

## A SOFT MEMORY

I don't remember the mountain  
    where I was born  
or the place where I first crawled.

I remember Mami's worried mouth  
a whisper that she, Papi, and I  
    would follow  
a flock of cranes going  
home  
    El Norte, Los Angeles.

There, we could be birds too—brown grullas  
where bad men could not harm us  
like they did my Tío Pedro  
and Abuelita would not worry.

Seven years later  
I think I remember the soft wrinkles  
on Abuelita Lola's face.

## WHAT I KNOW:

I know my school's shiny floors  
a broken water fountain  
and boxed chocolate milk  
I buy for fifty cents.

I know Ms. Martinez  
and her  
happy handshakes  
at her door  
before each fourth-grade morning.

I know how to write  
and draw the picture poems  
Ms. Martinez taught us  
to paint our feelings.

I know to never forget  
to scribble my name and date  
on the bottom.

I know recess on the blacktop  
and the length of my golden  
brown crane wings  
in the desert sun.

I know my BFF, Amparo  
climbs los columpios like wind.

I know aftercare until six p.m.  
when Papi comes to get me  
    between  
        his two jobs  
and carries me home  
    on his  
strong shoulders  
    so high I find  
            flight.

# HOW I LEARNED TO FLY

Blue sky flight  
began  
with a ripple  
of feathers  
tickled by air  
on the surface  
of my dancing arms.

Sprouting wings stumbled  
with the wind  
pushed sideways  
at first

I heard  
Papi's voice,

*Encuentra la dulzura en tu lucha.  
Find the sweetness in your struggle.*

Then, a breath  
a thought  
to spell  
my smiling name  
with my wings  
big circles to form  
*Roberta, Betita*  
my name like Papi's  
*Roberto, Beto.*

Then, a glide  
a laugh so loud

