

A simple life fueled a colorful writer

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By TONY BECKWITH / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Macondo is surely one of the best-known place names in contemporary literature. In his latest book, Gabriel García Márquez explains that he saw it on a sign from the window of a train in his early travels with his grandfather, but didn't realize until much later how much he liked its poetic sound.

Vivir para contarla is the first volume in the trilogy of his memoirs.

The original Spanish edition has been released in the United States in advance of the translation, an interesting switch on the recent trend of publishing both versions simultaneously. Booksellers claim to be having trouble keeping up with demand posed by the increasing buying power of the Latino population. An English translation by Edith Grossman will be published later this year, under the title *Living to Tell the Tale*.

Mr. Márquez was born in Colombia in 1927, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982, and is widely known for such books as *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) – the book that made both he and Macondo famous – and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975).

Like most of his other books, Mr. Márquez's memoir appears deceptively simple. He writes of his childhood, his family, his education and his formative years as a journalist in Colombia, all the way up to the publication of his first novel, *Leaf Storm*, in 1955. For those familiar with his work, there are fascinating insights into the events and influences that shaped him as a writer. It was that same grandfather, for example, who introduced him to ice, and took him along to the home of friend who had taken his life with cyanide, burning the bitter scent of almonds into the young writer's memory and giving him the opening scene for *Love in the Time of Cholera* many years later.

As he does in his novels, Mr. Márquez brings his characters vividly to life, and we meet some colorful (of course) members of his family and friends. His mother and maternal grandfather loom large in his memory, as does the group of journalists and assorted intellectuals he ran with during his youth. Those were the formative years of his career, when he endured his father's pressure to finish school so that he'd "have something to fall back on." Mr. Márquez is proud to say that from then on he never earned a cent that didn't come from his writing. And, just for the record, he clarifies that his royalties didn't start paying his bills until he was in his 40s.

Mr. Márquez is a joy to read. He writes in a clear, relaxed Spanish with a graceful rhythm and fluency that blend a marvelously correct command of the language with an

unpretentious touch. A gentle, often self-deprecating humor is never far from the surface (he mentions his poor spelling skills), reminding us that the author is thoroughly enjoying himself as he picks through these pieces of his life's journey.

Writer and translator Tony Beckwith lives in Austin.

Vivir para contarla

Gabriel García Márquez

(Alfred A. Knopf, \$25)