

For Cesar

Woman of Many Colors

I have a Mexican father and several Filipino grandfathers.
African-American women writers birthed me.
I am a woman of many colors.
My blood is shades of red and black, brown and white, and golden yellow.
Native-American traditions nurtured my soul and my dreams.
Drumbeats filled my spirit.
Wings grew from my feet.
Feathers danced above my head.
My blood grew red.

I heard cries of pain coming from Africa.
Women raped and beaten—
 molested and mutilated—
Silenced.
Men humiliated and jailed.
Until they found their voices,
Words screaming from their pens,
Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange.
My blood grew black.

From the Earth, my Mexican father was born.
Mother Earth created him -
A gift to those who could hear,
A gift to those who had no voices,
A gift to me.
My family grew.
Hermanos y hermanas,
Primos y primas,
Tios y tias,
Que no se puede contar.*
My blood grew brown.

My ancestors came by ship.
They hid by day from the Czar's soldiers

and traveled by night through Russia.
They journeyed by train from the Vistula River to the sea.
Their mothers did not raise them to be soldiers.
They fled famine in Ireland.
Potatoes no longer grew where the ancient Celts
had celebrated the Earth in all her goodness.
Where Brigid danced her transitions from maiden to matron
to crone in a time when women were honored.
My blood grew white.

Old men planted gardens and shared their harvests with me—
Eggplants and long beans, bitter melon and sticky rice.
Harvests of loss
Filipino men denied wives and families.
Harvests of pride—
“We began the Delano grape strike.”
Harvests of love—
“We, the Agbayani Village Committee, present you with this money we
collected to buy food for your wedding.”
Catalino held my baby.
My blood grew yellow.

My blood is shades of red and black, brown and white, and golden yellow.
I am a woman of many colors.

Deborah Miller
*Brothers and sisters,
Cousins,
Uncles and aunts,
Beyond counting.