sort of chosen. The brown man pushing the plow in the *Pedacito de Tierra* poster looks just like one of my uncles. So many different kinds of faces and colors, all from the Island I'll bet. I'm staring at the black man with the tambourine in the *Plena* poster and see how he's really beautiful too. If Herbie was here I'd show him that Tufiño is a lot more than either of us knew back then. It's more that with his art he builds a more balanced world, one that dances and moves to our special rhythms.

From our first days in Puerto Rico, pelicans had emerged as the focus of early morning walks in Old San Juan, through the arched gate with the inscribed blessing, and along the bay. Years in New

England and then New York City had formed me to be surprised in wonder every time I saw those big brown birds long suspended over the water suddenly diving with absolute precision. Clearly their lives depended on that unexpected, precise movement, those patterns of flight.

A whole series of Pelican Poems ensued, so, in addition to writing my first book on Hildegard, I was writing poems about pelicans. Very few people knew about the writing—the Hildegard project was supposed to be my Ph.D. dissertation. John was at that time my first and only reader and facilitator, carving out regular hours here and there most days when he took over all duties at La Casa, then reading aloud later in the day whatever I had written. There was something rather secret about both writing projects.

Looking at the date, I see that the first of the poems was written a few months after our arrival on the Island and shortly following the big hurricane. Something about the ferocity of that event, the way it uprooted trees and other living things, had made me cherish those resilient birds even more. I kept my eyes on them and called the first poem "Pelican Vigil":

I've seen
a pelican sitting
atop a turret for so long that
three sets of clouds sailed over
and a
frigate bird skimmed by
and a fuschia balloon escaped into the blue nowhere.

I've watched
while a perched pelican
stilled down to a bottle shape,
leaned slowly forward and left,
stretched back a right web,
and
extended its wings in a perfect jeté.

I've stood close enough
to see the fringes of spread
flapping strong wings
and
heard the thud of beaten air.

I've watched pairs of them
fly across the bay
for so long that
a spruced-up red tugboat
moved into position perpendicular to me,
nose away, quietly waiting till a monstrous
white cruise ship pushed its big nose around the point,
glided up to the pivoting tug,
escorting each other to the nearest pier. *[10/1988]*

As artist friend Mary-Ann and I grew closer, she became the second person to read my writing. I trusted her; she was the indispensable force in finding gifted people from the Island to teach my various children's workshops. It seemed perfectly natural to Mary-Ann to share one's creative work. Her paintings and collages appeared in a gallery in Old San Juan and in her work at Sagrado Corazon, where she taught drawing, art history, and related forms of visual arts with fellow artists.

Not so for me. My writing was still very much in the shadow of my mother and *her* writing. She was manic depressive during my growing-up formative years, a time when mental illness was neither publicly talked about nor even recognized by one's family and friends. She wrote about thinly disguised people we knew, colleagues of my father at the college where he tuaght, their sexual adventures as she conjured them, and—out of her three children—chose me to be her first reader. It was painful and disturbing.

I had written from the time I could read, but, except for assigned papers at school, early attempts were hidden away in small spiral notebooks. Something about the shame I felt at having to read my mother's writing had rubbed off on me. I wrote poems, essays, and short stories that never saw the light of day.

Hildegard von Bingen came into my life when I was in my 30s, along with the excitement of the Second Wave of the Women's Movement. The thrill of discovering that exceptional women had created paintings and composed music through the ages made the world seem new to me. I dreamed a lot about Hildegard at night and translated her works from Latin until she got under my skin. It was a creative entanglement that took me to places I'd not been before and allowed me to have feelings I'd never experienced before. I could feel my emotional palette grow.

Reading her visions, I learned that Hildegard was about my age when she first dared to write down the things she had seen with her inner eyes and heard with her inner ears. Her reasons were not mine. As a twelfth-century woman in the patriarchal Church, she was forbidden to teach or declare her ideas publicly, and she kept them to herself until she became gravely ill. She had a lot to say, and, with the help of a devoted scribe and a young nun she loved, she began to pour it all out and continued until she died at 81.

She inspired me to think that starting at midlife to write things for someone other than myself was not only acceptable but necessary. In 1980 I "interviewed" Hildegard in the *Heresies #10: Women and Music* publication. I was part of a collective obsessed with finding out all we could about creative women. I kept translating her work, singing her music, and coming out of my writing closet. Instead of writing *my* journal, I began writing Hildegard's journal, an account of her everyday life arranged according to the days of the liturgical year in the 12th century. It felt safe.

Still, when I gave a pelican poem to Mary-Ann in Puerto Rico, I was fearful of criticism. I wondered what she might say about this poem, whether she would understand it at all. I called it "A Desired Encounter."

To be lying where shades parade before my eyes
mostly greens and salmon tones
but blues for beds of clouds as well.

The temperature is warmed enough for skin without clothes.
Constant breezes play their way into crevices

that would otherwise be sticky,
even slick from dripping sweat.

Skin notes that this is not sand
but long silken field grass
fluffed into a bowl-like bed
that's received my body in its desired extensions
the way thick new snow receives the shapes of angels.

My constant pressure and movement upon it
force it to exude odors of hay-scented fern on forest floors
though this is not at all a forest.

The same brown pelican I saw dive-bombing the bay at daybreak
or its mate
Floats to a web-footed landing three feet from my face
and studies me with eye askance on the right side of his head.

This pelican will either nest with me in green silk
I have shaped in my image,
or it will devour me whole in quiet hunger

gulping my body deep in its throat as living juices
dribble out the ample sieve built in the underside of its maw. [2/26/91]

Mary-Ann said nothing about my poem, but within a few days she surprised me by producing some beautiful illustrations for it. The kind of communication that goes on when two people create a third

thing between them is exceptional and has become sacred to me. John and I have enjoyed this kind of co-creation in our life together; Mary Ann and I have continued to create one-of-a-kind books together over all these intervening years and from two locations, distant from one another. Sometimes it starts with something I've written; other times, one of her art works is the beginning and evokes writing from me.

Looking back on our time in Puerto Rico, as we so often have, John and I realize with some wonder that it was the most intensely creative period of our lives. Being surrounded by the physical beauty of the Collection, the splendor of blue sky and stars in our indoor-outdoor living quarters, and by the presence of artists who feed on such beauty was a unique experience. It seemed the perfect embodiment of one of the feminist ideals of creativity: I began to realize this while making books with Mary-Ann, wherein the ideal was one of cooperation rather than competition.

The collection at La Casa uniquely supported this ideal: producing manuscripts and books in the Middle Ages was a quintessentially cooperative experience. Who knows how many artists and craftspeople, scribes, and engravers were responsible for the miniatures and woodcuts that fill incunabula? At that time, much of this work was done anonymously, giving later historians and critics a field day for making attributions. Several later periods in Western world history were filled with this ideal in one form or another. When William Blake was working around 1800, one artist might write the text; another, draw the illustrations (*invenit*); and yet another, engrave the plates or cut the woodblocks for the illustrations (*fecit*).

Later in the 19th century came the Pre-Raphaelites, who deliberately adopted medieval ideals, actually sourrounding themselves with beautiful, handcrafted artworks so "ordinary" that they took the forms of wallpaper, furnishings, tiled fireplaces, as well as paintings and graphics. Printers devoted

themselves to handset letterpress printing of illustrated books, cards, and beautiful calligraphy. Strands of this ideal continued into the twentieth century in the shops of specialized printers, but not for the general public, by then commercialized to expect the cheapest possible copy of their favorite novel. Maillol might illustrate someone's poetry, Rockwell Kent, someone's adventure, but only in limited editions. In our own time, and for most of us, only when we read children's books do we have the expectation that some visual artist was fiercely engaged in co-creation.

El Fantasma:

Lachman gets so carried away with making books with Mackinnon that she manages to ignore the trouble creeping up at La Casa. She decides to make an exhibition of nothing but *Libros Hechos por Mujeres* [Books Made by Women] that fills the entire front room of 257. They're in all those plastic-topped cubes, so you can see them in three dimensions. A lot of them are made by hand, and a few are one-of-a-kind. Marta Perez from *Viejo San Juan* submitted some of her designs for book covers that looked like swirling magic.

I'm thinking that Lachman did all this because of Blackley's being so busy with the Board now there's a real fight going on. What started the mess was when the two guys from *neuvayork* came down to figure out how much money the books were worth. Everybody was pretty surprised when it turns out the figure is over five million dollars [in 1991]. The two of them are still such *bobos* about money. It never occcurs to them that the money will be more important to some people than the books themselves.

I decided to tag along with Blackley. I remember one of the Sotheby's guys talking to him inside the rare book room, at the beginning of the year when they were adding up the tally. They were arguing about the meaning of the word "mandate" or "mission" or something like that. Jay told Blackley that the mandate they had been given by the Board to make the Collection "meaningful to the Puerto Rican people" didn't mean they had to hold on to all the books.

Blackley didn't get it. He has this idea—maybe he and she both do—that, since one man put it together with the help of his one student-assistant, there's something sacred about keeping it together, adding but never subtracting. No doubt Jay told that to the Board, and *they* got it right away. The wheels stopped turning as far as the Board was concerned. Lachman stopped going to the Board meetings, said she couldn't stand it and busied herself with the exhibition of *libros mujeres*.

When Blackley told the Board that a duplicate book in the collection could be sold to take care of the awful *comojen* infestation that was taking over the building, the Board member from Paine Webber in Puerto Rico got heated and told Blackley off at their meeting, swearing and everything. "Don't sell any books!" he said and stormed out of the room. Lucky she wasn't there—she gets anxious when people get nasty.

Mary-Ann and I had made another one-of-a-kind book by the time John and I mounted "Libros Hechos por Mujeres." Mary-Ann had told me one day about an arborist interested in buying a piece of their land out in the mountains at Utuado, where she and husband Jack got away from San Juan on weekends. Basically, they had made a quiet retreat for themselves (and orphaned animals) out of a chicken coop and the surrounding land. It was lovely—filled with blossoming vines, bromeliads, fragrant citrus trees, and trees that flowered in surprisingly bright colors. In one direction a path led to a stream that ran year-round.

Initially, she and Jack were excited about the possibility of an arborist caring for a piece of the land, then discovered that he was planning to clear everything on it in preparation for cheap development. They were angry and turned down the offer, but the whole idea had pushed my buttons and I wrote a very angry poem. I called it "Dirge for the Land," and one of the stanzas is characteristic of its fury:

> Peel the soil like a tangerine,
> expose tenacious roots,
> the better to yank old trees like pliered teeth so withering tropical sun
> more efficiently sucks exposed and barren wasteland dry.

I'm not used to expressing anger, and Mary-Ann was probably surprised at the poem, but what she created on her part surprised me even more. Our first book, about the pelican, had been done on handmade paper using a whole panoply of colors for the drawings. This one had loose pages that were simple tan and black construction paper. They were in no way attached to one another, just placed loosely in a plain tan wrapper. The colors she applied for the drawings were black, white, tan, and orange. It was a bold, stark statement—except for the contrasting beauty of natural materials that she pasted in as collage: luminous tree leaves and individual petals, curved natural living objects, some of them gilded or lightly washed with rainbow colors.

I think it was this work, combined with the eagerness of some of the little girls who regularly attended our children's activities, that made me curious about how many other women were making books on the Island, and whether we had any books in La Casa's collection that women had made.

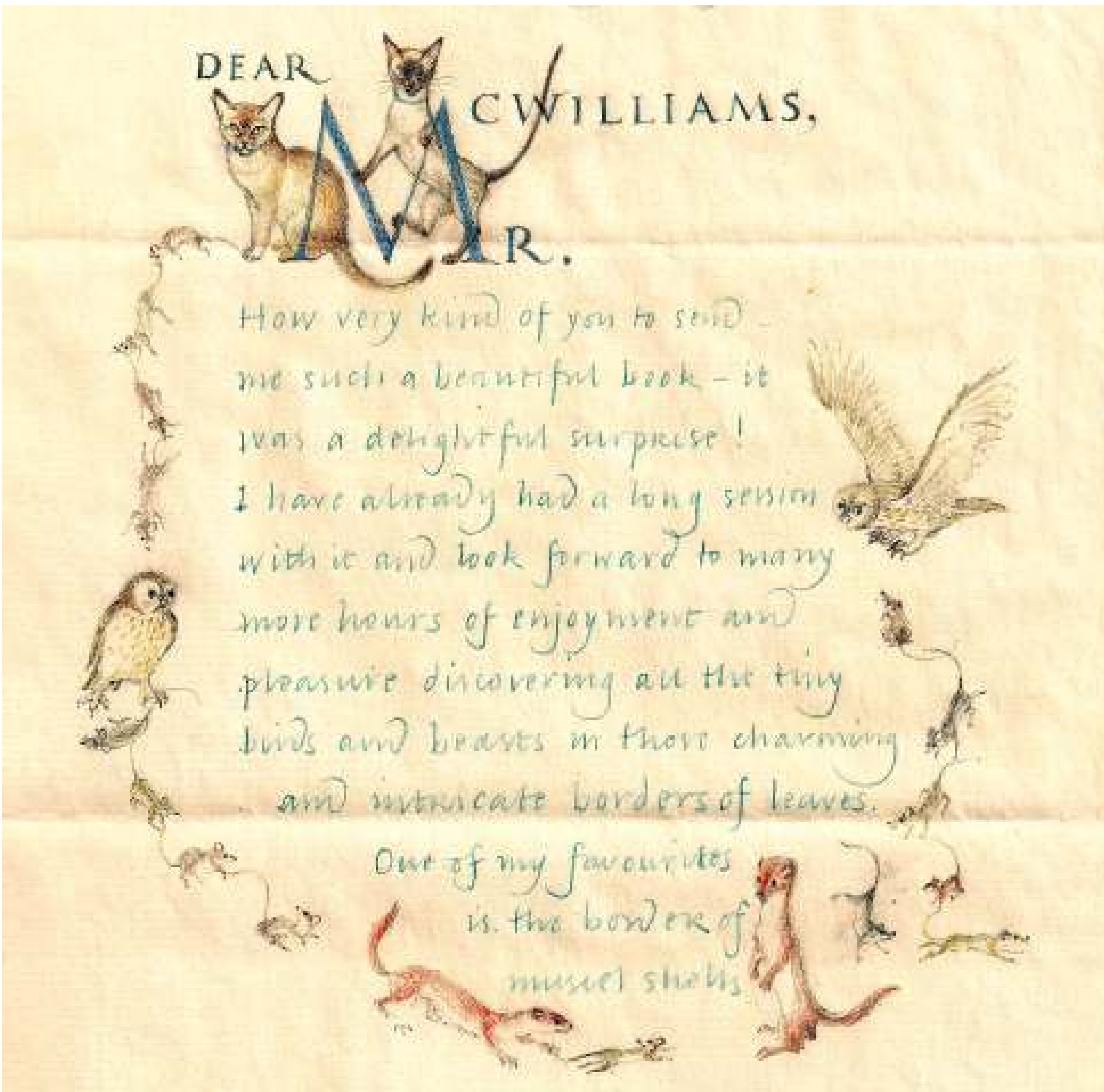
Everything about putting this exhibition together surprised me. On an Island with a dearth of public libraries, there was no dearth of love for books. For a change, there were more books created by people living on the Island (and one living on the little island of Viecques) than those gleaned from the Collection istself. Artist Ida Guttierez created a book out of the leaves of sugar cane. Nicole Alvarez, who was 11 years old at the time, contributed a book she wrote explicitly for La Casa all about the unique *paso fino* horses of the Island. The *paso fino* drawn on the cover of her book had tail and mane of embroidery thread, a suede leather saddle, and the woman riding the horse had a top of special cloth. The physical characteristics and details about the horses were inside the book and went on for pages.


Peel the skin like a Tangerine,
expose tenacious roots,
the better to yank old faces like

Characteristically, these books written recently by women seemed intensely personal. The titles of several of the books by women of the Island—*My Memories of Love*, *Ransom Notes*, and *Hogares Ancestrales*—are each paeans to varieties of love, maternal, ancestral, erotic. Even love of animals, as in Nicole's book and in the beautiful calligraphic work of Marie Angel in which her belovèd cats dance around the pages that we framed and hung on the walls. Marta Perez, Old San Juan artist, contributed 3 of her mixed media works that she designed for book covers. They are large and surrealistic, always filled with female figures with mythical references and, perhaps most of all, her love for the Island's magical greenness, beautifully illustrated in her paintings.

Puerto Rican jounalist Eneid Routte-Gomez attended the opening and picked up on the love that threaded its way through the women's works. On December 24, 1991, she wrote in *The San Juan Star* that it "was lovingly put together by La Casa del Libro associate director Barbara Lachman, a poet and scholar on medieval women. The exhibit evolved out of a children's art workshop that she, artist Mary-Ann Mackinnon, and art teacher Marilyn Torrech had been holding on alternate Saturdays at Casa del Libro."

We began to realize that there were women working on books and how important it was that women's voices be heard.



DEAR MR. MCWILLIAMS,

How very kind of you to send
me such a beautiful book – it
was a delightful surprise!
I have already had a long session
with it and look forward to many
more hours of enjoyment and
pleasure discovering all the tiny
birds and beasts in those charming
and intricate borders of leaves.
One of my favourites
is the border of
mussel shells

El Fantasma:

On a Saturday in early January I slipped in to take another look at *Libros Hechos para Mujeres*. The place was teeming with kids—parents too. According to a flyer, Maestra Torrech was teaching kids how to make "flag books," but there was more than that going on. Kids 8, 9, and 10 years old were signing their names and ages on a couple of pieces of blank paper on a desk, Lachman sitting on a chair behind it smiling at each one as they signed. I wasn't even sure whether the place was open to the public cause the doors were closed, but there was plenty going on!

People were telling one another that things are just as bad as I thought last time, maybe even worse. Blackley and Lachman had found the original bylaws and constitution of La Casa, in a drawer in Jack's old desk upstairs on the second floor. They found out that the Amigos are supposed to hold a meeting every year to elect the Board. Then Board members can only serve a certain amount of time, I think six years is the max. There hadn't been a meeting in 35 years, so none of the Board members are even legal. But that probably meant the two directors aren't either, since the Board really hired them. What a mess! B & L were insisting on a meeting of all Amigos in early February. Bylaws made that the right time of year for the meetings, only they never took place. Lots of people writing letters to *The San Juan Star*, and now these parents are making up a letter saying how important the workshops are to their kids. Of course *The San Juan Star* letters are in English, but this one's in Spanish with a lot of signatures scrawled underneath. The typed part says

11 de enero de 1992

Sr. Rafael Fábregas
G.P.O. Box 970
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936

Estimado Sr. Fábregas:

Sirva la presente para señalarle nuestro sentir en relación a los talleres para niños celebrados en la Casa del Libro durante el pasado año 1991.

La extraordinaria iniciativa del director de la Casa del Libro, Dr. John Blackley y de la asistente, Sa. Barbara Lachman; ha contribuído al desarrollo de la sensibilidad artística de los numerosos niños que asistieron a los variados talleres.

Es sorprendente cómo un gran número de nuestra población de todos los niveles sociales y económicos carecen de experiencias artísticas durante toda su infancia y adolescencia. Son precisamente estas experiencias las que ayudan a conformar un adulto sensible ante la realidades de nuestro medio ambiente.

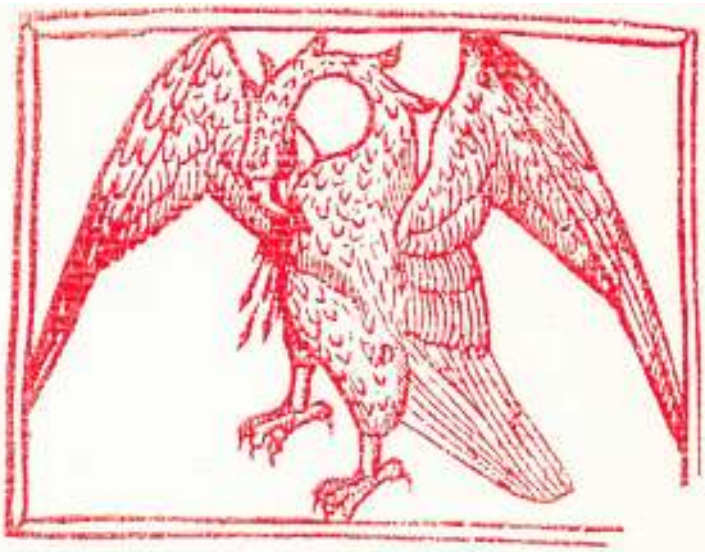
Exhortamos a que se continúe con tan encomiable labor y nos ponemos a sus órdenes para cualquier tarea relacionada.

My evesdropping after that proves things got worse. Board is pissed and threatened and fires the two directors, cuts off their phone, and sent a summons for them to appear in court, Spanish-only. No salaries or running expenses, and they're telling them to close La Casa to the public. Blackley hooked up a phone line over the roof with the newspaper store a couple of doors up the block.

It's difficult to say which were the worst moments in this whole end-time. As things heated up, John was mugged midday a few blocks from La Casa after getting cash from an ATM machine. Whoever it was tore the whole back of his pants off getting the money out of his back pocket, where he always put it. (It's too hot to wear jackets every day in Puerto Rico unless you work in an air-conditioned office.) In the struggle, he was thrown forward onto the sidewalk. He stayed in bed for a day. I went to the police, who were decidedly uninterested.

We were fired and ordered to close La Casa's doors. An official looking man knocked on the locked front door and presented us with a subpoena to appear in court. It was of course to be a Spanish-only court, and I was terrified. The man was kind and tried to reassure us not to worry, that this kind of thing happened all the time.

John wrote a wonderful letter to all those who had paid the $25 to become Amigos over the preceding weeks in order to support us at the coming meeting:



February 24, 1992

Dear Friend:

We want to thank you with all our hearts for your care and contributions, and thank you as well for the support you have given to us and the patience with which you have given it!

Be assured that all checks have been deposited in the Amigos' account, and that any books or art-works loaned for La Casa's Libros Hechos Por Mujeres exhibition are safe and should be returned.

La Casa's doors have been temporarily closed, by court order. We do not know exactly when they will open again, but we hope it will not be long from now.

Nor, at this time, are we certain in just what capacity we ourselves can continue to be involved with La Casa del Libro. We'll let you know what happens. Since the telephone has been turned off, the best way for you to reach us is probably by mail sent to Cristo 255, San Juan 00901.

In spite of everything, we remain deeply persuaded that a wonderful change is afoot in Puerto Rico: that people who have been deprived of the kinds of aesthetic choices and exposures that would have been theirs if they had had public libraries, and library/museum children's activities, and a range of serious musical and artistic events at affordable prices, are now actively working to change things and to be heard. We feel proud to have been a part of this initiative. It is essential in a democracy to know that ideals and principles, rather than blood or lineage or political connections, create beauty and a better quality of life.

Enclosed are copies of newspaper articles relating to events of the last two months, in case you missed them.

We began to fear for our own safety. I was relieved when the storekeeper up the street offered us the use of her phone line, which John stretched across a couple of roofs so that I could be in touch with my two grown offspring in the States. (This was before cell phones, and our only phone was that of La Casa.) A friend offered us the use of an apartment in a little two-story house in Arecibo near the sea. It had once been a brothel, and he had renovated it into two nice apartments. We had some idea of looking for teaching jobs while preparing ourselves for the court appearance. We had no extra money and were no longer making salaries. A nice couple in Arecibo offered to hire us for a few months to house-sit for them, but that fell through when we said we'd have to be absent for a day or two in order to appear in court in San Juan. The nice couple explained that the last time they had left their house vacant for several weeks someone or someones had broken in, torn out the refrigerator and stove.

We boxed up our two cats in carriers, collected a few things dear to us, including the computer and record player that belonged to John, and drove my little Honda Civic to Arecibo, only a few hours away. Our apartment was on the second floor. The one on the first floor was occupied by a kind of caretaker, who with his family had never seen cats who were allowed inside as well as outside. He chuckled when Manley, the big orange male, climbed trees around the building and proudly straddled a tiny narrow ledge that ran from our little balcony all along the sea side of the stucco building.

Luckily, I had brought my hair-dryer with us. Every time we printed anything from the computer it was necessary to blow-dry the printer, because the *salitre* was so dense that close to the beautiful blue sea around us. We began to appreciate our surroundings. Our dear friend Susan Pabón offered to be our interpreter at the court appearance, and we hired a woman lawyer well-schooled in the vagaries of Puerto Rican trials. She seemed a tough old bird, who promptly developed an obvious crush on Susan.

Preparing for the February meeting, we developed a slate of people we hoped would become the new Board. Each of them took a deep interest in the future of La Casa. One of them, the Puerto Rican architect friend who had given us help designing the new rare book room, told us that he was warned not to serve. The threat was that he would not receive any architectural contracts within the public school system if he joined "our side."

We returned from food shopping late one afternoon to find our bed stripped of sheets. Someone had broken into the Arecibo apartment. The phonograph with its turntable and speakers plus my jewelry collection had been bundled into the fitted bottom sheet and taken away. Our court appearance was less than a week away. John, Susan, and I had another meeting with our tough lawyer and hoped for the best.

The first annual meeting of the Amigos was held in February on the date that the By-laws had stipulated thirty years earlier. Our slate for a new Board, along with proposed exhibitions and events for the coming year were roundly defeated, and another slew of letters appeared in the San Juan Star. Many people wrote in support of what we had accomplished, but there were also personal attacks from those members of the old Board who were eager to get rid of us. We had proxy votes from all the parents whose youngsters had enjoyed the children's workshops and paid to become eligible to be Amigos. We had no idea that Board members who opposed us had "stuffed the ballot box" with 200 proxy votes from people whom we didn't know and who had never set foot in La Casa.

And who had never enjoyed its imaginatively and historically remarkable treasures.

El Fantasma:

I found them next in court. They both looked dejected, but Lachman looked really scared. The group of *denunciantes*, who had already fired them, filed in with funny smiles pasted on their mugs and insisted on shaking hands with the two of them and their singer friend Susan, their *traductora*. Next thing that happened was a big shock. Their lawyer walked out, took one look at the judge in his robe and lace cuffs, and collapsed. I couldn't tell whether she fainted *o si se desplomó*. I could hear everybody in the room gasp, and then she was able to get up. The trial started. The judge asked all kinds of questions about whether the two directors had carried out all the things they had been told to do by the Board: bringing books back, making them safe, cataloging them, all that stuff. Fábregas answered "*Si*" to every question, and I wondered what would happen next. At the end, the judge decided in favor of the *denunciantes* anyway, and it was over. They were allowed to go back to La Casa and given some weeks to get their stuff together before going back to the States.

We decided to move to Baltimore, since my daughter lived there and we could feel somewhat at home. The trauma took us about a year to recover from. We found work with the Calvert School and the Baltimore Curriculum Project. From there we moved to Lexington, Virginia, where we taught, wrote, and made music.

And from there, we wrote this letter to The San Juan Star…

Readers' Viewpoint

La Casa del Libro has never known a very serene time

Yesterday we received from dear friends a copy of Loretta Phelps de Córdova's excellent commentary, "La Casa del Libro: A national treasure trove in peril" (The STAR, Oct. 27). We had the honor of directing La Casa from 1988 to 1992, following upon the directorships of its founder, Elmer Adler, and his protégé David Jackson McWilliams. All of the rare books were donations to the tax-exempt Amigos de Calle del Cristo 255, Inc.; some of the ancillary, scholarly books were purchased through funds from the Legislature, coming through the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, which owns La Casa's two buildings.

According to the legally declared wishes of Adler, the collection of rare books is owned by the people of Puerto Rico and is under the control of the Amigos.

The problems of dilapidation, mold and poor operational budgets began in the early 1960s while Adler was still alive and became so dire during the time of McWilliams that the books had to be brought to the General Archives, where they were stored mainly in two rooms. When we arrived, one room was without the dehumidification system so the odor of mildew was immediately detected, and mold and foxing were beginning to devalue some of the books. After Hurricane Hugo the Archives were closed, but when we stopped by to check, we found its backdoor and the door to La Casa's collection unlocked: there was no guard, and anyone could have walked off with a million dollars' worth of books.

The culprits in all this? The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, its architectural arm Zonas y Monumentos Históricos and illegally constituted or inept Amigos' boards of directors. We were fired one and one-half years short of our five-year contract for insisting that the Amigos' members meet annually as required by the By-Laws (they never had, not once, in 44 years). During our tenure at La Casa, the heads of the Institute and Zonas y Monumentos attempted to hinder our work at every possible opportunity; repeatedly made promises they did not keep; failed to supervise the construction contractor properly and overpaid him, and caused the remaining monies available for reconstruction to dwindle from $32,000 to $24,000 to $3,000 without one bit of work being done.

Though a contract was signed in December 1990 to have the balconies restored (rotting and infested with termites, pieces of the railings were falling into the street), the order to proceed was never signed by Zonas y Monumentos. During the summer of 1991, beams began to fall from the ceiling on the second floor, making it and the beautiful exhibition/activities room on the first floor unusable. The Institute was called in, bids were procured, promises were made, but, again, nothing was done and this dangerous situation continued. The extermination of termites was delayed for five months.

We had returned the books to a safe environment within La Casa and catalogued almost all of them — certainly all the rare books; we presently retain a copy of the catalogue in our office. At the time we left Puerto Rico, the books were valued at around $8 million. We sincerely hope that the magnificent, wholly integral collection put together by Adler and McWilliams is still untouched and complete, but we have reason to believe otherwise and fear that a number of the books may have been sold off. La Casa del Libro was one of the jewels of Gov. Luis Muñoz Marín's Operación Serenidad, but the library/museum has never known a very serene time.

R. John Blackley and Barbara Lachman

It is now nearly 2017. The books are—once again—not back in their home at Calle del Cristo 255 & 257, and the doors are locked.

El Fantasma:

Of course I wish the two of them long lives—but I also look forward to meeting them, some day, face-to-face . . . so to speak.

Forty copies of this book have been printed and distributed gratis,
and it will be published on www.ScholaAntiqua.net.