

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Web Posted: 09/07/2008 12:00 CDT

Review: 'The Smell of Old Lady Perfume'

By Wallis J. Monday - Special to the Express-News **The Smell of Old Lady Perfume**

By Claudia Guadalupe Martinez

Cinco Puntos Press, \$15.95

"Dying flowers and alcohol" is how Chela Gonzalez describes the smell of her grandmother's perfume. It is a smell that permeates the household when Chela's father has a stroke, and her grandmother comes to look after Chela and her siblings.

Their father had the stroke on the morning of the first day of school, which Chela is excited about. She is finally a sixth-grader and they get "the best of everything."

But her mother says that the children won't start school until their father is home from the hospital, and the kids stay at home wishing time would speed up.

After about a week and one sad, slow Sunday, their father comes home, and the kids try to go back to their normal lifestyle.

When she finally gets to school, Chela finds that she has lost all her friends, and so she loses herself in her studies. Sometime through the school year, the popular girls start to like her, but just as she finds friendship, her father has another stroke, and Chela starts to think about relationships differently.

Debut novelist Claudia Guadalupe Martinez wrote this autobiographical story because she wanted to pay tribute to her father. She grew up in El Paso, where the book is set, and wanted to be a writer from an early age.

The book reads like it was actually written by a sixth-grader, but a very articulate one. I liked that it was uncluttered, with straightforward sentences. The book flows easily; this is a story that seems to be told by a person still experiencing these things.

I wasn't sure that I would enjoy this book as much as I did. I discovered I could relate to Chela's isolation at school, as well as her worries about her family.

She has a difficult time growing up, with nobody to confide in, but she does learn and mature — she understands what is going on around her.

The thing that surprised me was the grandmother, who did not appear in the book as much as I assumed she would, and was not particularly liked by the children. However, when the grandmother did show up, she symbolized the sad, stuffy air of a household without its beloved father, a smell that was "sad like Sundays."

"The Smell of Old Lady Perfume" is a story about growing up, about seeing things in a different light.

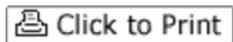
But there is hope. By the end of the school year, Chela is looking to the future, disregarding whatever happened

in sixth grade because, as she comes to realize, "The world was bigger."

Wallis J. Monday is a 14-year-old freshman at Keystone School.

Find this article at:

http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/Review_The_Smell_of_Old_Lady_Perfume.html



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

- Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.