

# From Dutch Costumes to Cacti: Award-Winning Picture Book Explores Mexican-American Roots in 'Where Nopalitos Grow'

*Inspired by a childhood in Holland, MI and rooted in Mexico, this bilingual picture book celebrates family, imagination, and cultural pride.*

CAMARILLO, CA, UNITED STATES, May 20, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a town known for tulips and Dutch costumes, Irma Hersel's childhood home in Holland, Michigan stood out — thanks to a front yard filled with nopales.

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This book is educational and heartwarming—a beautiful blend of culture, memories, and language. I even shared it with my mom, a former bilingual teacher.”

*David Q., Reader from Southern California*

"We were Mexican-American kids, among others, dressed in full Dutch festival outfits, standing next to prickly pear cactus," Hersel laughs. "It was unexpected — but it was our story."

She adds, "It was me and my sister, Maria — we made so many fun memories in that yard. We played, we laughed,

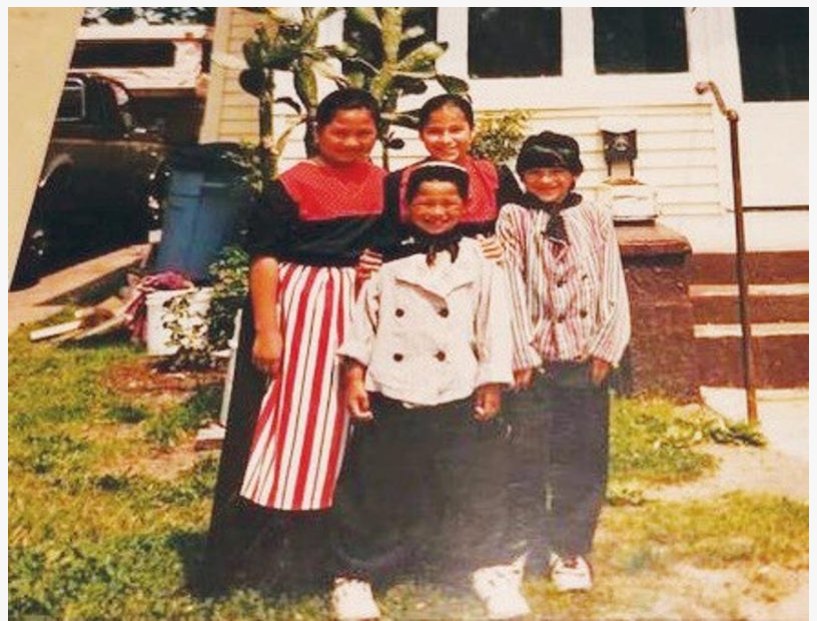
and we were taught how to care for the prickly pear cactus, even learning to make salads with them. Our maternal grandparents lived nearby in Holland, so we were very close to them and spent lots of time together. They often traveled with us too, which made every trip feel extra special. And during the summers, it was always a treat to visit our paternal grandmother — those layered family experiences really shaped how I see culture, connection, and belonging. That vivid memory became the seed for Hersel's debut bilingual picture book, *Where Nopalitos Grow*.

The story follows young Roberto — named in memory of Hersel's late cousin — a dreamy child who visits his abuelita's home in Mexico, a vibrant world full of food, family, pyramids, music, and the nopalitos that connect him to generations before him. Through lyrical bilingual text and soft, whimsical illustrations, the book invites children to explore imagination, cultural identity, and the power of intergenerational love.

*Where Nopalitos Grow* was named a Finalist in the 2024 Best Book Awards by American Book

Fest and was recently added to the Chicago Public Library system. The book continues to gain traction among teachers, librarians, and families looking for stories that reflect bilingual and bicultural experiences.

Written for readers ages 4–9, the book includes sprinkled-in Spanish vocabulary, a "hidden heart" visual challenge featuring a heart-shaped cactus fruit (tuna), and a place for young readers to jot down dreams and goals inspired by the story. Hersel also includes two bonus coloring pages and encourages families to share their children's artwork using #wherenopalitosgrow.



Author Irma Hersel (center, back) poses with neighborhood friends in traditional Dutch costumes beside her family's prickly pear cactus — a memory that helped inspire *Where Nopalitos Grow*.

In addition to the book, Hersel has created a suite of interactive educational resources designed to engage both children and educators. These include a downloadable activity pack featuring themed coloring pages, word games, a cactus salad recipe, and printable bookmarks, which brings the story's imagery to life through play. All resources are available free on her website.

"We didn't see stories like ours growing up," says Hersel. "So I wrote one — rooted in tradition, love, and the idea that nopales can grow anywhere, even where no one expects them." The project was originally born as a mixed media assignment while Hersel was studying at Kendall College of Art and Design, where she first combined her passion for storytelling, culture, and visual art., where she first combined her passion for storytelling, culture, and visual art.

Hersel is also exploring hands-on collaborations with organizations that promote cultural learning through food, gardening, and storytelling — expanding the story's reach beyond the page and into classrooms, kitchens, and family gardens.

Irma Linda Hersel is a first-generation Mexican American from Holland, Michigan, now based in Camarillo, California. She holds a BFA from Kendall College of Art & Design and an MBA from California Lutheran University. Through *Where Nopalitos Grow* (Where Cactus Grow) she brings her artistic roots and cultural pride to young readers in a uniquely personal way.

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#### WHERE TO BUY:

□ [Amazon](#)

□ Bookstores & Schools: Available via IngramSpark

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