

Gerry: Hi, my name is Geraldo Cadava, and this is Writing Latinos, a podcast from Public Books.

Latino scholars, memoirists, novelists, journalists, and others have used the written word as their medium for making a statement about *latinidad*. We'll talk to some of them about how their writing illuminates the Latino experience. Some of our episodes will be nerdy and academic, while others will be playful and lighthearted. All will offer thoughtful reflections on Latino identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

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Now, for the show...

Gerry: We're so excited to talk today with Ingrid Rojas Contreras, originally from Bogota, Colombia. Rojas Contreras is the author of two books. Her first was a novel called Fruit of the Drunken Tree.

It was the silver medal winner in first fiction from the California Book Awards and was a New York Times editor's choice.

Her second is a memoir called The Man Who Could Move Clouds, which was a finalist for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in memoir or autobiography. A finalist for the 2022 National Book Award in non-fiction and was named a Best Book of the Year by time, NPR, vulture People, vanity Fair, Esquire, Boston Globe, and others.

That's the book we're going to talk about today. Thank you for joining us, Ingrid.

Ingrid: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here chatting with you.

Gerry: So Ingrid, in a lot of ways, to me at least, your bicycle accident in Chicago was the kind of origin of this book, both because it caused the amnesia that helped you connect your story with your family's history of supernatural powers.

And because it led you on this quest of discovery where you felt like you really had to learn everything again, including about your own family. So can you talk about that a little

[00:01:19] **Ingrid:** bit? I think you're absolutely right, and it felt like that to me too as I was living it. I always felt that. The, the lives of my mother and grandfather, both of them who were eros, were lives that were lived maybe like in the middle of surreal reality or in the middle of strangeness.

[00:01:40] **Ingrid:** And I never really quite felt that in my life until I had that accident. Mm-hmm. And lost my memory. Um, and my, my mother, when she was a young girl, also had an accident where she lost her memory. And I think, you know, once I remembered all of those things, it, it really felt like the amnesia and the accident was a way of belonging to my mother's story.

[00:02:06] **Ingrid:** It was a way in which both of our lives were, were fitting together. And it really like that. That feeling of just suddenly fitting into the story that, you know, takes generations to tell was what guided me when I was writing the book, was that feeling of this is a really long story and this is, this is the new kind of continuation of it and what does it mean for me, and, you know, and what does it mean to be at the middle of it.

[00:02:34] **Gerry:** Yeah, that's, that's fascinating. I mean, I, I think I read another interview you did about this book where you talked about how. You'd been preparing to write this book for your whole life in some ways,

[00:02:46] **Gerry:** but the bicycle accident, that was a moment where you felt yourself part of this family lineage, going back to your grandfather and stretching through your mother and even to you.

[00:02:58] **Ingrid:** Yeah, I, I think something that happened was that I always wanted to tell these stories as you're saying, and, and they're just, Very dramatic, very, um, beautiful stories, very fun stories to tell. And they have sadness in them and they have portrayal in them. And. I never quite knew how to approach them or write them.

[00:03:21] **Ingrid:** You know, one of the main stories that is told, that are told about my grandfather is, is him being able to move clouds. Mm-hmm. And as a young girl, I remember asking mm-hmm. You know, all of my aunts and uncles who had seen it, just, you know exactly what did you see and, and really enjoying their description of what it was.

[00:03:39] **Ingrid:** Um, and I felt that until I. Until having amnesia, I didn't really have an experience with my own that really kind of showed me what it is like to, to be in the middle of something that feels very surreal. Mm-hmm. And so I think in some ways having that experience showed me how to write about, you know, my aunts and uncles seeing this happen.

[00:04:02] **Ingrid:** I also interviewed other people who saw it happen, and I think the difference is that had I not had that experience, probably my impulse would've been to, to say like, well, did, did this happen or did this not happen? Right. and I think in some ways when I started to do that, you know, before writing the memoir, Having that impulse in some ways made the story fall dead.

[00:04:29] **Ingrid:** And I think it's that stories about eros are stories that just belong to a different culture. Mm-hmm. And this impulse that we have of, of saying like, is this true? Is this not true? Or is the evidence what happened? If we put a camera in the room, like we, you know this Yes. This kind of like an impulse for like the scientific method is ano is a different culture.

[00:04:51] **Ingrid:** And, and in some ways when we try to bend cordero's stories to try to satisfy this other culture, it just doesn't quite work. And what I really love doing in the book is telling the stories and then trying to keep them in the world that they're. That they're, you know, wanting to be kept in. Yeah. Which is not to say that it's, um, you know, anti-scientific or anything, it's just that the, the stories

kind of become more interesting when you, when I would kind of linger with my family or with, you know, other people who had seen all of these events happen and just asking about their experience and asking about what that experience meant.

[00:05:34] **Ingrid:** Yeah. So it becomes kind of like more of a. Seeking meaning as opposed to seeking factual answers.

[00:05:42] **Gerry:** Absolutely.

[00:05:42] **Gerry:** I feel like I have to ask because I've been in Chicago for 15 years and this has become my home, but this, this accident happened in Chicago. Tell me about how you liked Chicago. What's your, what's your memory or impression of Chicago?

[00:05:57] **Ingrid:** I, you know, my, my memory of Chica, my first kind of impression of Chicago, I. Was that I wasn't going to make it. Mm-hmm.

[00:06:06] **Gerry:** Through the winter,

[00:06:07] **Ingrid:** through the winter, of course I arrived in, I arrived in September and I came straight from Bogota. So if you can imagine, the coldest that I had ever experienced was something like, you know, 50 degrees.

[00:06:20] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And. I remember people kept telling me that I needed to buy a coat and me just not understanding what they were talking about, and at some point it just every day became the coldest day of my life and I just couldn't believe, I know when the weather reached zero. I know. My immediate thought was, do we all die?

[00:06:42] **Ingrid:** Like what happens when it gets to like negative? Yes. One. Like what happens? Oh man. Um, so it was a very just first brutal winter and it took me a few winters to really get to fall in love with the city, but I, I eventually did, and there was this moment that I always think of as, as a moment that, that just kind of showed me the, the, the love of the weather.

[00:07:06] **Ingrid:** At some point, it was the middle of winter and I walked to Lake Michigan Uhhuh, and there were. These, you know, pieces of ice that were kind of breaking off from each other and then flowing away and there it was just making this surreal, very eerie groaning sound. And I had never heard ice groan. And there was something about hearing ice, making these animals sounds.

[00:07:35] **Ingrid:** I think that was the moment for me where I. I just really started to love the weather and just love the, the extreme nature of it.

[00:07:45] **Gerry:** That's fascinating. I mean, I've never heard anyone describe coming to love the Chicago weather in the middle of the winter. Usually it's more of a story of when the winter thaws and everything comes to life, and I, I still think to this day that Chicago in the summer is one of the funnest cities I've ever lived in because people are just out and about and having fun.

[00:08:06] **Gerry:** So, um, we'll get back to the book.

[00:08:08] **Gerry:** So, for a while after your accident, you write about how you kind of loved being a, a blank slate. You. Experienced nothing but joy. But then you had this complete turnaround where you found that you needed to learn everything

[00:08:23] **Gerry:** That sounds kind of, to me, it sounds kind of bewildering and exhilarating and maybe even a little bit scary. So can you talk about that transition a little bit? Yeah,

[00:08:32] **Ingrid:** it, it, you know, in the beginning having amnesia felt like I had never been that happy, you know? Mm-hmm. In my life. And it just felt like I was, you know, having no memories meant that I was just kind of grounded in every moment that was unfolding before me.

[00:08:52] **Ingrid:** And I think that I was also, The curiosity that I felt was very high and the sense of wonder that I felt was really high. And those for me curiosity and wonder have always been such stable sources of joy. And I, you know, I just

experienced joy all of the time. there was a, a moment where I didn't know what it was called.

[00:09:16] **Ingrid:** And so it was just kind of like this pure observation and then the word would arrive and I would remember, oh, that is called this. And it really felt like, um, like watching the world being born. And just kind of like watching the world slowly unfolding before you. And it was just, you know, just really beautiful and just really fulfilling.

[00:09:37] **Ingrid:** I think for me, like what started to, to have like the turning point and I write about it in the book, is this moment where I saw a reflection of myself on this black window, and this was right after the accident. that was just such a surreal, eerie moment because I thought that I was making eye contact with a person and then I realized that I, I was looking at myself

[00:10:01] **Ingrid:** I hadn't up until that moment really thought about like whether I was a man or a woman. And so it, it felt like I was just this, cloud of consciousness. So, For me, like that became the moment where when you don't know anything, you can live in the middle of just having a, a really high sense of curiosity and uh, wonder.

[00:10:24] **Ingrid:** And then once you start to know things, you start to be grounded. And so with that knowledge comes some, accompanying sad things that have to do with, I don't know, just being a person and having a history and the things that you chose and the things that you did and the things that you didn't do.

[00:10:43] **Ingrid:** And so the, the whole journey of, of having amnesia and, um, memories coming back were me experiencing those two things back and forth.

[00:10:55] **Gerry:** It's very interesting. And so I've, I've been trying to hold back on the science question for later. Mm-hmm. But I feel like I have to ask it now cuz we're, we're talking about it.

[00:11:04] **Gerry:** I mean, okay. I could imagine one version of this book, you know, you have a bicycle accident that causes amnesia that. Maybe leads to, uh, a

period of recovery and regaining memory and is accompanied with panic attacks, things like that. I could imagine a very kind of medicalized version of this story. But instead, what the experience does is take you down this hole.

[00:11:29] **Gerry:** Path of, um, learning about your family history and kind of narrativizing that experience.

[00:11:36] **Gerry:** So all of the things we're talking about have scientific explanations, but

[00:11:40] **Gerry:** instead of medicalizing what happened, you take it down this whole other path. And so I'm wondering how you've come through writing this book and through your experience to think about the relationship between scientific and medical explanations of things versus anthropological historical narratives.

[00:11:59] **Ingrid:** Yeah. Um, I guess maybe part of it would be informed by my parents. And, you know, my mother's was a, and she very much lived in that world and, and my father was an engineer. Mm-hmm. And he very much didn't, you know, didn't really kind of believe in anything that my mother would say or anything that she, you know, she was doing.

[00:12:26] **Ingrid:** You know, they still loved each other and it, it's almost like there was, that, that point of contention between them wasn't even a point of contention. I think growing up, it just, for me, it just kind of coexisted and writing the book. I think I tried to strike a similar balance, um, and just, you know, um, tell the story

[00:12:49] **Ingrid:** the way that I think about it is that it's, it's just two different languages. And when you have both cultures, then you, you can kind of, uh, draw from both. I think even in writing the book, I, I was always trying to strike the right balance with it.

[00:13:07] **Ingrid:** And then there's, there's moments that I, that because they're unexplained, I think I, it's better to kind of leave them unexplained as opposed to

try to, I don't know, chase an answer that isn't really there. one of the stories that I always think about, It's about, there's this period where my sister gets very sick and she's trying to get pregnant.

[00:13:32] **Ingrid:** and you know, she says like, I am pregnant, and we all celebrate. And then at some point she calls us back and she says, um, the baby's dead and she's just had a sonogram and they couldn't find the heartbeat. And so she is, you know, the, she's also kind of calling to say like, I'm gonna. Have the procedure where they go in and they retrieve, um, the remains of the fetus

[00:13:56] **Ingrid:** But then my, my mother in that moment said, no, the baby is alive. If you have this procedure, you're gonna kill the baby. even though I know the doctors say, and you got a sonogram, and the doctors say that it's dead, it's alive. And I just remember that moment and just being very upset with my mother and I, you know, was also just seeing with the effect that, even saying that had on my sister

[00:14:21] **Ingrid:** Saying something like that is so destabilizing. Mm-hmm. And my mother kept telling my sister like, do not get this operation. Like, I am sure that the, that the baby's alive. my sister decided to wait, not because she was listening to my mother, but only because, she, um, couldn't get herself to the hospital cuz she was that.

[00:14:44] **Ingrid:** Um, just filled with sadness and just unable to do anything about it. And at some point the remains were supposed to come out on their own and they didn't. And so she went back to the hospital, they did a second sonogram, and then they found the heartbeat. Wow. After that. Um, and you know, like what my mother said at that moment was like, I.

[00:15:07] **Ingrid:** I don't, you know, like, I don't understand why nobody in this family believes me, like after everything that I've done, why doesn't anybody believe me? Um, and you know, and that's like the real life story. It's like she. Sometimes knows unexplainable things, and sometimes the story has that sort of unexplained flavor to it.

[00:15:30] **Ingrid:** And, you know, and the, so when we asked the doctors or my sister did, um, a, the discrepancy of not having a heartbeat and then finding a heartbeat, they thought that maybe she had twins and one of them had died, and then the other. They couldn't find the other heartbeat and then it lived. And so that was their explanation and, and both of those, Things are in the book.

[00:15:54] **Ingrid:** So I really like to kind of tell the story from our point of view and what happened and, you know, bringing in the, the eeriness of my mother having an answer, and then also having an explanation from the doctors as well and putting that all together.as opposed to, I.

[00:16:13] **Ingrid:** choosing one lane and sticking with it, because that is just not my experience, we live with all of those things in my family together, so I, I wanna tell that story that way too.

[00:16:24] **Gerry:** another moment that stuck out to me, a along these lines was when you were talking with your mom about anxiety and your mom said, I wish that.

[00:16:34] **Gerry:** You would give it to me and I could heal it. Like she wanted to absorb your anxiety and heal it for you. And part of me was thinking like, you know, this is the kind of thing that any parent would say to their, to their kid, because all parents want to protect their children and want to help them. But then in your mom's case, she thought that she could literally heal it by absorbing it herself, right?

[00:16:58] **Ingrid:** Yeah. It's interesting cuz I did a lot of, um, research on data traditions and indigenous traditions and you know, from my reading, this idea is an indigenous idea. Mm-hmm. That you can kind of, um, suck the illness off of somebody. And then a healer can heal that in themselves.

[00:17:22] **Ingrid:** And I think that there's, you know, something really beautiful about that idea And I think even if you're on the receiving end of that, um, that there's something else kind of that can happen.

[00:17:32] **Ingrid:** there are things inside of us that are kind of, you know, I don't know, deeper wounds that in some way can be helped by someone kind of reaching that level of care with you.

[00:17:45] **Gerry:** Absolutely. as I was reading, I was trying to also connect what I was learning from you with broader patterns of Latino experience and. Know, I'm very familiar with Latino writers and scholars talking about colonialism as a kind of erasure, and then our efforts as historians or writers or scholars kind of constitutes an act of recovery part of the work we're doing is recovering what was.

[00:18:14] **Gerry:** Stolen from US languages, religious practices, land, et cetera. So I'm wondering if you came to think about the amnesia you experienced, all of the memories taken from you, uh, in terms of Latino's broader experience of colonial erasure and the parallels between the writing of your book and all of our efforts to recover the Latino past.

[00:18:35] **Ingrid:** there was a, there was a key moment when I remembered that my Grandfather was a ra and my mother was a ra, where I just also remembered that my mother, when I was a little girl, would tell me, don't tell this story to anybody. Don't tell anybody. Mm-hmm. That I'm a ra, and like, do not share this with anybody.

[00:18:55] **Ingrid:** Yeah. And she would say things like, it's, you know, It's not that we're ashamed, but you just don't know what people are gonna do with that information. Mm-hmm. And I think in her own life, she had experienced, um, a lot of judgment and a lot of, um, I don't know, actions from people who would look down on her for, for that reason.

[00:19:16] **Ingrid:** Um, she once had a, a person kind of like spit in her face when she said that she was a, um, and. Um, yeah. And then I think at some point, like my, my dad didn't get a promotion because they found out that my, that my mother was a, um, and I think that we, I started to think of, you know, erasure and our kind of collective amnesia, like Latino collective amnesia, right?

[00:19:45] **Ingrid:** In that way where, you know, the eras are, uh, you know, a mix of. Indigenous traditions and then European traditions, and that's what that is. And so it's, it's kind of like really a place. And it, I guess it depends on the area as well and who the guero happens to be, um, and where they come from and, you know, and, and their, who they're learning from and everything else.

[00:20:11] **Ingrid:** Um, but, but yeah. But it, it's almost like we. Have been taught to look down on these traditions or we, we equate them with brujeria, which is also what the Spanish Inquisition did when encountering these traditions. And so I, I think I wanted with writing the book and writing it in that way and thinking about history in that way to just really highlight for us, When, you know, like the things that we look down on, is it because we have been taught to look down on them?

[00:20:43] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. You know, over 500 years. Is it because we have been taught to price one side of ourselves while demeaning this other side of ourselves and just even kind of disassociating, uh, you know, from that side. Mm-hmm. Um, so I really kind of wanted to, to question the politics of that. Yeah, that's

[00:21:02] **Gerry:** interesting.

[00:21:02] **Gerry:** it's all about the timing. She, mm-hmm. So there are moments when we are prepared for the story to be healed and other moments.

[00:21:12] **Gerry:** When we're not, we're not ready for the story to be healed yet. And, um, so I'm wondering if, um, you know, that leads me to wonder if the writing of this book was also a form of healing for you because, uh, the moment was ready. Yeah.

[00:21:28] **Ingrid:** Uh, I think it did, it did feel, you know, in the, in the, in the beginning, it just really felt like, um, A story that I loved telling, and I didn't think that I was going to talk about my anxiety disorder or my sister's eating disorder at all.

[00:21:46] **Ingrid:** I didn't think that that was part of the story. Mm. But I think at some point, as I was, as I was writing, and I got to the point where there's kind of an interruption in the narrative. With, you know, we have to leave Columbia because of the violence, and then it means that we become like uprooted people.

[00:22:05] **Ingrid:** then we, you know, my sister and I and everyone in the family started to have these other, you know, emotional disorders that came from that time and came from that stress. Um, and. Yeah. And so then I, I realized that if I was gonna write a story about healers, that I also had to write a story about healing.

[00:22:25] **Ingrid:** Um mm-hmm. But it, it was really something that I resisted the whole way through. Mm-hmm. Like, I was really not wanting to, to write that. Mm-hmm. Um, and then, you know, and then when I did, um, it felt really hard at times, like it felt really difficult to write about all of that. Um, and you know, and also there's moments where whenever you're able to, you know, put words to an experience that you haven't, you know, made the effort to, to tell to yourself like, these are the things that happened to me and these are the things that I lived.

[00:23:01] **Ingrid:** There's something about putting language to that that does feel healing. And that feels like an important part of coming to terms with, um, your experience in life and how that's made you into, into a person. Um, so even though I, you know, didn't mean it to be be, and I didn't go to writing for that reason, in the end it did, it did feel healing.

[00:23:24] **Gerry:** There's a lot in the man who could move clouds. Uh, that's about gender relationships and, and kind of sexual transgressions where you have no, no, your grandfather taking yearly long absences or having yearly long trips away from the family when it was suspected that he was visiting other women and maybe even had other families and.

[00:23:49] **Gerry:** Then his wife's efforts to keep him at home. And some of this often gets discussed, especially in a Latino context as, uh, machismo. And I'm wondering if, if that term though, does that term make sense to you as you think about your family?

[00:24:03] **Gerry:** Or is a, a different kind of term or concept better? For the dynamics in your family,

[00:24:10] **Ingrid:** I think that is right. I, I would say that the language I was using with myself is I was thinking about violence against women. Mm-hmm. And I think in, in the beginning, I did start with this idea of machismo and just trying to look at, I mean, I've, I've met so many, um, Latinas for whom, if you say, like my grandfather used to kind of go away, he probably had other families.

[00:24:36] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. The response would be like, yeah, mine too. You know, like it would just be so, such a common thing to have happened. Um, and at some point when I was writing the book, I was just thinking about. You know, the origin of Mestizo people and how that would've been forced relations between European settlers and indigenous women.

[00:25:00] **Ingrid:** I was also, I think, thinking about how many, you know, if, if that's, you know, where I come from being a mixed person So I think I was just thinking about just, you know, decades eras of violence against women and trying to think about, you know, how do, how do we carry that?

[00:25:22] **Ingrid:** How does, you know? That sort of violence live within us, and how does it show up and how do women kind of like talk to each other when they're alone? Um, what does it mean about how you navigate the world? And, you know, for my mother being aquita, you know, how does she, how does she think about that and how does she approach that?

[00:25:44] **Ingrid:** the men in my family have gone through horrendous things as well. Mm-hmm. Um, and there is this just really kind of inability to, to share or in some ways to kind of, you know, um, hold the experience.

[00:26:00] **Ingrid:** And so the, the way that it comes out is usually through violence or drinking or these other. I dunno, methods of trying to quiet the pain down of what's going on. Um, but, you know, but also if, if you have little boys growing up seeing that sort of violence, then it's, that's, that's the language that you learn how to, how to speak as well.

[00:26:22] **Gerry:** Right, right. so switching gears a little bit, I want to talk about. Genre, uh, and the genre of the memoir. And I guess the basic question is what some of your thoughts are about, um, how you decided to write the book in the way that you did. Because, it's not written like your usual memoir, which is the kind of recounting of the details of a life in chronological order,

[00:26:47] **Gerry:** I would describe your work as much more lyrical and poetic and novelistic and really, um, kind of bouncing around in time in ways that are very artful. And so, um, how, how were you thinking about this as a memoir and how were you trying to play with memoir as a genre?

[00:27:09] **Ingrid:** I think I, I was thinking a lot about how my mother. Tell stories out loud. Um, and she will never, she starts to tell you a story and she'll just kind of go on these other tangents, and I don't know if this is very familiar to other, mm-hmm. Latino, um, people who, you know, listen, listening to their mothers.

[00:27:32] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. And it's almost like she interrupts the story that she's telling to tell you an even more scandalous, more dramatic story. And so that you sort of forget what she's talking about. And it's just this kind of, you know, you're like writing this, um, you know, hurricane and you're like, where is this going?

[00:27:51] **Ingrid:** I am so interested. I have no idea what all of this means, but please go on. Um, and I think I was trying to capture a different type of, uh, thinking. I'm not really someone who thinks of it in, in a chronological way, but I do think of it in terms of meaning and how one meaning led, led me to understand something else.

[00:28:13] **Ingrid:** And for me, that sort of weaving is how I would tell the story anyway. I'm just kind of like really just recalling how my mother would've told it. Yeah. Out loud to us.

[00:28:27] **Ingrid:** as far as, you know, genre goes, there's this moment in, in our family, like when my, when my grandfather passed away and him and my grandmother had been in estranged, um, and they hadn't kind of talked for, for years, and he died alone.

[00:28:45] **Ingrid:** Um, and the, so the night that he died, my grandfather, my grandmother, dreamt that. Uh, my grandfather kind of like came to her and just made love to her on her bed and asked her if she would forgive him for all the pain that she had, that he had caused her. And in the dream she said, no, I will not forgive you.

[00:29:07] **Ingrid:** Um, and when she woke up, there was, um, dirt all over her bed. when people kind of kept calling her to tell her that her estranged husband had died, she kept telling that story and then she kept saying, I, like I made love to a ghost like this is, I now know what it's like to make love to a ghost.

[00:29:28] **Ingrid:** And do you see what I mean? Like that's the story that just lives at the, at the edge of reality and surreal reality. And so again, like to when, when we are living out that life, we don't, you know, nobody in the family said like, well, but what really happened?

[00:29:45] **Ingrid:** Right. Like we didn't go down that road. Yeah. But we just kind of, um, heard the story and then thought about, um, you know, our grandmother's heart in that situation. we thought about how much pain she had lived through and how that is kind of like the last moment that she had with this person.

[00:30:07] **Ingrid:** Yeah. Through this very kind of strange relationship. I started to think of, um, you know, magical realism and how the true origin of magical realism is just really how, um, Latina people tell stories. You know, it's how we, you know, it's, it comes from, um, this, it has like an indigenous origin.

[00:30:30] **Ingrid:** Yeah. Um, And so, yeah, and so I, I, I really wanted to honor what that is and just really tell it how it, you know, how it really was in life.

[00:30:42] **Gerry:** Was it hard to kind of coax those stories out of yourself though?

[00:30:47] **Gerry:** you know, I think part of why our mothers were able to accomplish that is because they had an audience in front of them, kind of, they could see our interest in it, you know, so they kept going until they landed at some point, like, There was mud on the sheets and in my underwear, and now I know

what it's like to make love to a ghost, but, um, you didn't have that kind of audience when you were writing, so did you have to kind of coax that sensibility out of yourself?

[00:31:17] **Gerry:** I think I did.

[00:31:20] **Ingrid:** Um, it's also that the, the story just kind of kept getting wilder as I was writing it. So the, you know, the, the moment that we, that the, that the memoir starts is that two of my aunts and my mother have all had a dream where my grandfather has announced, you know, to them that he wants his remains to be disinterred.

[00:31:43] **Ingrid:** And he had been buried at this point for 20 years. Um, so because it happened to three people, then we just decided that we needed to go back to Columbia and actually carry this out in real life. and so I, you know, like that's where the, where the memoir starts and this is where it kind of opens.

[00:32:02] **Ingrid:** It's just we're traveling back to Columbia to do this, um, errand that we got from the dream world and. You know, I living it, I was, my thought process was also, it was that feeling of, I don't know where the story is going and what is happening. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You know, like, and everything kind of perhaps getting stranger and stranger as, yeah, I was living out, you know, that, that period of time.

[00:32:30] **Ingrid:** So I think in some ways I, I myself was the audience of that. Do you see what I mean? Like, I myself was like, how is it possible that. Three people have a dream, and now suddenly we're at the cemetery. You know? Yeah. Doing it. Yeah, exactly. Doing it. And um, and you know, and there's things that we uncover and so it's, it almost felt like, uh, I don't know.

[00:32:55] **Ingrid:** The story feels very blessed in some ways because it almost felt like at every turn there's something, you know, like the, just the narrative just kind of gets stranger on, you know, obviously like, That's just what happened. Um, mm-hmm. But it feels like, um, as a writer, like the, the way that the narrative unfolded was really satisfying to me.

[00:33:17] **Gerry:** Yeah. And I think this is actually some of what you mean by like real magical realism, right? Because you're just in some ways reporting the facts of how you experienced 'em. So, speaking of this as a kind of wild ride and journey, I mean, how, how did you collaborate with your family in the process of writing this book?

[00:33:34] **Gerry:** How did, how were they supporting the project? Reacting to the project, uh, involved in the project with you?

[00:33:42] **Ingrid:** in the beginning I told everyone that I wanted to write the book and the first response was, no, you can't, cannot write this book. Mm-hmm. Um, and, you know, my, my mother and my aunts had that same, um, response that I was talking about before, which is an kind of like a very strong sense of shame.

[00:34:04] **Ingrid:** So like, what are people going to think? And, you know, one of my aunts has a business and she said like, what if people find out that this is my father? Like what's gonna happen to my business? So this, this fear of, um, social retaliation, Through, yeah, through many years we, I had a conversation with everyone about, you know, okay, what if I change your name?

[00:34:28] **Ingrid:** Do you feel more comfortable? I guess like also questioning what does it mean that we can't talk about this part of our lives when it feels so central? And just, you know, just trying to have those harder conversations with them that had to do with what, who taught you to be ashamed

[00:34:44] **Ingrid:** and so having those conversations, which even happened, you know, off the page are not, are not really in the book where. The precursor for being able to write the book and for having everyone. Um, yeah, come on board with it

[00:35:01] **Gerry:** in the end.

[00:35:02] **Gerry:** Would you say that anything that is inside the book changed as a result of those conversations?

[00:35:09] **Ingrid:** That just kind of became a question that I wanted to carry within the text.

[00:35:14] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. So, as you know, as I was asking my aunts, like, who taught you to be ashamed and why is this something that you're ashamed of? I think that was also something that I was asking in the book, like, who taught us to be ashamed? Mm-hmm. Why is this something that we're ashamed of? So it was, I, um, it did change the book in that way where it showed me what to pay attention to and what to.

[00:35:37] **Ingrid:** Turn to history for, and look for in history.

[00:35:40] **Gerry:** Yeah. Yeah. That's interesting. Um, and then the last question I want to ask is, um, I, I basically wanna know if a category like Latina literature or Latino literature, latinx literature, whatever you wanna call it, is that a meaningful category to you? And do you see this book as fitting within that category,

[00:36:02] **Ingrid:** Yeah, I, I mean, I think it, I think it does belong. I understand whenever we say, um, Latino people that we're talking about, um, social, cultural, you know, shared history and we're talking about. Geographical history, and we're talking about the shared history that we have of how we were colonized as a continent.

[00:36:26] **Ingrid:** Um, and so in, in that way. Um, and you know, as I started to read about Eros in other countries, I know that it's very similar and I know that, um, the, those sorts of the things that happened in Columbia also kind of apply. So everyone, you know, the, the way that we were colonized, happens throughout the Americas, but like in different ways.

[00:36:50] **Ingrid:** Um, it was obviously better to, to have, you know, babies with someone who looked wider than they were. Mm-hmm. So that by the generations you could become wider and that you could, you know, that was always better. So we have that history. Um, and you know, if, if you. After generations have someone in your family who is still, you know, a cordero, that's the sort of cultural resistance that is happening.

[00:37:19] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. Right? It's like a part of, um, culture that is resisting being absorbed So I think in, in that way, it is, you know, it, it belongs to that constellation of stories that we, and experiences and lives that we have in, in South America.

[00:37:36] **Gerry:** Yeah. And if I'm doing my math right, um, you have by this point spent about half of your life here in the United States, maybe a little bit more than that. So, um, you know, How have you come to identify as a Latina and how do you understand kind of, uh, Colombian American identity fitting within the broader landscape of Latinidad?

[00:38:00] **Ingrid:** well, I moved to the, I moved to the US when I was, uh, 19. Mm-hmm. And, you know, I think there, there's something about spending, you know, your formative years are always gonna be your formative years. and my, my first language is always going to be Spanish. Um, and the way that I understand and read the world is, is always going to be Colombian.

[00:38:20] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. Um, and if, when we have an interruption of that history, you know, and for me and my family, it was violence, then that becomes part of the story, we, you know, I changed and now I'm, um, I am, you know, Colombian American. and I think that that has a, of course, like ha just brings kind of a complications that everyone who's had that, you know, happen in their lives knows.

[00:38:53] **Ingrid:** Um, but even kind of, even, you know, when I go back today to, to Columbia, it's, there's something really interesting that happens with language where. I don't, you know, I speak Spanish on the phone with, with my mother and friends who, um, speak Spanish, but a lot, a lot of the time, and even when I am before the desk writing, it's in English.

[00:39:18] **Ingrid:** Mm-hmm. And so I have this, now I just have this like overdeveloped English, um, and I have this underdeveloped Spanish. And the way that I like to think of it is that it's, um, you know, language in my case is a fossil. Where the, the idioms that I am using when I go back to Columbia, belong to the nineties and the sorts of things that I am using Yeah.

[00:39:45] **Ingrid:** Belong to the nineties. And that's just what happens, you know, like it's, it's a, it's a language that's frozen in time. And, you know, and that's, and that's all part of who I am and how I'm writing. And it all, it affects, you know, everything.

[00:40:01] **Gerry:** Yeah. That's so interesting. I don't know if you have the experience of going back to Columbia and looking for places that you knew in the nineties and they're just not there anymore.

[00:40:08] **Gerry:** I mean that, yeah. It happens with me in Tucson all the time when I go back to Arizona. Like I, I have my favorite restaurant, but my image of what my favorite restaurant is is based on something 15,

[00:40:18] **Ingrid:** 10 years ago. Yeah. And there's also that, that miracle of you come across, I went back to Columbia and came across this like particular brand of yogurt that, mm.

[00:40:31] **Ingrid:** I used to have as a girl, and it was like my treat, and I had forgotten about it completely. And then I saw it and it was just like I had bought it, I had it, and it just felt like this small, momentous miracle that was unfolding.

[00:40:44] **Gerry:** That's great. Yeah. Um, thank you so much for your time, Ingrid. I really enjoyed talking to you

[00:40:49] **Gerry:** Thank

Ingrid: you so much, Geraldo. I really loved our chat together.

Break:

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Outro:

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We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. Drop us a line at geraldo@publicbooks.org

This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced and edited by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is "City of Mirrors" by the Chicago-based band, Dos Santos.

I'm Geraldo Cadava. We'll see you again next time.