New realities shook him. The discovery of books catapulted him into dawning understanding of human landscapes and feelings, strivings and failures. A conflicted teenage functional illiterate he started down an endless road to finding himself. In writing.

He drove himself for decades ten hours a day, six days a week untiring, re-ordering and retying strings of words. Eventually, some books reached print and modest success. Then, in 1981, he wrote the made-for-TV motion picture THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ.

Well-wishers came to the large, old Spanish colonial house on a bluff in Oceanside, California. He paid an emotional tribute to his parents, Salvador and Lupe. He promised he would write their lives. All celebrated the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) telecast. The picture was released to movie houses the next year.

In 1991, ten years later, a more-than-500 page work—parts of it laboriously rewritten more than 40 times—became a milestone in Latino literature. RAIN OF GOLD sold more than 200,000 copies in hardcover. Any given copy may have been read by six-to-ten people.

It recounts the Mexican youth of Lupe and Sal: surviving the Revolution, their separate journeys across the Border, how they met on this side. It ends with their marriage in Santa Ana, but not before sketching the personalities of their mothers, Victor’s grandmothers.个性化了的 the faithful at her church in Corona. Her lively conversations—even arguments—with God and Mary did not go unnoticed.

Now, more than another decade has passed. Victor has gone through multiple rewritings of his latest book. It is about Sal, Lupe and their lives in 1929, 1930 and 1931. It is published by HarperBooks.

Salvador has been dead for years. Lupe passed away in 2000. Both are very alive in pages Victor has filled. So is the cosmically talkative grandmother who, together with Sal, finally makes clear to the author what lies behind all he has been writing.

There have been tumultuous first years of marriage not made any smoother by Sal’s profession. He is a hooklegger.

Victor remembers what his father often told him: Casi todos nacen y mueren y nunca abren los ojos. Poca gente abre los ojos porque no usa todo su sentido. (‘Almost everyone is born and dies without opening their eyes. Few people open their eyes because they don’t try fully to perceive things.’)

What that really might mean became clear in a startling brush with the law. Salvador is driving a truck heavily laden with barrelful of whiskey in Corona. His well-connected mother is with him. A cop pulls them over.

She begins telling God the officer will not see the barrels and that she needs help for her son and that God owes her one and that she wants a pass. The cop looks in the back of the truck and says, “Nothing here, but you better get some air at a gas station because your tires are almost flat.”

Crisis over, Sal asks, “How did you do that?” …”I shut my eyes, and explained.

“When people finish this book,” Victor claims. “They are going to think magic is possible.” The title: THIRTEEN SENSES.