

# El Olvido

**By Judith Ortiz Cofer**

It is a dangerous thing  
to forget the climate of your birthplace,  
to choke out the voices of dead relatives  
when in dreams they call you  
by your secret name.  
It is dangerous  
to spurn the clothes you were born to wear  
for the sake of fashion; dangerous  
to use weapons and sharp instruments  
you are not familiar with; dangerous  
to disdain the plaster saints  
before which your mother kneels  
praying with embarrassing fervor  
that you survive in the place you have chosen to live:  
a bare, cold room with no pictures on the walls,  
a forgetting place where she fears you will die  
of loneliness and exposure.  
*Jesús, María, y José, she says,  
el olvido is a dangerous thing.*

Judith Ortiz Cofer, "El Olvido" from *Terms of Survival*. Copyright © 1987 by Judith Ortiz Cofer.  
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Judith Ortiz Cofer was born in Hormigueros, a small town in Puerto Rico. When she was a young child her father's military career took the family to Paterson, New Jersey, but she often spent her childhood traveling back and forth between Puerto Rico and the U.S. At 15, her family moved again, this time to Augusta, Georgia, where she eventually earned a BA in English from Augusta College. She later earned an MA in English from Florida Atlantic University and did graduate work at Oxford University. In 2010, Ortiz Cofer was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame. Her work explores the rifts and gaps that arise between her split cultural heritages.

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