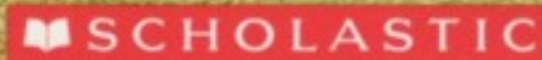


FROM THE AUTHOR OF *ESPERANZA RISING*

PAM MUÑOZ RYAN

Becoming Naomi León

Includes AFTER WORDS™ bonus features

The Scholastic logo, featuring a red square with a white book icon and the word "SCHOLASTIC" in white capital letters on a red background.

SCHOLASTIC

1 a paddling of ducks

There we were, minding our lives with the same obedience as a clock ticking. A few weeks earlier the sun had switched to its winter bedtime, so even though it was early evening, the sky was dark as pine pitch. That meant that Gram, Owen, and I couldn't sit outside on the white rock patio. Instead we had to crowd around the drop-down table in the living room/kitchen of Baby Beluga. That was what Gram called our Airstream trailer. She was the absolute expert at calling things what they resembled and thought it looked like a miniature whale next to all the double-wides at Avocado Acres Trailer Rancho.

The trailer park was called this because it was surrounded on three sides by the largest avocado ranch in Lemon Tree, California. The name Lemon Tree did not appeal to Gram's sense of description because, as she pointed out, there wasn't a stick of citrus in sight. A giant plastic lemon did sit on a pedestal at the Spray 'n Play, a combination car wash-deli-playground and one of our

favorite places. That lemon was a tribute to the fact that there used to be fruit orchards in San Diego County, before the builders came and put a house on every scratch of spare dirt. Except for the avocado grove, which was smack in the middle of town and the last countrified land in Lemon Tree.

We had already put away the dinner dishes from Wednesday chicken bake and Owen started racing through his second-grade homework like a horse on a tear. People were usually fooled by his looks and thought he was low in school due to being born with his head tilted to one side and scrunched down next to his shoulder. It had straightened a little after three surgeries at Children's Hospital, but he still talked with a permanent frog voice because of something inside being pinched. One of his legs was shorter than the other so he walked like a rocking horse, but other than that, he was just fine. Contrary to people's first opinions, he got the best grades in his class.

Gram, in her usual polyester pantsuit and running shoes, was doing her weekly hair set, rolling what little blue hair

she had on those new bristle curlers that require no hairpins. (I was not being mean about her hair. It really looked blue in the sunlight.) And I mulled over my sorry situation at school, which was three boys in my fifth-grade class who had decided that Outlaw was the funniest last name in the universe. They did not give me an ounce of peace.

“Have you robbed any banks lately?” was one of their favorite sayings, along with jumping out at me, throwing their arms in the air, and yelling, “Is this a stickup?”

My teacher, Ms. Morimoto, said to ignore them, but I had tried and it did no good. I was fed up, so I was making a list of what I could say back to them that might be embarrassing. I wrote across the top of my notebook page, “How to Get Boys to Stop Making Fun of My Name.”

I scooted my book in front of Gram to see if she had any ideas.

“Naomi, I have lived with that name since I married your great-grandpa, rest his soul, almost fifty years ago, and I am due proud. Besides, there are worse things in life.”

“Things I Am Good At”

1) Soap carving 2) Worrying 3) Making lists

Naomi Soledad León Outlaw has a lot to deal with—like having the “funniest last name in the universe,” for one. Then there are her clothes (sewn in polyester by Gram), her difficulty speaking up, and her status at school as “nobody special.”

But according to Gram, most problems can be overcome with positive thinking. Luckily, with Gram and her little brother, Owen, life at Avocado Acres Trailer Rancho is happy and peaceful. That is, until Naomi and Owen’s mother reappears after seven years, stirring up all sorts of questions—and a whole lot of trouble. Soon Naomi finds herself on a whirlwind journey in a last-ditch effort to keep her family together. But will positive thinking be enough to save them?

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Cover art © 2007 by Raúl Colón
Cover design by Marijka Kostiw

\$5.99 US / \$7.99 CAN

ISBN-13: 978-0-439-26997-1
ISBN-10: 0-439-26997-0

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