



Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club

By Benjamin Alire Saenz

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Winner of the 2013 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction!

Benjamin Alire Sáenz's stories reveal how all borders—real, imagined, sexual, human, the line between dark and light, addict and straight—entangle those who live on either side. Take, for instance, the Kentucky Club on Avenida Juárez two blocks south of the Rio Grande. It's a touchstone for each of Sáenz's stories. His characters walk by, they might go in for a drink or to score, or they might just stay there for a while and let their story be told. Sáenz knows that the Kentucky Club, like special watering holes in all cities, is the contrary to borders. It welcomes Spanish and English, Mexicans and gringos, poor and rich, gay and straight, drug addicts and drunks, laughter and sadness, and even despair. It's a place of rich history and good drinks and cold beer and a long polished mahogany bar. Some days it smells like piss. "I'm going home to the other side." That's a strange statement, but you hear it all the time at the Kentucky Club.

Benjamin Alire Sáenz is a highly regarded writer of fiction, poetry, and children's literature. Like these stories, his writing crosses borders and lands in our collective psyche. *Poets & Writers Magazine* named him one of the fifty most inspiring writers in the world. He's been a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and PEN Center's prestigious award for young adult fiction. Sáenz is the chair of the creative writing department of University of Texas at El Paso.

Awards:

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

The publisher describes these seven excellent stories as being about borders. That is certainly true as far as it goes, but it is equally true that these stories have even more to do with boundaries—the boundaries people set to protect themselves from physical or emotional harm, the ones that people cross in order to survive, or the ones they cross to intrude or intervene in someone else's life. Sàenz's tales are about the arbitrary boundaries that society sets and the ones children build against a world they don't understand. In today's political climate, one that is awash in ideology surrounding national borders, Sàenz's all-too-human characters transcend political polarization despite living within it. A versatile writer who has won major fellowships and awards, especially for his young adult and children's titles, Sàenz writes prose that is tender, occasionally fierce, and always engaging. Read every word of his stories lest you miss some clever twist, some subtle irony, some gentle nuance of poetic imagery that he has labored to create. --Donna Chavez

Review

"Sàenz's moving collection of short stories hinges on the intergenerational clientele of the titular borderland watering hole just south of the U.S.-Mexican divide on Avenida Juárez...there's much to enjoy in these gritty, heartfelt stories. — **Publishers Weekly**

"Seven excellent stories ... [by] a versatile writer ... Sàenz writes prose that is tender, occasionally fierce, and always engaging. Read every word of his stories lest you miss some clever twist, some subtle irony, some gentle nuance of poetic imagery that he has labored to create." — **Booklist**

"Seven stunningly evocative short stories ... a haunting tableau of characters wrestling with the boons and burdens of existence ... Saenz, with these masterfully hewn stories, presents this hardscrabble yet tenacious city as beautiful in its contradictions, disquieting in its ambiguities, and heartbreaking in its quotidianness. Filtered through this book are the lives of its singular people: doomed, broken, resourceful, and, above all else, faithful—to the city and to the parts they play in its intricate dimensions." — **Texas Books in Review**

"Though the prolific Benjamin Alire Sáenz has been writing books in every genre for the past two decades, *Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club* is only his second short-story collection. But the wait was definitely worth it ... [The story "He Has Gone to Be with the Women"] is nothing short of a masterpiece ... In one story, a school counselor says the following about his troubled charges: "They came to me with a thirst in their eyes, a thirst, such a thirst and I knew that I could never give them the rain they deserved, the rain they so desperately needed." That might as well be *The Kentucky Club* speaking, since every protagonist in this heartbreaking collection of stories finds his way to a confession stool at the bar. They find no solutions to their ills, just a sensitive ear that has heard it all before but is willing to listen once again." — Rigoberto González, former president of the executive board of directors of the National Book Critics Circle, special to the **El Paso Times**

About the Author

Benjamin Alire Sáenz was born in 1954 in Old Picacho, a small farming village outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico, forty-two miles north of the U.S. / Mexico border. He was the fourth of seven children and was brought up in a traditional Mexican-American Catholic family. He entered the seminary in 1972, a decision

that was as much political as it was religious. After concluding his theological studies at the University of Louvain, he was ordained a Catholic priest. Three and a half years later, he left the priesthood.

At the age of 30, he entered the University of Texas at El Paso. He later received a fellowship at the University of Iowa. In 1988, he received a Wallace E. Stegner Fellowship in poetry from Stanford University. In 1993, he returned to the border to teach in the bilingual MFA program at UTEP.

Sáenz is the author of a previous book of poetry, *Calendar of Dust*, which won an American Book Award. Cinco Puntos published two of his other books of poetry called *Elegies in Blue* and the now out of print, *Dark and Perfect Angels*. His most recent book of poetry, *The Book of What Remains*, was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2010.

He is the author of numerous novels, books for children and young adults as well as a previous collection of short stories. His award winning young adult novels are *Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood*, *He Forgot to Say Goodbye*, and *Last Night I Sang to the Monster*. His adult novels include *Carry Me Like Water*, *The House of Forgetting*, *In Perfect Light*, and *Names on a Map*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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