

Aurora Levins Morales

MEDICINE

ESSAYS FOR RADICALS

STORIES



Revised & Expanded Edition

M E D I C I N E S T O R I E S

• *Revised and Expanded Edition* •

M E D I C I N E S T O R I E S

essays for radicals

Aurora Levins Morales

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To write the full story of where my thinking comes from would require another entire book, the autobiography of my sensipensante heart-mind-body. There are certainly other writers, artists, and intellectuals whose work has fed my own, and first among them are my parents, Rosario Morales and Richard Levins, who raised my brothers and me to think critically and creatively about the world, and who remained my close friends, comrades, and colleagues until their deaths—and beyond—since I still listen for their voices. Next is my brother Ricardo, co-conspirator and comrade from childhood, weaver of images and words right beside my weaving of words and images, co-theorist of the arts of social justice, first phone call, now that my mother is gone, to read my rough drafts to.

But the roots of my thinking lie in a web of friendships, liberation movements, and my own social conditions as a light-skinned Puerto Rican Ashkenazi Jewish, disabled, chronically ill, migrant, mixed-class, single mother, Woman of Color artist and intellectual. I'm a product of time, place, condition, and the people I've loved.

I can't possibly name all of the streams that have fed into the flow of my thinking over the course of my lifetime, so today, sitting at a beachfront table in Puerto Morelos, on the Caribbean coast of Quintana Roo, Mexico, I will say that I sprang in equal measure from the humanist Marxism of my parents and the ecological awareness I learned from them and from the

rain-drenched mountains of western Puerto Rico; the forests and birds; from my mother's passionate and clear-eyed feminism and my father's love of complexity in nature and human societies; from being a teenager in the women's liberation and antiwar movements; from early and repeated visits to revolutionary Cuba; and the many radical Jews I've loved and worked with; from being part of the 1980s upsurge of writing by Women of Color; and my thirty-four-plus years in Reevaluation Counseling; and from taking part in solidarity movements with Chile, the Black Panthers, South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, and many other global sites of struggle.

I was shaped by La Peña Cultural Center's Cultural Productions Group, an intensely creative collaboration that was also rife with sexism and produced groundbreaking multimedia performances about Latin America. I was shaped by *This Bridge Called My Back*, which credentialed me to speak at colleges and universities for pay, and by a forty-year literary collaboration with my mother, by the Third World News Bureau of KPFA, and the flowering of radical arts in every genre by people from hundreds of cultures that is San Francisco's left arts scene. I was shaped by every conversation, every collaboration, every collective brainstorm, and there have been many. Special among them are the Latina Feminist Group, co-creators of *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, and JOCSM: Jews of Color, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews in Solidarity with Palestine, two collectivities full of brilliant, creative, funny people who understand the importance of belly laughs and good food to cutting-edge political work.

In the writing of this second edition of *Medicine Stories* a few people played significant roles, reading and commenting on my writing, listening to me think my way through knots, and encouraging me to abandon perfectionism and keep it as simple as I can. Gratitude to Alicia Raquel, April Rosenblum, Chela Blitt, Gwyn Kirk, Monica Gomery, Ricardo Levins Morales, Ruth Mahaney, and Susan Raffo.

Thanks to my co-counselors: Catalina Vallejos Bartlett, Claudia Martinez, Ilana Streit, Jennileen Joseph and the Dream Team she leads, Julie Saxe-Taller, Michael Saxe-Taller, Randi Freundlich, Rebecca Mautner, and the crew at RCCR.

I am, as always, grateful to my ancestors, without whom I would not be here, carrying their gifts and sorrows, and to the generous, beautiful, wounded earth, always trying to teach us how to live. I pray this book may offer nourishment, medicine, navigation, and tools to my people, the radicals.

A NOTE ON REPETITION

In the work I do, repetition is a method, a rhythm of meaning that must be maintained, a beat to my message. Many of us radical writers and artists and public speakers know that we are spending our lives saying one or two things over and over again, sometimes in a rainbow of different ways, sometimes using the same phrases over and over, refrains between the many verses of shifting examples and illustrations. Throughout this book there will be words, phrases, sentences that circle around and are said again. This isn't a mistake. It isn't a failure of editing. This is a tool, a genre, a Caribbean Jewish chant. This is my revolutionary oy le lo ay le lo lai.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you for reading *Medicine Stories*. I am proud of the fact that the first edition (South End Press, 1998) has become a classic and is the kind of book that people lend to their friends, give as gifts, and pass from hand to hand.

But as a disabled, chronically ill elder, without the safety net of an academic job, I need the community of my readers to financially support my work. If you pass my book on to someone else, buy a copy to send to a prisoner or a domestic abuse shelter or clinic waiting room or your rabbi. I don't want to stop the easy flow of my writing through networks of people who will make good use of it, but I do want to be paid for writing it.

For nearly forty years I've been writing poems and essays that are widely used in our social justice movements, and almost all of that work has been unpaid. I have built up a good amount of social capital—my ideas and words are valued and respected, and people write to me to tell me how much the books and articles and poetry have meant to them—but this hasn't translated into the income I need in order to pay my bills and have a healthy, productive old age.

I am experimenting with a new economic model, in which the broad community of people who read, teach, and quote my work pays me for the *practice* of continuing to bring my particular perspective to the challenges

of our times, pays me to write and speak and broadcast what I have to offer, rather than waiting to buy my products. This frees me to say the things I think need saying, without having to package them into a book I can sell. It frees me to use my limited energy to tell the stories that need telling, instead of chasing grants and spending my time marketing. It frees me to accept only the speaking engagements that excite me, protecting my time and my health. It lets me give away books to those who can't afford them, without losing my livelihood.

Patreon is a funding platform created by and for artists. You join by pledging a small monthly amount. This brings you into an inner circle of people who actively back me to do what I do. It also means that you receive regular posts from me, in which I let you know what I'm working on, comment on what's happening in the world, and share excerpts of unpublished writing, and you can ask me questions, comment on my posts, and engage other supporters in conversation.

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I hope to see you there.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aurora Lewis Morales". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, connected letters.