

# City Terrace Field Manual

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*Sesshu Foster*

## **Prose Poem Fragments**

Sixto Tarango (1957 - 1987) died a few Septembers ago, and his wife took the kids and moved to Bakersfield. But one day I saw Sixto standing there on the sidewalk in front of a house on a residential street. He was looking pretty sad, big and dark and lonely. After his Dad died of a heart attack when Sixto was eight, he had always been prone to moodiness. It looked like another bout of self-doubt and frustration. He always came out of it with a winning smile. Like in the 70s, president of Cal State L.A. Student body and a big Afro, watching the Chicano movement go down in flames. Nowadays if I mention him to someone, they'll say, "Sixto? I thought he was dead." "Yeah, that's what they told me, too." Sixto and I shook hands and he invited me into the house, which turned out to be gloomy and vacant, without electricity or running water, the late afternoon sunlight dappling the windows. Even Sixto reflected the Colorado-colored loneliness of the cottonwoods. He had a lot more on his mind than he could say. I told him what was obvious: "Everybody thinks

you're dead." He gave me a pained look. "I have AIDS. I have no friends any more. I can't find a place to stay, that's why I'm out on the street now, looking for a place to stay. Nobody wants anything to do with me. They know it's gonna be bad. It ain't right, the way people are treating me. You know I always treated people right." "You did," was all I could say, nodding, "You always did." Then he shrugged, as if to shrug everyone off his back, and he looked around at the empty house. "I just need a place to stay." "I'll help you find something," I promised. We talked as twilight fell like a shadow on the room. And it was years later as I woke in the early morning sunshine coming through the cottonwood leaves into the second story window in Durango, Colorado.

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Arturo ran that way and disappeared into the afternoon. But at 4 AM the signal on the corner of City Terrace and Eastern blinks red, silent off and on. The intersection is black and empty, but shining under a galaxy of streetlamps as if all the unending light, gases, energies, and the vast emptiness of the universe stops there at the intersection of City Terrace and Eastern, comes to this edge at a red light blinking off and on, and crystalizes into the shapes of night, these parked cars and an asphalt island with a broken concrete bus stop bench kids knocked down, treetops, the dark rooftops of apartments and houses. As if the shining black asphalt and gleaming steel and the glass of windows without people looking out of them absorbed and were constituted of the emptiness of space and the spiral lights of dead galaxies and the dark forces of unseen stars. Forever. But that's just appearances: time moves,

the universes spin off in different directions. A car makes a rolling stop at the light and left turn, heads toward the freeway. A drunken guy, only a kid as it turned out, comes down the long hill of Eastern Avenue north just past the former fire station inhabited by a Vietnamese family. He's roaring down the hill in an old black Camaro. He must have been having a hell of a night, or a hell of a week. Maybe he sees the red light too late, and his brakes fail. He veers to the right. Or maybe he never saw it. Maybe he was asleep, and thought he was dreaming about it. He slammed into the back of those parked cars at more than 70 miles an hour. They said death must have been instantaneous. We all heard the explosion. It happened right in front of Eddie's House, and he said they all knew what it was. It was the second time in 2 years. Everybody ran out to see whose cars got hit. The Camaro was spun out in the street, only half a car lying on its side with the kid's body still mostly in it. And the cars along the curb had accordianed into a big mess all jammed together, sprinkled with sharp beads of glass. From our house on the hill, I heard the sirens and watched the cop cars and the fire engines arrive, and even the towtrucks had their lightbars on, all the vehicles working for hours to clear the intersection with red and white lights flashing in every direction. Eddie said how everybody was talking about where they could park their cars and how it was the second time in 2 years. I told Eddie I think space only feels empty and the night only looks quiet. Sure, Eddie said. Somebody's going to sleep through it all, I guess, I said.