



I Call on the Earth

Marisol Cortez

Double Drop Press 2019

Table of Contents



1. Preface: No Poems Allowed

2. Dedication: For the Ones Who Stayed Till the End

3. Grassfire

4. I Call on the Earth

5. Conversation Between Strangers

6. Interview at the H-E-B

7. For Ms. Carol, Unclaimed

8. Missing Limb

9. Big Sky

10. Red Bird

PREFACE: NO POEMS ALLOWED

Let's start with the numbers:

51 interviews with
62 residents of
51 households, almost half
of those displaced
from Mission Trails Mobile Home Community

when the City of San Antonio decided
that luxury apartments would be
in the parlance of planners
the highest and best use
for that site.

And what follows is poems I wrote alongside
or in between or beside or underneath
the work of something legible
as research

Who were the displaced?

86% Mexicano or Mexican-American.
56% of households making under \$20,000/year.
43% Spanish-dominant.
52% immigrant.
45% children under 18.

which you can read here
<https://vecinosdemissiontrails.wordpress.com/research/>
and should read here
if you really want to understand
San Antonio
(whose own inaugural poet laureate,
Carmen Tafolla, recently said
of a memoir penned by a relative: "I think
they were hoping to document this so thoroughly
it could not be disproven."
Same here.)

Interviews revealed four main impacts of displacement:

First, on housing security:

22% experienced a period of homelessness.
43% were forced to move more than once.

By the time of the interview

only 28% were settled economically and housing-wise.
14% were settled but only after homelessness or multiple moves.
58% were still unsettled because of problems with their new location.

But if you read the report on Mission Trails, please
imagine that these next poems
are sandwiched between
every section of painstaking scholarship, staggered
between the history, the theory, the data:
please mentally reinsert them for me
because they had to be cut
in the end, because

Second, on health:

Three residents died following displacement—
two elderly women and one man from suicide.

21% experienced health impacts requiring hospitalization.

33% experienced a worsening of chronic conditions.

27% developed new health conditions.

57% reported mental health impacts, five cases severe enough
to be disabling, hospitalizable or fatal.

20% reported health impacts on children, pregnancies, newborns.

because we worried
that if poetry
canoodled too closely with
the witness of numbers
the reality of numbers
the tragedy and defiance of numbers
it would give the city one more reason
to discredit our work, or worse:
it would make the story of Mission Trails
and the people who lived there
about me as the teller—
too personal, too individual
when the truth is that
our work was collective

Third, on economic security:

Relocation assistance promised in theory: \$7,200.

Average amount of relocation assistance actually received: \$4,451.

77% of households paying out of pocket for moving expenses.

47% of households reporting an increase in housing costs after displacement.

and because I trusted the strategy
I agreed: no poems allowed

however
the reality is
that what the research
ultimately found
is that when fighting the willed
disappearance of bodies with
writing, you will find
that some bodies cannot be found
and some stories can never be looked at
straight on, and some lives will resist
documentation

Where did they end up in the end?

Of 70 households known to us:

51% kept their homes, meaning
another half lost their homes.

19% became renters after owning.

17% bought a new house, mostly
by taking on new debt.

Four households were living with friends or family
at the time of the interview—homeless, in other words.

Three were able to access public housing.

One purchased an RV and moved to Corpus.

Two others moved out of Texas altogether.

One moved their trailer to an approved park
but actually lives in their place of business.

And 36 households *we just don't know*.

and when you stumble upon the presence
of such absences, that
is when poetry becomes
the only way
of speaking
what has
actually
happened.