

## The Street Belongs to Us

**Karleen Pendleton Jiménez**

**Gabriella Godoy, Illustrator**

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Karleen Pendleton Jiménez vivifies a 1984 Los Angeles summer in *The Street Belongs to Us*, a nostalgic novel about friendship and family.

Best friends Alex and Wolf thrive on Muscatel Avenue. When a construction project to add sidewalks to their Mexican American neighborhood stalls, it leaves open trenches behind, one of which the duo claims as their headquarters. With few cars to bother them, and the adults away at work, they embark on a friendly battle with other kids.

Tomboy Alex goes along with being Wolf's comrade-in-arms, though she's also discomforted by her changing body—a reality that plays against light background themes surrounding gender questioning and gender identity. She misses her father, too, who left. Wolf still grieves his mother's death, and retreats by playing at being a soldier.

At once tender about how its characters accept each other's concerns without question, and humorous about their everyday adventures, this sweet portrait of an impromptu summer deepens through the children's awareness that their families don't always resemble what they'd hoped for, but that love and safety still surround them.

Alex's Nana, who lived through the Mexican Revolution, is a standout character. She encourages Alex and Wolf, mixing her childhood stories with background information about the Chicano movement, all of which fuels Alex's imagination. Nana's optimistic, magical perspective of the earth, and pride in her heritage, are reassuring notes amid Alex's worries.

Gabriella Godoy's cheerful illustrations depict Alex and Wolf with gentle humor, alongside their trench and a wash that's a setting for their journeys. Because of its wise interplay between the duo's spontaneous last hurrah before adolescence, and the ways in which their families anchor each other, *The Street Belongs to Us* is endearing middle grade novel.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2021)

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