

Remembering Peg Bowden (1942-2020)
By Dana Wildsmith

I have been an English Literacy instructor at Lanier Technical College in north Georgia since 2001. As I have gotten to know my students, many of them have shared with me their migration stories. Around 2012, I began recording the stories of many who had come into the U.S. without documentation. Their stories intrigued me so much that I decided to further my research and write a novel comprising their often-overlapping histories. I had become aware that, just as I had not known why or how so many people chose to chance their journey, so also most Americans are not aware. I wanted to share my new understandings with the reading public.

I contacted a friend who was at that time living in Tucson and asked if I could stay with him while I began to make contacts along the border. This friend introduced me to an artist friend of his, who then put me in touch with Peg. Through Peg, I got to know Shura and others of the Green Valley Samaritans. Over the course of the next two years, I made several trips to Green Valley, volunteering with the Samaritans and building the research for my novel, *Jumping*.

Peg and I fell into a friendship based partly on our common love of writing and music. We began a regular correspondence and I stayed at their ranch and at her place in Tubac several times over the next years. She had planned to make a trip east and stay at my farm in the winter of 2021, but she emailed me at the beginning of December 2020, to let me know of her diagnosis.

The poem Shura read at Peg's memorial is part of a new manuscript of poems which I hope to see in print within the next year.

Courage

-Dana Wildsmith, 2021

“We’ll make it to the tequila store,
but first I want to visit
some migrants waiting at the border
for asylum. They have to sit

by the gate until their number’s called.
If they leave, they lose
their place in line.” The kids all
swarm around Peg. She lets them choose

a coloring book, chats with them
while their mamás keep vigil
with American air less than
two breaths away. “We’ll

be back,” Peg tells them, “but I hope you won’t.”
Pancho hails us, “Hola,
Peg!” Pancho’s one of those
who didn’t know he was

illegal until a traffic ticket

sent him to Mexico.
“We got to move two sisters
to the shelter. You know,

they too young to stay alone.
I need you to come.” We climb aboard.
“Tu eres muy brava,” Peg smiles.
“No.” They claim their words.
“Valiente.” As the miles

pile up on miles, I start to fret.
“If Pancho died on us,”--
he grins and mimes dramatic death--
“could you get us home?”

“Nope,” Peg sounds so blasé,
it settles me.
No soy tan valiente
como ellas. When we

get to the shelter, two brisk damas
herd the girls with care
and fierceness, exactly what
they need. “Now where?”

Peg grins at me, “Tequila, girl!”
After, at the gate,
I claim the bottles “It’s not worth
the hassle,” Peg says. Some hate

me enough to crucify me for legal
tequila.” We make
good time going home.
Peg opens one, “Here you go. Take

a shot of courage.” Our glasses clink.
It burns like rage. *This
comes a little late for me, I think,
and you never needed it.*

*Peg Bowden, Immigration Activist
Pancho Olachea Martin, Humanitarian
Unnumbered migrants, Human*

(See more about Peg under ABOUT US – WHO WE ARE and SPREAD THE
WORD – CREATIVE RESPONSES)