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Daniel A. Olivas stories provide no easy answers

By Sergio Troncoso / Special to the Times
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Daniel Olivas' "Anywhere But L.A." (Bilingual Press, \$16 paperback) is an unusual, highly readable collection of short stories that often prompts the reader to ponder, "What just happened? Why?"

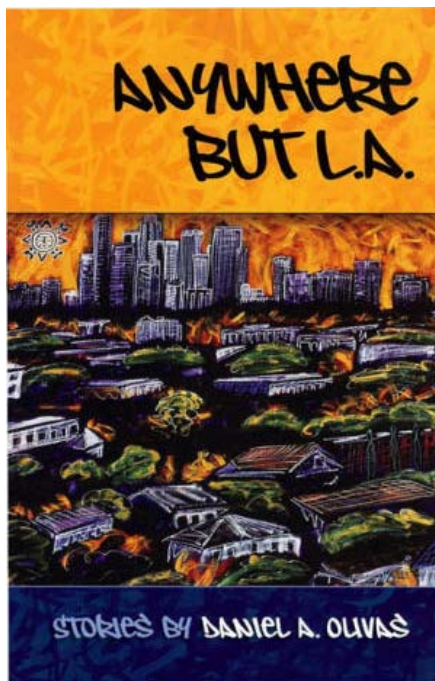
It is the mark of a good storyteller who encourages readers to buy into his characters' lives, without offering obvious answers or neat resolutions. Olivas (who also regularly reviews books for the El Paso Times) achieves that in "Anywhere But L.A." The prose is simple and straightforward, and the characters and their situations jump off the page in the strongest stories.

In "The Fabricator," Rigoberto recreates dead people as "memorial fabrications," presumably for families who want their loved ones around a bit longer. The mood is alternately creepy, nonchalant and even mystical.

In "Cheyne Walk Wine Bar: April 2, 1980," Olivas captures the moment in a British bar when Claudio and Miriam, on a semester abroad from the States, could make something more of their friendship. Whether the duo take the leap -- or not -- is left for the reader to ponder, but such ephemeral moments resonate with us long after they become our micro-history.

Two stories focus on priests having sex with girls ("El Padre" and "La Queenie"), while in another, "Blue," a young teenager gives away her baby for adoption, only to hear the news that the child has drowned in the swimming pool of a well-to-do family.

Olivas is not moralistic in these stories but stays true to the characters' feelings, including their self-deceptions. The young teenager believes she did the right thing; it is up to the reader to decide whether or not she did.



"Anywhere But L.A." by Daniel Olivas (Bilingual Press, \$16 paperback).

In "La Queenie," three characters, Bobby, Gramps and Reyna interact perfectly in a story about heritage and wisdom, myopia and love, that ends with a twist that will give the reader much to consider about what could have been, what never was, and who helped us find our way.

"Anywhere but L.A." is a good collection of stories that deserves to be read. Olivas is a writer who will take risks and surprise you. His stories delve into the topical themes of Latino and Chicano literature and beyond.

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UTEP Miners slog past SMU for victory in C-USA opener



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