

# Soto's poetry - academy of american poets

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



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## **The Inspiring Poet**

Gary Soto is quite an inspiring poet and writer. He has lived a life full of influential experiences that have led him to who he is now as a great writer. Soto's writing style and inspiration help to grasp readers attention through his attention to detail and relatable instances. The key to his writing was his experiences growing up in a poor Hispanic culture. Soto was born on April 12, 1952 in Fresno, California. Soto is married and has one child, a daughter. Both his parents worked as laborers and he himself worked as a laborer as soon as he was old enough to help his family. " When Soto was five years old, tragedy struck his family; Manuel Soto died as a result of a factory accident at the age of twenty-seven." After his father's death his family was faced with even more hardships. Soto grew up in a poor Hispanic neighborhood and did not do well in school as a child. In 1970 he went to Fresno City College so that he could avoid the draft. While he was at Fresno City College Soto became interested in poetry after one day while, " At a library, he picked up an anthology, The New American Poetry, edited by Donald Allen. The poems - by Edward Field, Gregory Corso, Kenneth Koch, Allen Ginsberg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti - were lively, irreverent, and

audacious, and Soto was hooked. “ I though, Wow, wow, wow. I wanted to do this thing.” Soto later transferred to and graduated from Cal State University in 1974. Soto went on further with his education and in 1976 he earned his MFA from The University of California. It was only one year after graduating in 1977 that his first book of poems was published.

## **Creative Way to Author**

Soto has written many poems, children’s books, short stories and even a few films. He has received numerous awards for his works. His works are reflections of his childhood and what his personal experience was like growing up as a Hispanic and the hardships he faced. His first book of poems, *The Elements of San Joaquin*, had great reviews. In one journal it is noted “ Critics praised the book-as well as the volumes that followed, *The Tale of Sunlight* and *Where Sparrows Work Hard*-for Soto’s frank, desolate portrait of migrant life, his short, enjambed lines and idiomatic diction, and his ability to shift from naturalism to magic realism, from the apocalyptic to the transcendent”. This sheds light on how he was able to begin his career with such a strong impact. This particular critique definitely displayed the notable ability of Soto to write with great attention to detail. His use of naturalism helps to paint a vivid picture which helps the reader visualize with great detail. Also his uses of personal experience allows for readers to relate. Soto’s first three published works shed light on what it was like growing up in poverty and the affects growing up in poverty had on people. He followed these rather quickly with a fourth publishing and a fifth which put his work in a new genre, autobiographical prose. “ In this memoir and the one that immediately followed it, *Small Faces*, Soto vividly re-creates the racially

mixed, laboring-class neighborhood in which he was raised, the struggles his family endured to provide the children with a safe environment, and the central dilemma of a life continually lived on the margins as a product of two cultures". His passion was clearly evident in his culturally centered works which he had breathed first hand. Soto was able to write from personal experience and allowed people to see things from the inside out based on his experiences. Shortly after beginning to write in a new genre, Soto went on to try his hand in writing children's literature in the 90s. " A first volume of short stories for young readers, *Baseball in April, and Other Stories*, was published in 1990. The eleven tales depict Mexican American boys and girls as they enter adolescence in Hispanic California neighborhoods". Even though he was now writing for a new target age group he was still sticking to displaying his Hispanic heritage in his works. During this time even though he we was writing for adolescents Soto still used real life issues that allowed young readers to relate to the topics in the stories. He received many critiques on these, mostly all good ones, such as this one, " To Michel Cart in *Booklist*, ' his greatest gift to readers may be the attention he focuses on meaningful lives'. This to me simply restates the fact that the real life issues he writes about are easily relatable by the intended audience whether young or old. There were many works written by Soto and he wrote for many different ages. Soto also went as far as publishing children's picture books. Just as in his other work he stuck to the Hispanic culture in these picture books as well. His work was reviewed as, ' Soto's pithy text uses a mix of Spanish and English to great effect,' noted a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*, and a critic in *Kirkus Reviews* deemed the work ' a multicultural lesson with

lots of zip'. His ability to display his own life and culture through his writing has made him very popular.

The way that Soto was able to become so expressive using his heritage is quite inspiring. He wrote to give incite to his own life and express the life of Hispanics in poverty. His writing can be seen not necessarily to educate but mostly to display, recollect and relate to his Hispanic life experiences. " Soto's voice has been heard by readers of all ages; but, as he told me in an interview, he does not write with an audience in mind". This shows how he writes to express not to impress. Another line from this journal " Soto does not simply tell about his experiences or despair about the light of the poor. His power comes from showing, from painting pictures that allow the reader to feel the wonder, promise, and pain of everyday life". This goes to show simply that Soto portrays his stories similar to real life and in some cases actual real life so that makes them more easily to relate to. Soto's passion for writing can easily be felt in any of his works and dedication to detail. Soto's hard work and dedication has gained him many awards and acknowledgments. Just to mention some of his awards let us look at a list:

- Discovery-Nation prize, 1975; United States Award, International Poetry Forum, 1976, for The Elements of San Joaquin; Bess Hokin Prize, Poetry, 1978;
- Guggenheim fellowship, 1979-80; National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, 1981, 1991;
- Levinson Award, Poetry, 1984;

- American Book Award, Before Columbus Foundation, 1985, for Living up the Street;
- California Arts Council fellowship, 1989;
- Beatty Award, California Library Association, 1991, Reading Magic Award, Parenting magazine, and George G. Stone Center Recognition of Merit, Claremont Graduate School, 1993, all for Baseball in April, and Other Stories; Carnegie Medal, 1993, for The Pool Party;
- National Book Award, and Los Angeles Times Book Prize finalist, both 1995, both for New and Selected Poems;
- Literature Award, Hispanic Heritage Foundation, 1999;
- Author-Illustrator Civil Rights Award, National Education Association, 1999;
- PEN American Center West Book Award, 1999, for Petty Crimes;
- Silver Medal, Commonwealth Club of California/Tomas Rivera Prize;
- The Gary Soto Literary Museum was established at Fresno City College, 2010.

This list shows how much he has accomplished since the beginning of his career as a writer and how much he continues to accomplish. Some of his works received multiple awards which show just how great he is at his passion.

## **Conclusion**

Gary Soto has and continues to live an inspiring life while pursuing his passion and voicing his cultures struggles. His works have encouraged many and are well known beyond his Hispanic culture. Soto's Hispanic culture

continues to motivate him and he still has so much more he can offer through his passionate work especially with all the issues going on politically at this particular point in time.