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New on the Border Bookshelf

'**Laura's Children: The Hidden Story of a Chinese Orphanage**' by Becky Cerling Powers (Canaan Home Communications, 379 pages, \$24) — Fascinated with the mysterious story of a relative who had spent 22 years caring for orphans in China, Becky Powers in 1983 began researching the life of Laura Richards.

Richards was an Ohio nurse who came to China in 1921 to work at a missionary hospital, then after a 2-year furlough returned in 1928 and shortly afterward began taking in castaway babies. She was forced to leave China in 1951, having cared for nearly 200 children, and remained in the United States until her death 30 years later at age 88.

Richards survived illness, poverty and persecution while remaining faithful to what she embraced as God's calling to care for these children, many of whom would remember her simply as Mother. She managed to escape internment during the Japanese occupation, but when the new Communist regime insisted that she renounce her Christian faith and her native country, she could no longer stay.

Richards declined to tell details of her story during her lifetime for fear that the orphans she

left behind would suffer persecution. After her death, Powers, an El Paso writer and Laura's second cousin, collected old letters, photographs and other historical material about Richards and Canaan home, eventually going to China twice and interviewing some of the surviving orphans or their children.

The result is a reconstructed biography that uses a novelized style to weave the story of this faithful woman who gave the comforts of American life to serve as God's caregiver for a generation of children half a world away.

Interspersed throughout the book are excerpts of letters and interviews, along with old photographs, which confirm that the author has not taken liberties with the actual story she took so many years to unearth.

"Laura's Children" is a story of a 20th century saint who otherwise might have been forgotten except for the fleeting recollections passed on among family members. It also is a story of the tremendous sacrifices required in trying to do good and remain faithful when surrounded by opposing forces of poverty, anarchy, war and ideological oppression.

To learn more about the book, or to order a copy, go to chcpub.com.

— Randy Limbird

More than 30 years ago, Hector Serrano, wanting to give his actors in "Viva! El Paso" a chance to show off their skills, created a show after "Viva" closed to spotlight their various talents. Two of his actors, Loretta Buchanan and Felipe Macias, did the famous "spanking" scene from Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew." "That sparked an idea to do Shakespeare here in the canyon," Serrano remembered. "I thought what a wonderful setting it would be for Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare on the Rocks" was born 30 years ago when Serrano's "Viva" crew did "A Midsummer Night's Dream" after the regular season was over. The next year, Serrano added "Romeo and Juliet" to the repertoire.

"It became a venue for the actors to show off their ability," Serrano said. It developed into an end-of-summer season of shows done in repertory.

In the 30 years, "Shakespeare on the Rocks" has gone through several resurrections, the last in 2004. This year, "Shakespeare" not only performs at Ysleta Independent School District's outdoor stage as part of the Renaissance Fair, but also will stage the shows in late August at Chamizal National Memorial.

By tradition, each show is done for four years before it is retired. This year, two shows had to be retired, "Julius Caesar" and "The Tempest."

"That really was a blessing in disguise," Serrano said. "Because of the shows at Chamizal, we were left with only three weeks to rehearse."

So instead of adding two new shows this year, the Shakespeare company only added one, "Othello," to "Midsummer" and "Romeo and Juliet."

Serrano directs "Romeo and Juliet," which will feature last year's director of the show, Cornelia Patterson, as the nurse. Jesse Snyder, who teaches language at Alicia Chacon School, will direct "Midsummer" and appear as Lord Montague in "Romeo and Juliet," and EPCC English professor Charlie Miller will direct "Othello."



by Carol Viescas

Most of the actors are either community actors or former El Paso Community College theater students, Serrano said. Because shows are done in repertory, most of the company of actors appear in more than one show, or if not, work in technical areas. Some familiar names to theatergoers include former Kids-N-Co. student Matthew Rutkowski as Romeo, Gina Green as Juliet, Brian Giza as the apothecary, Carlos de la Garza Garcia as Friar Lawrence in "Romeo and Juliet," and Brian Gameros as the title character in "Othello."

The biggest challenge for this year's directors, cast and crew, Serrano said, was to create shows that could be presented in both very different venues.

"August always is a killer month, because we practice every day except Sunday," Serrano said.

But that is doubly so this year because of the Aug. 20 opening date at the Chamizal. Then the pressure will be on again when the shows move to Ysleta's Fine Arts Amphitheater.

"We only get one day to rehearse there before we open," Serrano said.

Still, he said, the challenge is worth it. "I love Shakespeare," Serrano said. "His language is the best use of English anywhere. Actors really are challenged to discover the meaning of lines — alliterative and figurative. Different actors and directors create wonderfully different shows."

Carol Viescas is a veteran of community theater and teaches journalism at Bel Air High School.