Lorraine López is of Chicana descent and has had several books published within the past few years. Her books range from collaborative essays to a young boy's coming of age. Some of the themes Dr. López addresses in her books are poverty, bi-cultural relationships, loss of innocence, racism and struggling with cultural identity, and surviving setbacks.

Dr. López obtained her B.A. from California State University, Northridge; her M.A. from the University of Georgia; her Ph.D in English from the University of Georgia. She is married and a mother of two; Dr. López is an associate professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. In an interview with Gabriela N. Lemmons, Dr. López stated that some of her influences were Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, and her mentor, Judith Ortiz Cofer.

Dr. López’s characters are intricate, emotional, and struggle to overcome cultural and economic obstacles. She uses her life experiences to develop her characters and relate to the reader regardless of the reader’s background or age. Dr.
López addresses each topic with such compassion that the reader is engaged and reads with anticipation to see the characters and plot develop. She is a warm, caring, reserved individual who loves to share her passion of writing with others. I highly recommend any aspiring writer to read Dr. López’s works as they bring imagination and compassion to the page.

J.: In our women’s literature course, we’ve been discussing how important family is to authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Kelly Cherry. How has your family influenced your work?

L.: I come from a family that values the narrative form in storytelling, gossip, and jokes. My father’s side of the family, in particular, is exceptionally verbal. Among my thirty-some Lopez cousins, only a handful of these are male, so women tend to dominate storytelling sessions. In our family gatherings, stories tend to be performed, rather than merely told. My aunts and cousins use elaborate gestures, various voices to portray characters, and much inflection to punctuate emotion. Again and again, I am exposed to hilarious and often outrageous stories from my relatives, and my father himself is quite the joke-teller and narrative weaver, though he doesn’t always understand that good
stories should have a point. With such a family, I doubt I could have been anything but a storyteller. But as a reserved person, I tell my stories in writing, rather than acting them out at a family functions.

J. : In your interview with Curbstone, you were asked:

Q. Do any of your personal experiences make it into your book?

A. I often write about incidents that have happened to me or that I have heard about from family or friends, and I invent characters and events as well.

Has using your personal family incidents ever backfired for you? Have family members or friends been upset that you used them in your stories? If so, how did you handle that?

L. : Oh, absolutely, this has been a problem for me, as it has been for other writers. It’s such a recurring dilemma that my good friend and fellow writer Joy Castro is compiling an anthology of personal essays by writers who have grappled with repercussions from writing about family, and I have submitted a piece for that collection in which I discuss various and surprising reactions from family members to encountering versions of themselves in my stories.
These have ranged from delight to anger. One of my cousins who recognized herself in an unflattering portrayal was provoked to write, and she is now producing essays about her life that she shares with me. Another cousin I’ve written about has not spoken to me in over eight years. My children have also struggled with me writing their experiences, and my son asked me never to write about him, which I take to mean: If you write about me, be sure to disguise the character so that I don’t even know myself. I confess I have not always handled this type of conflict well. Harry Crews says that if you are a writer and you have a family, someone in that family will have a problem with what you do. This is true. And it’s taken me an exceptionally long time to figure out which stories are mine to tell and which are not.

J. : During the Spring Writers’ Series at UNA, you mentioned “cultural currency,” what advice would you give someone who was struggling with their cultural identity?

L. : My best advice is to articulate that struggle in one way or another, to discuss it openly with those you trust or to write about it. Once a person can fully express struggles with cultural identity, it becomes easier to understand
kind of impact it has on one’s life, whether this struggle emanates from class, gender, ethnic, or religious difference. Naming the struggle and putting it into words can help bring the problem into sharper focus so it can be dealt with in a proactive and direct way.

J. : How important do you think student literary magazines like *Lights & Shadows* are for young writers?

L. : Such literary magazines are absolutely essential as early venues for publishing work. I will never forget how validated I felt as an emerging writer when *The Northridge Review* at California State University, Northridge published my early stories. When these appeared in print, suddenly I was writing for readers other than myself. People were reading my work, thinking about my characters and their experiences, and this was wonderful to me. Though I have never been on staff for a student literary magazine, I have worked as assistant to the editors at *The Georgia Review*, so I know that working to produce a literary magazine affords an invaluable experience for emerging writers. Reading submissions enables writers to understand what the
playing field is and to see ways in which to improve their own writing.

J. : What advice would you give to aspiring young adult novelists from your experiences?

L. : I would advise such writers that writing for children and young adults is the most challenging type of writing there is, and one should never enter into it because he or she feels unready for producing mainstream literature. Young readers have zero tolerance for undisciplined writing—dull stories, inflated language, lazy editing practices, and superficial characters. I would also stress that writing for young adults is in not a forum for derivative genre writing. Basically, this type of writing is in no way a shortcut for writers who don’t feel up to the challenge of writing for adults. So my advice: Develop your writing skills to the best of your ability and then find out if you are good enough to write for the toughest readers around.

J. : While at UNA, you stated it took you approximately 10 years to get
your first book published, any advice for students seeking publication? Should students seek publication with an established publisher or are new media tools, such as blogs, a better way to go?

L. : Sorry to be terse about this, but student writers ought to focus on learning the craft of writing, not publication, which happens when the work is at such a level that other people will be interested in reading it. Again, there are no shortcuts. Nowadays though, it does seem easier than ever to see one’s words in print, but that is not the litmus test for success as a writer, as I see it. My fifteen-year-old nephew publishes an online sports journal. If you write a solid piece on a high school baseball game in Dallas, he will likely post it. But does that make you a published writer? Technically, I suppose it does, though it will not necessarily bring you closer to being the kind of writers most students aspire to be, the kind of writers they read and admire most, those who have inspired them to step up and write.

J. : What’s your favorite food dish? Would you mind sharing your recipe?
L. : My family is from central New Mexico, land of the mouth-excoriating chili peppers. My favorite New Mexican dish is chili relleno. This is a stuffed chili dish that one prepares by roasting green chili, peeling it, slitting it open, and stuffing it with a stick of Monterrey jack cheese. Then it is coated in a cornmeal batter and deep-fried. Drain excess fat from this delicacy and cover it well with even hotter red chili salsa to serve immediately with many glasses of cold water. Enjoy!