

Their spirit was still here.

I grew up in the wilds of the Southwest. My family heritage has deep roots here, going back hundreds of years. We are descendants of Pueblo, Pilipino, Irish, Jewish, and Spanish lineages. I am a manita; I grew up with the “old” ones. From them I learned our foods, our stories, and our traditions. I learned of the great weaving of life and the importance of place.

I have always loved the strong beautiful women who, along with my father, taught me about hunting, fishing, cooking, planting, gathering, and storytelling, set amidst the panoramic views of the Sangre de Cristos of Southern Colorado. This book is in honor of my ancestors.

In 2007 my husband Glen Anstine brought home the book *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* by Ramon A. Gutierrez. Inspired by the book, I asked myself if the Corn Mothers had ever gone away. I had a deeply held conviction that the women I grew up with were in fact Corn Mothers.

Shortly afterwards my brother Todd Pierson and I trekked to Arizona to visit our dear friend and teacher Immanuel Trujillo at the Peyote Way Church. He talked admiringly about the women who had been influential in preserving the legacy of the desert. Something resonated as we sat among the saguaros and mesquites. The Corn Mothers had returned over the centuries. Their spirit was still here. After all, it was they who sang in the essence of all creation, including the sacred Kachinas. And so the journey to document the Corn Mothers began. We gathered a team of dedicated women and men and a great editor, Ed Winograd. The first step was believing we could do it.

This collection of portraits and stories is about today's Corn Mothers. They are women who live, study, and work in the Southwest. They are women who give back to their communities. They are humble women deeply committed to making the world a better place. Some of the women were born and raised in the Southwest and some are indigenous to this region, with family ties that go back hundreds of years. Others have journeyed here, as thousands have done for centuries, from other places. They all share an ability to pull from the past all that is sacred and holy, and to create a future that is filled with promise. This is a multi-generational and multi-cultural endeavor, which represents the continuation of a story that is always evolving.

In honor of my mamá, my abuela Esther, and my tía, Auntie Lucy, blessings to all. In honor of mi esposo, mis niños, mis nietos, y mis comadres y compadres, and in honor of you and yours, may we never forget the Corn Mothers who have breathed life into souls. In honor of all those who come after, may you too pass on the stories of the women.

Blessings
Renee Fajardo

Return of the Corn Mothers was named a finalist in the Anthology category in the 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, the largest international book awards for Indie authors and publishers.

ISBN#: 978-0-9724472-9-4 Return of the Corn Mothers - Anthology Copyright © 2022 Renee Fajardo. All stories, philosophies, and original Life Quotes are Copyright © 2022 by their authors. Portrait Photography Copyright © 2022 Todd Pierson.

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Return of the Corn Mothers: Inspiring Women of the Southwest - 22 Women in 2022



What is a Corn Mother?

From Taos, New Mexico to the Hopi mesas of Arizona, the oral traditions of story continue to shape the living culture of the Pueblo peoples. Historically, one central figure in these traditions has been the Corn Mother, the giver of life. This legendary entity is important to the Pueblo cultures, as she is synonymous with Mother Earth and represents growth, life, creativity, and the feminine aspects of the world. Despite the coming of the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity, Pueblo communities continued to preserve their knowledge of the Corn Mother. Some legends say that she will return one day to bring harmony and enlightenment.

This collection of portraits and stories is about today's Corn Mothers. They are women who live, study, and work in the Southwest: Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, and northern Texas. Some of the women were born and raised in the Southwest, some are indigenous to this region, with family ties that go back hundreds of years. Others have journeyed here, as thousands have done for centuries, from other places. They all share an ability to pull from the past all that is sacred and holy, and to create a future that is filled with promise.

This is a multi-generational and multi-cultural exhibit, which represents the continuation of a story that is always evolving.

Corn Mother Carving by Rob Yancey



INTRODUCTION

For my own Corn Mothers: great-grandmothers Leva, Luisa, Eusabia, and Maria; grandmothers Josefina and Natalia; “step” mother Elyse; mother Marta; daughter Sofia, and my great aunt Eva, who was Coyolxauhquied at 19 years of age.

The Aztec Earth goddess Coatlicue was described by Gloria Anzaldúa as one of the earliest aspects of Mesoamerican fertility: “Coatlicue, or ‘Serpent skirt’...had a human skull or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet. As creator goddess, she was mother of the celestial deities, and of Huitzilopochtli and his sister, Coyolxauhqui, She With Golden Bells, Goddess of the Moon, who was decapitated by her brother [the God of the Sun].” The cosmic battle between brother and sister, day and night, balance and patriarchy, ended with the dismemberment and defeat of the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui when her brother Huitzilopochtli threw her to the bottom of the Templo Mayor pyramid in Tenochtitlán, creating an imbalance signified by violence, patriarchy and war.

It has been said that when Jesus came with the arrival of the Spaniards, the Corn Mothers, who insured a good corn harvest, went away. And Alicia Cardenas, one of this year’s Corn Mothers, was gunned down by a man while she was at work.

These events, like the militaristic, patriarchal power play that dismembered Coyolxauhqui, represented attempts to defeat balance and to defeat duality, and an attempted murder of the sacred feminine.

This year’s Return of the Corn Mothers project (now in its 15th year), honors 22 inspiring women of the U.S. Southwest (or the North, depending on your perspective). Twenty-two mujeres are featured in the 2022 book. They, and the 48 previous corn

mothers, are represented in an exhibition on display at History Colorado from Sept. 2022 to Sept. 2023. They were all nominated by members of their communities, and their lives and impact on their communities exemplify the wisdom, generosity, and resilience of Coyolxauhqui.

In honoring these Corn Mothers, we are also “re-membering” Coyolxauhqui, recalling her and putting her back together, and soaking in her moonlight. As you meet the mujeres in this book and exhibition and read their stories and the stories they wrote about their own inspiring Corn Mothers, I encourage you to reflect on the Corn Mothers in your experience.

Alicia Cardenas was writing her story for this book and exhibition when she was murdered on December 28, 2021. Her recognition as a Corn Mother points to the inspiration she gave to her community. This year, we especially honor her. Alicia’s life was violently and tragically ripped away by a man with a gun full of bullets and a heart filled with hatred, fear, and misogyny. Across all ethnicities, nationalities, and social strata in our country, one in three women will experience violence at the hands of men, many of whom are intimately known to them. But she remains in our memory. The inspiration she gave to her community did not pass away with her.

Huitzilopochtli became the sun god. When he is winning the battle at the top of the pyramid, the sun is shining, and it’s daytime. Coyolxauhqui became the moon goddess. When she is winning, the sun sets and the moon comes out.

A myth is simply a story that a community creates to explain the things they see, hear, feel, taste, touch. To understand this story, we may ask, is

Huitzilopochtli really the winner? After all, every day after the sun (Huitzilopochtli) sets, the moon (Coyolxauhqui) rises. Despite the violence of her defeat and being thrown down the pyramid steps, Coyolxauhqui never went away.

This also applies to the Corn Mothers. Their “return” does not mark a coming back from being completely gone. They were always here, and they still are. The moon is not gone when we can’t see it; it’s still there, attached to the earth. It just may not be visible to us from where we are at that time.

Alicia Cardenas was thrown down the pyramid steps when she was murdered. She was “Coyolxauhquied” (as Alma López said in *Our Lady of Controversy*). But just as we may not see the light of the moon every day of the month, she reappears to us, re-membered.

As you will see when you read the life stories of the 2022 Corn Mothers (some of whom have survived domestic or other violence), each one has worked to restore balance by doing things such as fighting

violence, demanding justice, opposing discrimination, celebrating their culture, bringing education to their community, working for charities, comforting the bereaved, and advocating for peace. Their stories represent the weaving of the many ethnicities found in the Southwest, from backgrounds such as Hispanic/Chicanx, Black, White, Japanese-American, and Mongolian, or from a woven tapestry of several cultures. They are all Corn Mothers, and their light, like the light of their ancestors, continues to shine.

MSU Denver has proudly supported this project since 2009, when it received a grant from Colorado Humanities to support a campus-wide symposium dedicated to the first group of Corn Mothers, called “Wise Women of the Southwest.” Today the project has expanded from the original 17 Corn Mothers to 70, including the 2022 inductees. May their stories and lives inspire us all.

Mothers, and their light, though not always visible, continue to shine.

Dr. Adriana Nieto
Chair, Chicano/a Studies (CHS) Department
Metropolitan State University of Denver

ARTISTIC TALENT

Renee Fajardo, curator and artistic creator of the project, wrote the seed grant to Colorado Humanities to fund the initial Corn Mother project. An avid arts educator and community activist, she has had the honor of working with numerous partners over the past decade on the Corn Mother project.

Todd Pierson is an internationally published, award-winning photographer whose career has spanned over two decades. Awarded many times over for his photojournalism, he traveled from desert to canyon to mountaintop to capture these women in their home environment.

His clients include local and national publications, municipalities, universities, and the international news agency, EFE, the world's largest bilingual news agency, based in Madrid, Spain.

Ed Winograd, experienced editor, proofreader, tech writer, story writer, university writing teacher, and Spanish to English translator, has edited all printed materials for the Return of the Corn Mothers project since its inception in 2008.

Toinette I. Brown, graphic designer of this book, generous of mind and spirit and creativity, a great resource for anything creative. She is a Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design graduate, currently calling South Dakota home. She is an award-winning graphic designer and art director.

Rob Yancey is a sculptor who hand carves in wood, creating Spanish Colonial art in the form of bultos and retablos, His art has a northern New Mexico influence and vibe to it. He also paints and makes Día de los Muertos style clay masks. Rob has won numerous awards for his art and is known to teach art classes. He formerly owned Arte de Taos from 2010 – 2012 in Taos, NM, and routinely does art demonstrations and donates his artwork to worthy causes and fundraisers. He carved the Corn Mother.

Emmanuel Martinez is an internationally acclaimed artist, painter and sculptor, in Colorado. Martinez attended Metropolitan State College and Juarez-Lincoln University in Denver. Martinez has received countless awards for his design capabilities and high standards. His work has been featured at numerous key galleries including the Smithsonian American Art Museum. He painted Alicia Cardenas Corn Mother portrait. www.emanuelmartinez.com

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*Ellen
Aires-Trujillo*
BOULDER, COLORADO

While a single parent, Ellen Aires-Trujillo earned a B.A. from CU Boulder and a J.D. (Juris Doctor) from the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law.

Her passion for Social Justice led her to use her law degree as an attorney at Colorado Legal Services for over 30 years. She represented low-income individuals with Family, Housing, and Health and Elder Issues. Working with Children's Hospital, she was instrumental in developing Colorado's first Medical Legal Partnership program, addressing the social determinants of health.

She mentors students of all ages, law students, and practicing attorneys. She actively engages in political causes and has served on several boards and advisory committees, including the Judicial Performance Commission, Colorado Hispanic Bar Association, Colorado Latino Age Wave, Adelante Mujer, Sturm College of Law Alumni Council, and the Denver Public Library's Hispanic Acquisition Committee. In 2021, she received an award from the César Chávez Peace and Justice Committee of Denver for community members and organizations that follow Chávez's ideals of nonviolence in obtaining justice for all people.

Ellen is passionate about cultural preservation and education, and for the last 20 years has been actively involved with Hilos Culturales (Cultural Threads), promoting the Indio-Hispano cultural traditions of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado.

ELLEN'S

Life Quote

"IF I HAVE SEEN FURTHER THAN OTHERS, IT IS BY STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS."

— SIR ISAAC NEWTON

My Greatest Influence – My Mother, Grace Madrid-Alires

BY ELLEN ALIRES-TRUJILLO

I was privileged to be surrounded by many independent, strong-willed women who inspired me along my journey. But my mother, Grace Madrid-Alires, who crossed over to the other side more than 45 years ago, was the most impactful woman in my life.

She was an 11th generation New Mexican, born on August 5, 1926 in Colonias, a small village outside of Santa Rosa in Northern New Mexico. She was the daughter of a farmer/rancher and the fourth of nine children. She graduated from high school, met my father, and with three young sons, moved to Colorado, where my sister and I were born, for new opportunities. Medical issues plagued her throughout her life. She passed away before her 48th birthday but did a lifetime of work in her short time on earth.

She was very spiritual and a devoted Catholic. Faith was central to her life. I witnessed her faith in action and what it meant to apply it to everyday life. Attending mass included waiting at the church as Mom drove several of the elders in the community home. Sundays were an important day to give thanks, rest, and be with family for sharing time and a meal.

Our community, and we, were poor. Despite the struggle, my parents managed to purchase a five-acre farm and later moved a house onto the farm. When I was eight, we finally moved to the property. It required lots of work, but it was our little piece of the world.

When my father became ill, my mother assumed the responsibility of caring for the family until he was able to work again. I learned the dignity, value, and importance of hard work by watching my mother. She was a visionary who understood how things should be and took the opportunity to move us beyond our circumstances.

She was optimistic, courageous, and determined to learn and grow, even if it meant things didn't always come out perfectly. She was willing to take risks and was not afraid to tackle projects, whether it was putting up fences, plowing fields, planting crops, raising animals, or seeking other ways to make our life better. We learned to love and respect the land. Today, the smell and the color of newly plowed fields still bring back memories of my mother driving the tractor, and the serenity and appreciation for the beauty of the natural environment that I experienced.

My mother taught me to believe there are few things that couldn't be overcome if one was willing to take on the challenge. She took on issues that might have been impossible for others and solved them. Once, she put up an electric fence to keep our cows from escaping. During the process we experienced a few shocks, until she figured it out. If she had an idea about how to remodel our home, she never hesitated to take down a wall and then have my brothers help her build a new addition. She had a sense of humor and often said, "If there's a will, there's a way."

We all worked for the benefit of the family. We worked in the fields picking beans, topping carrots and onions, and hoeing beets. When others couldn't get to work due to transportation issues, she had my brothers convert a large truck that we purchased into a covered vehicle and drove door to door picking up people.

She also became a conduit for the community, using her skills to find ways to help others. She was resourceful at securing food, clothing, and other items for those in need. Our home was often a clearinghouse for donation items, to which community and family members came. When needed, she always lent a compassionate ear and advice and counsel. If there was a way to stretch what was available to make sure there was enough to meet others' needs, she found that way.

She believed that education was our path to success. She was generally tolerant of many things and allowed for some flexibility, but "skipping school" was not one of them. I remember a talk she had with us in which she warned us that a phone call from the school would be met with harsh consequences. She understood that an occasional day off might be appropriate, but must not be abused and had to be spent at home. She even threatened to sit with one of my brothers in class, if that would help him graduate from high school. We all knew she would follow through.

When life presented difficult situations for me, I was strengthened by her words, "I trust your judgement." Those words meant so much. She taught me to trust myself and my decisions.

My mother was a traditionalist about many things, but she was ahead of her time and in her thoughts about male and female roles. We were all expected to help with chores, both inside and outside of our home. They included cooking and cleaning, feeding animals, cutting weeds, and washing and ironing clothes. We each had, and used, a hoe, and we each had an iron. She was also a skilled seamstress. She made clothes for us and helped us learn non-traditional skills. A couple of my brothers learned how to use the sewing machine and to mend much better than I did. And I think I was a better car tower than my brothers. There were few, if any, gender roles in our home!

The ripple effects of her life and her spirit fill me daily. I try to pay tribute to her memory in how I live my life. She influenced my philosophy of life, and it is small wonder that given that influence, I chose to spend a career working with those in need, practicing Public Interest Law.

PHILOSOPHY

We have an obligation to remember our less fortunate communities and to reach back and pull someone up.

My circle growing up was primarily Latino/a, where many of the families were poor. While I had role models, I didn't know anyone who had completed a college degree. Although I didn't have much of a plan, I had a lot of dreams, and I had a desire. Had it not been for living in an activist community during the Chicano movement, I'm not sure what my future would have been. It was so important for me to see there that there are opportunities, if only we knew. Mentorship is so important.

We have an obligation to respect and honor our ancestors by learning and sharing our rich history and culture.

Many of our children suffer from self-esteem and identity issues. The only history we were ever taught has been negative. It is so important that our children are taught, and know, their history and the contributions made by those who came before them.

Children must have a reason to dream, and the only way is to see that anything is possible. They need to know that despite what is commonly presented, there is more to the story. They need to know that we as Latino/as are not a drain on society but have always contributed to society in many ways. They also need assurance that they are as smart as anyone else and can achieve if they are willing to work for it.



Batkhishig Batochir (Baja)

DENVER, COLORADO

Born in 1969 in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, Baja Batochir has an Associate's Degree in Theater Arts from the Kharkiv Art University. An actor, slam poet, theater coach, and yoga instructor, she has acted in Mongolian avant-garde experimental films. After immigrating to Denver in 1999, she has dedicated herself to advancing Mongolian culture and art.

She is a founding member of various educational and artistic organizations, including the Mongolian Culture and Heritage Center of Colorado, Dharma Wheel Colorado Mongolian Buddhist School, Bombog Nomadic Children's Puppet Theater, Uran Biir Colorado Mongolian Art School, and Nomad Yoga Sunshine LLC. Baja is trained in the ancient Mongolian art form of Tsam mask making, and in crafts and textile-fabric arts. In her apparel business, she makes apparel and tapestries.

She is creator, director, and designer of the Bombog Nomadic Puppet Theater — the first Mongolian American children's nomadic puppet theater. She is part of the BETART Collective with her artist family. Their interactive art installation Mongovoo went on permanent exhibition at Denver's Meow Wolf Museum in 2021.

She has dedicated her life to elevating her family and Colorado's Mongolian community. As a skilled creative, her art is an extension of her life, and of her perpetual curiosity and dedication to education, empathy, inspiration, advocacy, and empowerment.

PHILOSOPHY

I am a spiritual person. I believe in Buddha and Buddhist practices, and in the unity of all life. I strive to exemplify and value inner strength, speak to others on a human level, respect and support others in times of sorrow, learn from my own mistakes, and remain virtuous.

We must all find our reason and our purpose in life. I learned that life is about being grateful for what you have, for your family and friends, and accepting things as they are, while seeking to do better. I have strived to raise my children with morals and traditions, in a humane way. I have raised them to be forthright individuals and upright citizens, to help create future humane, compassionate societies.

I try to connect to others on the human level, not on material value. When my children or friends suffer mental anguish, I help and support them as best as I can. Peoples' skin color, language, or culture may be different, but we all share the same two eyes, ears, legs, and hands. We share the same emotions and the same suffering. We all become ill and feel pain, for which we need love and care. Giving and receiving compassion can help us overcome even the most terrible times.

I believe that a successful society consists of accepting things as they are, having more inner compassion, and seeing and living with wisdom from unconditional love.

BAJA'S

Life Quote

"HARD WORK PAYS BACK."

My Mother Tsogzolmaa,

When I was 28, my mother left and went to heaven. She was only 68. She was my Enerelt Eej, my Eternal Mother. It was hard realizing that she was gone and would never return. But I had to accept it and embrace the best qualities she had taught me.

She was always joyful, even amid extreme hardships, filled with infinite love and compassion. She was quiet, hardworking, honest, and humble. A woman of few words, she expressed herself mostly through actions, including catering to everyone before herself. Inside, she was soft and had a great amount of love, but she was also tough enough to triumph over every hardship.

The Mongolian word “Burhan” means “God / Goddess.” We use it to refer to our parents. It shows how much we admire them, and our appreciation for the life they gave us and the sacrifices they made for us.

My mother Tsogzolmaa is my hero, my Burhan. She helped me so much when I was a child. I lacked confidence and thought I wasn’t good enough. I was always the odd one out in school and didn’t have many friends or boyfriends. I had almost no self-esteem. Eventually I exclaimed to her, “Why did you give birth to such an ugly child?” I cried hysterically and said I wanted to die. She just looked at me fondly and said, “It’s hard to find good-hearted people in this world. If people are too ignorant to see you for who you really are, it’s their loss.” These words, and the look she gave me, became the foundation of my self-confidence and esteem.

She was extremely selfless, putting aside her dreams and desires to give everything to her children and their children. For example, when I was

young, I was afraid of the dark. She let me sleep with her until I was in eighth grade. She didn’t care what others might say. It was her way of taking good care of me.

My mother was born in the countryside. When she got married at eighteen, she moved to the city to get an education. But she decided to use the money she had saved for that to provide food, clothing, and other necessities for her seven children. Giving up her hopes of an education was difficult, but it showed her love for us and her generosity.

Many times, she went out of her way to help others, and never asked any thanks. Her resilience, patience, and unrelenting compassion continue to inspire me to become a better person.

Throughout her lifetime, she birthed 10 children, of which three died. The oldest was 17 years older than me, and I was the youngest, born when my mother was forty. She often gave me treats before giving them to my siblings. And she went out of her way to make me feel listened to, even though I was the youngest child.

I grew up watching my mother hiding her own suffering, while taking care of us. Once, she had pneumonia but continued taking care of my siblings and me and didn’t tell anyone until it became unbearable. Then she went to the hospital, where she had to stay for several months. It was a difficult time for us all.

My father worked in the countryside most of the year, while my mother took care of us alone at home. I remember several dark moments, such as when she lost a child and I lost a sibling. She cried, but always quietly, to not concern us. She was so

My Enerelt Eej

BY BATKHISHIG (BAJA) BATOCHIR

strong. She never gave in to life’s hardships, never became discouraged, and continued to strive for the best possible life, for herself and for us.

My parents worked hard to raise us. My older siblings told me my mother always returned to work a month after giving birth, brought home extra work, and went to work after only two or three hours of sleep. She never said she was tired and never complained about the difficulties of raising seven children.

Looking back, I think she lived such a short life because she often had to endure life’s hardships alone. She was quiet, but with extreme diligence, patience, and a warrior’s endurance. I try to emulate these as a mother, and I realize how challenging it is to be like my mother in face of life’s challenges.

She was an amazing cook. Despite our meager budget, every night she cooked us something different. She cooked in a huge pan, served my father first, and then us children. There usually was little or nothing left for her, but she never complained. She was satisfied watching her family enjoying her cooking.

As I grew older and began to understand my mother more, I tried to help her as much as I could. From cooking to cleaning, I was her right-hand woman for everything. One day, I started cutting some frozen meat, which made my hand very cold. She sympathized and said, “I remember thinking that if my hand gets cold, so did my mother’s.” This little moment, this snippet, helps show how selfless she was.

As a mother myself, I realize how eternal and infinite a mother’s love is. I only have two daughters and

haven’t faced even a fraction of the hardships my mother went through. Raising seven children, she worked countless nights with little sleep or food. Although our circumstances were sometimes hard, she never felt, or allowed us to feel, defeated.

I understand her now, mother to mother. I understand that these are the sacrifices we make, because a mother’s love is never ending and far reaching. Despite the difficulties of raising seven children and her grief for the three she lost, she put her anguish aside and swallowed her tears. She put the best face on things for us and gave us unconditional love.

She also taught me what love felt like and how to give it. She showed love to us in her subtle actions and warm caresses. Her eyes radiated love, regardless of any hardship. I am eternally blessed to have been raised with my mother’s love.

Because I grew up with my mother’s deep love, my heart is soft. I know love because of her and thus can give love to my children. Her example taught me to love my children with my entire heart, to respect my husband, and to be humane, humble, honest, and hard working.

My mother is my teacher, my pride. She is the sun in my heart — for me, she was a living Goddess, a Burhan. If I didn’t have you, Mother, how could I survive in this world? I know many good-hearted women, but my mother lives in my veins and heart, a true Corn Mother. She is the inspirational woman who taught me the virtue of unconditional love. Until the day I die, dear Mother, I will revere you and pray to you.

Genevieve Canales

GREELEY, COLORADO

Dr. Genevieve Canales is Professor Emerita, University of Northern Colorado (UNC), having taught Psychology and Mexican American Studies for 26 years. Her doctorate is in social psychology. Dr. Canales founded the annual Mexican American Arts Festival at UNC and the Más (more) Arts Plus After-School Program at Dos Rios Elementary. She has earned numerous teaching awards, including two Who's Who Among America's Teachers. Her teaching, writing, and public speaking underscore Mexican Americans' intellectual history and pioneering legal activism against discrimination and racism in education, housing, and politics. Currently, she is directing and producing a video on *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), a collaborative labor of love. She is also writing short stories about growing up in a bicultural/bilingual Mexican American family in San Antonio, Texas. She loves spending time with her only child, Everett, her family, and friends; dancing (R&B, Salsa, Middle Eastern); and watching murder mysteries.

GENEVIEVE'S

Life Quote

"WHETHER YOU THINK YOU CAN OR
YOU THINK YOU CAN'T, YOU'RE RIGHT."

— HENRY FORD

PHILOSOPHY

Using my talents to help others become the best version of themselves, and to do the same for myself, gives me purpose and tremendous joy. One of my talents is using words — teaching, writing, public speaking. I use words to connect with others, to convey knowledge, to inform, and to inspire. I also have training in pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of integrating the arts into teaching virtually all subject matter.

People grow up in different environments. They therefore have different ideas of what a best "self" is. I grew up in a bicultural/bilingual home with Mexican American parents who emphasized the value of family, education, and culture. I heard my parents' stories about the racism they observed and experienced. My Dad's outrage was evident in his demeanor and body language. Thus, for me, one's best self is educated, feels pride in one's culture/ethnicity, and fights social injustice against Mexican Americans and other historically oppressed groups.

As a professor, I have used my words to promote my students' best selves by educating them about psychology and Mexican American Studies. I have presented this content through a social justice lens, giving them a deeper understanding of racism, sexism, homophobia, and related concepts. I have also incorporated the arts into lessons and assessments. This practice has helped me bring in the voice and culture not only of *mi gente* (my people) but of other groups whose voice and culture have been missing in textbooks, curricula, and assessments.



María Guadalupe Peña Treviño

BY GENEVIEVE CANALES

Red lipstick. That was my Mama's trademark — but so was her business ledger! My Mom may have been a 1950's homemaker, but she was also much more! Throughout my life, I saw a woman who displayed the best of (so-called) feminine characteristics and the best of (so-called) masculine characteristics as well. She provided me a model of womanhood that challenged traditional gender-role stereotypes. She also taught me that as we learn Anglo culture and succeed within the "Dominant Society," we can and must retain and take pride in our Mexican American culture.

My smart, pretty, entrepreneurial Mom grew up in the barrio (or "West Side") of San Antonio. In spite of growing up very poor, her life was rich. She lived with her older brother, Ray, and their mother. Ray adored his sister; he called her "Pretty Woman." When he was killed during the Allied invasion of Normandy, Mom's heart broke, but she remained a most kind and caring person. Many mothers in the neighborhood did not read or write English. So, when letters arrived from their sons, WWII soldiers, Mom read the letters and even wrote replies at the women's request. My mother's kindness and generosity continued throughout her life. She kept up with her friends and loaned (actually, gave) money to family members experiencing a rough patch.

She walked door to door collecting donations for the March of Dimes and the American Heart Association. For decades, she talked on the telephone daily to a homebound uncle who had lost his sight as a young man. He enjoyed having her read newspaper articles and obituaries to him.

In her early twenties, Mom started working at a finance company in downtown San Antonio, where she was introduced to the world of business. She thrived in that environment. She loved keeping the company's books and managing the office.

When she became pregnant, she left her job to stay home with me. I was her firstborn, the eldest of three daughters. Until I was nearly four years old — when my sister, Darlene, was born — Mom was my constant companion. Besides being my first playmate, Mom was also my first teacher. By the time I entered kindergarten, I could write my full name in cursive, and I could read. Mom was consistently involved in my school life. She helped me memorize the Apostles' Creed, Our Father, and Hail Mary in first grade. She attended every Parent Teacher Association meeting, and for many years was a Room Mother for my class.

When I went to middle school, she became my confidant. I talked to my mom about everything. One time I asked her about sex and whether it hurt. With her usual gentle smile and soft voice, she said, "Your husband will love you very much, and he'll be gentle." Mom consistently conveyed messages about me and about being a woman in terms of strength, power, and — sometimes — superiority! For example, I am 5'1." Mom always said I was "petite" and that "the best things come in small packages." The way she said it made me feel special — in fact, I always thought that being short was superior to being tall. At age 10, I began having abdominal pains. Mom thought I was going to start menstruating. So, she explained it to me. I still smile when I recall her saying that only girls were capable of handling it. She said, "Just imagine Michael (my friend across the street). He wouldn't be able to handle this."

Observing Mom, I never saw support for the stereotype that females are poor at math. On the contrary, she loved numbers and business. One day she called her bank to let them know the bank balance was off by one penny! They checked, called her back, and thanked her for bringing it to their attention. Mom loved "figuring" in her business

My Mother AND Corn Mother

ledger, where she kept track of family finances. She was a stay-at-home Mom who continued to stretch herself intellectually. She was smart about financial planning and ultimately became a real estate entrepreneur.

I have achieved what I have because of my Mom's love, and the love of two other important women — my sisters. They both encourage me to pursue my goals and cheer for me when I succeed professionally and personally. They inspire me with their intelligence, resourcefulness, wit, and kindness. I am very proud of their success. Darlene is an estate planning attorney and financial planner. Mary Ann is a Licensed Professional Counselor. I am grateful that they love me and that I will always be able to count on them.

My Mom never forgot who she was. She showed respect to everyone. She loved me with her whole heart. I miss her very much. She died on Sunday, November 2, 1986. The following Saturday I found out I was pregnant. My greatest heartache is that my son Everett and his Grandmother never knew each other. I once told a friend about how very fortunate I was to have had a loving, caring mom, and how much of her I saw in my son. My friend remarked that I was lucky to return that love and caring through my son.

María Guadalupe Peña Treviño — "Lupe" or "Lupita" to her family and friends. Remarkable woman. My Mom did not choose between femininity and masculinity. She embraced both aspects of her humanity. She was feminine in dress, and she had a mind for numbers. Similarly, she did not replace her Mexican American culture with Anglo culture. She welcomed both. I can still see her — applying her lipstick before leaving the house. My Mom was the best Corn Mother. Her favorite color was red, and so is mine. Red lipstick. Friends say it is my trademark.



Alicia Cardenas

DENVER, COLORADO

Alicia Cardenas, a Native Mexican American painter, tattoo artist, educator, and Cultural Anthropologist from Denver, was inspired by her tribal culture, the earth and its mathematics, and her child, Xochitl Mayahuel. She identified as Chicana/Native and as a Mexica Danzante. Alicia owned a tattoo and piercing studio in Denver for 25 years called Sol Tribe, where she tattooed fulltime.

She had recently begun to take on larger scale projects under the name Tribal Murals to feed her appetite to color the world with ancient designs. For Alicia, painting was a spiritual practice and an extension of her activism for women and for Indigenous and Two Spirit people. Alicia only painted with used paint and repurposed it. She mixed all her colors from old paints.

Her mantra was "Ometoetl Tlazocomatli Mitakye Oasin," a phrase from the Lakota language. It reflects the world view of interconnectedness. It translates in English as "All my relatives, we are all related." It is a prayer of oneness and harmony with life, between people, animals, birds, insects, trees, plants, and the landscape of the earth.

You can find her tattoo work on Instagram (@soltribemama), as well as her paintings (@tribalmurals).

ALICIA'S

Life Quote

"BECOME IN HARMONY WITH THE EARTH AND YOUR FELLOW HUMANS. STAY HUMBLE AND WORK HARD. PUSH TO BE A ROLE MODEL AND SHOW UP FOR YOUR COMMUNITY."

Portrait Painted by: Emanuel Martinez
www.emanuelmartinez.com www.emanuelproject.org

IN MEMORIAM

ALICIA DEOLIVERA CARDENAS

MARCH 22, 1977–DECEMBER 27, 2021

PHILOSOPHY

I am Alicia DeOlivera Cardenas, daughter of Beverly Louise DeOlivera and Alfredo Joseph Cardenas, the daughter of a school teacher and an artist and survivor of colonization. I was told by my mother that I could do whatever I wanted with my life, and so that's what I did. I have a lot of philosophies I have gathered in my 44 years. As I have grown and done my spiritual work around decolonization, I have learned that there is much we can do in a lifetime to not only help others but to heal ourselves. I am grounded in my privilege and my hard work, and in order to maintain a healthy life I use my privilege to help others, and I live a life of integrity.

My murals are a representation of a struggle that has happened throughout history a million times ... it's happening today. Literally they are about taking down leaders and broken history ... tearing down the statues and representation of power figures ... this we must do ... this we are doing. On a deeper level, they are about the personal struggle we all have to talk about what we know or we thought we know, and tear that down as well ... kill your idols ... tear down your ego ... we are not in a fight for power, but for understanding. Our ancient relatives are here to remind us to take back the power.

After COVID, we lost a lot of people. We lost elders in the Navajo Nation ... across the country. And when we lose our elders, we lose oral history. We lose the songs and we lose the stories, because these things aren't being written down and because this culture doesn't value elders.

This is something common in our culture right now, where we basically throw out our elders and don't give them the space and time they deserve, because they're not on Instagram. It breaks my heart every day that there are artists who because they are not participating in Instagram or social media, are not "relevant," and my mission and core value are that the fact that I can sell a painting and make money off of it — or I can exhibit a painting right now — is because of the work that our elders, like my dad's generation, did.

Alicia was a well known and highly respected tattoo shop owner, muralist, Indigenous women's activist, LGBTQ+ advocate, and body piercer. Starting her career at age 19, Alicia opened her famed tattoo shop Twisted Sol, of which she was part owner, on Broadway in Denver. Her goal was to operate a clean, safe, high-quality body modification shop. Alicia was a proud member of the Association of Professional Piercers (APP) and help set guidelines for safer tattoo shops across the county. She challenged the negative stigma of tattoo shops by operating the first Boutique-style tattoo shop, where clients could receive safe, safety-conscious body modifications, without judgment or oppression.

Her shop Sol Tribe continues her legacy of providing a welcoming atmosphere. Alicia inspired her fellow artists to eradicate the prejudice so often applied to the piercing and tattoo community. Under her direction, Sol Tribe specialized in importing handmade jewelry from around the world, hiring local artists, and providing a safe, welcoming place for marginalized people, both as employees and customers.

In addition to her activism for the body modification industry, Alicia was a staunch LGBTQ+ equality advocate and supporter of Black Lives Matter. She embraced and engaged in Mexica dance, was a member of the 57-piece orchestra Itchy-O, and participated in Native American spiritual ceremonies.

Her influence in the Indigenous community was ever increasing. Before her death, Alicia was also known as a Meso-American muralist and visual artist. Her highly intricate and culturally significant murals can be seen throughout Denver, and in Arizona and New Mexico. Alicia supported Chicana/o artists and started the Chicano Humanities Arts Council's "Generations" project, pairing emerging artists with seasoned veterans.

Her proudest accomplishment was being a mother. She is preceded in death by her mother, Beverly Louise DeOlivera (July 18, 1945–July 25, 1998). Alicia was daughter to Alfredo J. Cardenas, and sister to Alfredo Javier Cardenas. She leaves behind a plethora of loved ones, including dear friends, nieces, nephews, cousins, and community members.

Alicia impacted so many people worldwide. The tattoo industry has changed forever, both with her involvement and her passing. She is deeply missed by all those who knew her.

Alicia was killed on Dec. 27th, 2021 in Denver in a mass shooting that also claimed the lives of Alyssa Gunn Maldonado, Danny Scofield, Sarah Steck, and Michael Swinyard.



Tina Cartagena

DENVER, COLORADO

Tina Cartagena was born in Wichita, Kansas in 1953, surrounded by a loving family, and developed close relationships with aunts, uncles, and cousins.

One uncle, Louie Ornelas, lived one house away, and other aunts and uncles lived two blocks away. She still maintains a close relationship with the neighbors and family she grew up with.

Tina discovered an appreciation for Mexican music, jazz, Motown, oldies, and popular music on the radio. She has fond memories of listening and dancing to songs that varied from “Volver, Volver” by Vicente Fernandez to “Fly Me to the Moon” by Frank Sinatra.

Tina has lived in Colorado since 1974. Since January, 1990 she has worked for public radio KUVU JAZZ, where the music frequently stirs emotions and memories of her childhood. The station plays jazz; Latin jazz; canciones (songs) from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Jamaica; and Afro-Caribbean sounds. Tina has had several jobs there, from her first position as Membership Director to her current position as Vice President of Radio. She is especially proud that KUVU JAZZ delivers positive information and highlights the rich cultural contributions of our Hispanic community!

Tina has two sons, Ben Lujan and Victor Lujan, and a grandson, Benjamin Lujan Jr. She has been married for over 20 years to Carlos Lando, whom she met at KUVU. They share their love for music, family values, and KUVU!

PHILOSOPHY

I learned when I was young what it meant to have integrity. To me it refers to eliminating harassment and discrimination. I learned to simply be kind.

I remember once when I used my voice in opposition, speaking up to my supervisors at Wichita State University. I was a student intern in the Office of Orientation, where applications, high school transcripts, and standardized test scores were processed. One day, I heard my supervisors talking about a friend of mine, Sherry Ramirez. They questioned her scores, which were extremely high. I asked why, since they came from a legitimate testing service. “These scores are wrong!” one of them said. They all thought that Hispanics always had low scores! But I knew Sherry was an exceptional student, and that questioning her scores was unfair. I spoke up and said they were wrong. Sherry was admitted, and a great injustice was avoided. It was one of the first times I realized that my voice was important.

Another important memory involved my father. While on a road trip to visit family in Guadalajara, Mexico, we approached a church in Monterrey, where he saw an elderly woman walking on her knees and praying as she made her way to the church. After asking, Dad learned she was paying homage for her son, who was ill. He pulled a blanket from our car and laid it on the ground in front of the lady. As she continued walking on her knees, he moved the blanket in front of her. He was the kindest man. Everybody knew it, and it has always influenced me.

The lessons I learned from my family have been vitally important. Compassion, and eliminating discrimination and any form of incivility are among them, and I follow them to this day.

TINA'S

Life Quote

“FIGHT FOR THE THINGS THAT YOU CARE ABOUT BUT DO IT IN A WAY THAT WILL LEAD OTHERS TO JOIN YOU.”

— RUTH BADER GINSBURG

My Mother, My Hero

BY TINA CARTAGENA

In the early 1920s my grandparents, Jose Iniguez and Cuca Ornelas Iniguez, immigrated to Wichita to escape political turmoil from the Mexican Revolution. My mom, Alice Luna, was born there on December 12th, 1927.

When the Great Depression hit, times got bad in Wichita. In October 1937, when she was nine years old, her family returned to Mexico. Leaving her home, and the United States, the only country she had ever known, was difficult. Like for the Dreamers of today, the United States was home, and they all wanted to stay there.

They returned to Mexico and lived in Guadalajara. Life was not easy, but being surrounded by her large and close extended family was a plus.

After six years there, my mother met the love of her life, my father, Manuel Luna, at a quinceañera (celebration of a girl's 15th birthday). They were married on February 6, 1946, when my dad was 24 and my mom 18. My mom had her first child, Victor Manuel Luna, in 1946.

Two years later, my mom, an American citizen by birth, made an enormous sacrifice to go back to Wichita, leaving behind my dad and my brother, Victor, who were not U.S. citizens and couldn't get visas right away. She was young and three months pregnant with my sister Veronica, but she knew Wichita offered her opportunities and a better future for her family. Even though it was a sacrifice, she sent money to help them out, as we children continued to do after she passed. Fortunately, although she greatly missed her own family and was alone there, she had a great support system in Wichita.

My dad and brother finally got visas and immigrated to Wichita: my dad in 1948 and my brother in 1949. Being separated for so long had been hard on all of them, but they were finally together! Eventually, my parents had five children: Victor in 1947, Veronica in 1948, Irma in 1949, Steve in 1952, and me in 1953.

I can't imagine what it must have felt like for my mother, at 18, to leave behind her husband and baby to make a better life for them in the U.S. I don't think I would have been brave enough, and I admire her so much for it!

Eventually, my mom started working the second shift at Cudahy Meat Packing. She wasn't home when we returned from school, but we could always feel her love. She worked during the day to make sure we had a clean home, homemade meals, and clean laundry. On weekends, she loved telling us about the books she read, and reading storybooks to us. She constantly gave us advice on who we should hang around with, and how we should behave, and listened patiently to us, including about our troubles.

When I think about my mother, I can get a bit emotional. Only now at this point in my life can I really appreciate what it took for her to raise five children, keep us in line, and share with us her knowledge and love for our Mexican culture. I think of her every time I listen to one of our KUVU shows that help celebrate our culture.

She was an amazing cook, and she taught her recipes to my sisters and me. I still have many of her handwritten recipes, which I cherish and still use. My sons, nephews, and nieces remember her

home-cooked meals. Although she has been gone for 20 years, they say, "Grandma used to make it this way!" She was the anchor of our family, our role model, and one of the main reasons I succeeded. When I was at Wichita State University, she was proud that I was continuing my education. She was so happy that we all had the opportunity to go to college. She knew that an education was our ticket to success.

In 1967, when I was in junior high school, my brother Victor was diagnosed with cancer. He was only 20 years old and had a bright future ahead. At the time, he was studying at Wichita State and working part-time at Cudahy Meat Packing Company, where my mom still worked.

The diagnosis was a huge shock for everyone in the family, especially my mom. It was hard for her emotionally and physically. She dug deep for strength as she continued to take care of her family. She was still there for all of us, even as she cared for our brother, Victor. While he was suffering in silence, she became his nurse, his coach, and (even more than before) my hero, while suffering in silence. The night he passed, I stood at her bedroom door. I saw the pain on her face. It was the only time I have ever witnessed such overwhelming pain. I will never forget it.

When I was older, my mother shared with me the full impact of losing her first-born son, and the financial burden his illness was for our family. During his final days in the hospital, she was called into the Human Resources Office at Cudahy. They told her my brother's health insurance was being canceled

and he was being terminated from the company. Being respectful and in shock, she thanked the HR representative, went to the rest room, and cried. Then she returned to finish her shift. I'm sure there must have been many other difficult moments like this that I never knew about!

Twenty-eight years later, she told me my dad had made the final hospital payment. Neither I nor my siblings knew. Not once did my parents share that burden with us, in all those years.

It has taken me years to recognize that my mom was the strongest woman I've ever known. She was lively, bold, and feisty. You could always count on her to have an opinion, or a perfect dicho (saying) for any occasion. She taught me the value of having an opinion and sharing it with others.

We all loved to gather around to hear what she had to say. When I was young, when she came home from work, she and I would sit and chat, sometimes until midnight. I loved talking with her. Often, I'd jump out of bed when I heard the door open, to talk about my day, her day, and the rest of the family. It was our special time.

Now, when surrounded by family, and listening to music, I think about my mom and my dad. I realize how fortunate I am to have been raised by such loving, caring parents, who supported us every day. Given the times and her dedication to our culture, my mom has always been my hero. Following in her footsteps, I have raised my family with the same values, attitudes, and strengths that she and my father instilled in me.



Connie Margaret Coca
LARAMIE, WYOMING

Connie Coca, M.S.W. was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico in 1943. She is the oldest of 13 children. She grew up caring for her 12 siblings and her grandmother, Silveria Blea Martinez. Silveria taught Connie to appreciate her New Mexican traditions, such as recipes, folklore, and celebrations. Connie's mother, Isabel Martinez Benavidez, who when Connie was born was a single mother of three and a teacher, instilled in Connie strength, resourcefulness, and a love for teaching.

Both her mother and grandmother influenced Connie, leading her to a career in Social Work and community organization, including working as a caregiver in Laramie, Wyoming. She has dedicated her life to promoting Latina/o culture in Southern Wyoming, founding a bilingual radio station, and encouraging documentation of Latina/o History, including the creation of a mural depicting Latina/o history in Wyoming. Her desire to promote awareness of Latina/o culture has led to her publishing two articles, and teaching at the University of Wyoming and Laramie County Community College.

PHILOSOPHY

"Acquired knowledge is not for me to keep but to share for the greater good."

I believe in using action and teaching for the betterment of the Latino/a community. When I was growing up, seeing the value of the contributions and experience of my grandmother and mother helped me commit to this goal.

Later, living in Laramie, where Latino/a culture was minimally practiced and valued, I realized that what I learned growing up was no longer part of my life. I moved to a community where I could practice traditional New Mexican ways. I saw the need to share my knowledge about my culture in Laramie through my employment, in interactions with people, in presentations, and teaching at the University of Wyoming.

In my work and life, I put my traditional knowledge into action for the betterment of my community, building on family, community, and professional contacts, using the knowledge I gained in my different environments. I'm glad I've been able to put my traditional knowledge and higher education into action for the betterment of my community.

CONNIE'S

Life Quote

"ALWAYS BE A PRESERVER OF HOPE."

— RITA MORENO,
ALMA AWARDS, 1998

My Corn Mother (and Grandmother)

BY CONNIE COCA

When I was about 4, I woke up one morning and heard Spanish music and a teaspoon tingling against my grandma's coffee cup. I smelled the pine she had chopped the previous day, and coal burning in the stove. It made me feel warm and happy. I could hardly wait for the fresh tortillas I'd have for breakfast. I peeked out and saw my mom buzzing around getting ready for work and school, and breast feeding my youngest brother.

I looked at the nursery rhymes on our linoleum — Jack Be Nimble, Humpty Dumpty, and Rock-a-Bye Baby. Mom always tutored me before bed on them. She performed multiple duties: attending school to get her high school diploma (which I've always admired), taking care of her children, and supporting my grandmother. Since Grandma kept house and babysat for us, I experienced a matriarchal household.

Education was important in our home. My grandmother did not have a formal education and didn't know English, but she used her intelligence to teach us by sharing her life experiences. My mother was educated. As an adult, she got her high school diploma, went to college, and obtained a teaching certificate. She became the only teacher in a rural one-room schoolhouse, teaching all grades, from first to eighth. Although I never had her as a teacher, before I was old enough for school I often went to her classroom. The love of learning I got from her has inspired me all my life, and inspired me to become a teacher.

My grandmother and my mom were both single mothers. My grandmother raised 5 children alone, and helped my mom raise 4 children as a single mother. I know it was hard for them. At first, we lived in Las Vegas, New Mexico. When I was about 5, my mom remarried and we moved to San Geronimo, a rural village in New Mexico.

After that, I was sometimes shifted between my mom's and grandmother's houses when one of them

needed me for something. My grandmother was my primary caregiver while I was in first and second grade. When I was with my mom, she tutored me on my school topics. In third grade, I was bullied by some kids who said I was a wimp and was being spoiled by my grandmother, and teased me for being the teacher's kid. After she tried to defend me, it got even worse, but I was so happy that she tried.

Then things got better. Because I was a very good student, I was promoted directly from third grade to fifth. I started attending school in Las Vegas and staying full time with my grandmother. I felt safe. It was wonderful to go out for recess without being bullied.

Then, because of harsh economic times, my mother and father moved to Las Vegas. She found a job at a nursing home. But I seldom saw her because she was always busy working and I was still living with my grandmother. My grandfather, who was separated from her, owned the house where we lived. He needed money, so he sold it to my uncle and his family, which included two cousins around my age. My uncle's family, my grandma, and I all lived there. I enjoyed living with my cousins.

In fifth grade, I needed help learning my Catechism, but my grandmother didn't know English and couldn't help. Having my best interests in mind, she recruited a neighbor to tutor me. Because my religion is so important to me, I'm glad she helped with this important part of my religious education.

I lived with my grandmother from fifth grade through high school, going between my mom's and grandmother's homes to support my mom after each pregnancy she had. They both emphasized the importance of education and expected that I would graduate from high school.

Before I graduated, I was so proud when my grandmother bought me my class ring, a symbol of that rite of passage. With my mother and grandmother's

encouragement, I found work at a parachute factory. But when the factory's largest contract ended, I was laid off. They encouraged me to look outside Las Vegas. I found work in Santa Fe, in a moccasin factory. By this point, I was dating. My mom and grandmother constantly reminded me of our family standards. I was so happy when they approved of my future husband John, who was a trainee in the National Guard, and who they said made them proud.

We got married in August, 1962. My mother and grandmother made sure my wedding upheld New Mexican wedding traditions, including traditional food, music, and dancing. I'm especially glad they helped arrange a traditional New Mexican wedding march. I've passed these traditions to my daughters Patricia and Stephanie and my granddaughters Chelsea and Jennifer.

Later, John and I moved to Laramie. Having grown up speaking Spanish, listening to Spanish music, attending *festejos* and *bailes*, and celebrating New Mexico traditions, I was astonished at its lack of Latina/o culture.

I pride myself on creating awareness, and advocating on behalf of, the Latina/o community, in part from what I learned from my mother and grandmother. I have integrated traditional cultural practices into my work, including my community organizing. I initiated fiestas that included traditional food, music, and history for all ages, and were staged with help from the community. People from Wyoming and elsewhere greatly enjoyed them. My mother helped by finding bands to hire and contacting them. The proceeds were used for scholarships for Latino/a high school graduates.

I worked to enable community access to Spanish-language radio (like my Corn Mothers listened to) and television, and to find a home for a collection of photographs and biographies of leading Latina women from Albany County, Wyoming. As Administrator for the Hospice of Laramie and Spring Wind Assisted Living, I introduced Latino-sensitive interventions, and

more hiring of Spanish-speaking people. My mother was especially proud of my efforts to make a difference for *nuestra gente*.

On January 12, 1978 my grandmother Silveria, the matriarch of our family, passed away. She would have been proud to know I attended college, got an advanced degree, and dedicated myself to community work. Her matriarchy was passed down to my mom.

In July, 2021, my mom fell and broke her femur. I sat in a hospital room, listening to the drip of an I.V. and the sounds of a heart monitor. I tried to communicate with my mom, but I could hardly understand her. I sang "Rock-a-Bye Baby" and she suddenly said, very clearly, "That reminds me of you." With the hospital sounds in the background, I recalled all of my mom's and grandmother's strength, perseverance, virtues, and generosity.

As I write this story, I am brought to tears because of my mother's passing on August 1, 2021. Both my mother and grandmother knew that education was vital for me and would be an important enabler to help me empower young Latina/os and my community. They wished for nothing more than to pass on their knowledge to me so I could have an impact on future generations. I realize what a large responsibility this inherited matriarchal position holds for me. I am forever grateful for everything they taught and shared with me. With their passing, I have been given an important inherited role as the matriarch of the extended Martinez family.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| <i>Bailes</i> | Dances |
| <i>Festejos</i> | Festivals |
| <i>Nuestra gente</i> | Our people |

Juliana Aragón Fatula

CAÑON CITY, COLORADO

Juliana Aragón Fatula's ancestors, indigenous to Aztlan, migrated from New Mexico to Southern Colorado. She is the author of *The Road I Ride Bleeds*, *Crazy Chicana in Catholic City*, and *Red Canyon Falling on Churches* (winner of the High Plains Book Award in 2016.) She has been a Macondista (alumna of the Macondo Writers Workshop, founded by Sandra Cisneros) since 2011, was a Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities ambassador, and Director of Creative Writing for Mujeres Unidas (Women United) at Colorado State University, Pueblo.

She has conducted writing workshops for Colorado Writers in the Schools K-12, Bridging Borders, César Chávez Academy, and Cañon City Middle School. She performed in the nineties with Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center in Denver, and after Operation Desert Storm, she toured in the Persian Gulf for the Department of Defense with the Latin Locomotions. She is currently shopping her first mystery, *The Colorado Sisters*, for a publisher. She believes in the power of education to change lives.

JULIANA'S

Life Quote

"HONOR YOUR CRAFT. THE MORE YOU THINK ABOUT THE AUDIENCE THE MORE THE LIGHT DIMS. WHEN YOU ARE MOST HUMBLE IS WHEN YOUR CREATIVITY SHINES...WRITE FROM THAT PLACE INSIDE YOU WHERE YOUR PAIN IS BURIED — YOUR TRUE VOICE."

— SANDRA CISNEROS
NPR INTERVIEW

PHILOSOPHY

I write the truth. Even though the truth hurts, it also heals. I'm a confessional poet, and my stories and poems reveal my dark past as a survivor. Dealing with adversity made me empathetic to others who struggle in life. I've become a resourceful woman who never passes over opportunities to expand my education, my spirituality, and my ability to help others. I've learned from the gracious women in my life how to nurture and develop healthy relationships.

My passion for writing has enabled me to work in my community of Southern Colorado and share my knowledge with hundreds of students. As an artist-in-residence for Writers in the Schools, I edited and published their poems in an anthology, *This Is How We Poet*. My favorite role has been with the Bridging Borders program in Pueblo, which unites female mentors with teenage girls who are disadvantaged and helps them gain confidence and become leaders.

I was once an at-risk-student, and I teach my students that if I can succeed, so can they. I teach them diversity and inclusivity, and to love learning. My students make me proud, and I learn how to be a better teacher by listening to them. I'm an educator, a performance artist, a healer, and a mentor in my community, and I've fulfilled my dreams. I'm grateful to my ancestors for their sacrifices that enabled me to become an educated Chicana. *Mujeres muy mujeres*.



Tía Emma, My Corn Mother

BY JULIANA ARAGÓN FATULA

Emma Aragón Medina, *mi tía*, hugged me and told me everything would be OK. She was right. She was a survivor, and so am I. At 14 I was pregnant, a high school dropout, but my tía never shamed or scolded me, never. Thank you, Tía, for not giving up on me, for telling me that fateful day 50 years ago, “You’re not a bad person, *jita*. You just made a bad choice. Don’t let that bad choice be your destiny.”

As a teenager in the 1970s, I watched her attend night school and graduate with a degree in Early Childhood Education from the local community college. She became the Director of Head Start in our community and helped countless children and mothers get a head start in life. She led other teachers by example at Head Start and mentored the mothers of her students, including my son, nieces, and nephews. Many of her students’ mothers were incarcerated in the Colorado State Penitentiary. To help the young mothers feel at home, she mentored them in her kitchen over a bowl of green chili, *frijoles*, tortillas, and *café con leche*.

Her ancestors were the Gallegos and Aragóns, *gente* of Villanueva, New Mexico. Her paternal grandfather was an indigenous sheep herder. Her maternal grandfather was a politician in a Spanish-speaking village that consisted of a Catholic church, a general store, a post office, and farms on the Pecos River. Her ancestors were peasants who migrated north to Southern Colorado to search for work and lived in houses with dirt floors. They worked as servants to the rich ranchers in Fremont County, Colorado.

My tía lost her parents when she was a child. My father became her parental figure, and she loved him, respected him, and admired his courage. She had dedicated her life to God and the church, but a handsome young Chicano changed her life. Instead of becoming a nun, she became a mother and wife

during the sixties. Four children and an alcoholic husband changed her path from home maker to head of household. Because of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, she was able to attend college with government grants and gain employment with Colorado Head Start, a program that assists disadvantaged children so that they can start on an equal footing with their advantaged peers.

She was the first and only one in her family of 10 children to earn a college degree. My tía taught inclusivity and cultural diversity. She became a feminist leader and an educated Chicana. She beamed with pride and joy when I became the language arts and *teatro* teacher in my hometown, and at César Chávez Academy in Pueblo, Colorado.

As an activist, she led the way for women to achieve success through education and by giving women a voice. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chávez, Lucha Corpi, Linda Rodriguez, Dolores Huerta, and many others, my tía Emma taught me how to change lives through social activism. She lit the path for me to follow and become an educated Chicana.

She survived her hardships with a smile on her face and with a prayer to the blessed mother. She set an example of working hard for an education and never giving up no matter what life threw her direction. She studied and earned her Early Education degree and went to work to support her family. Her tenacity and courage showed us how to survive, and that women need to fight for what they want, whether that is staying home and raising a family or getting an education and joining the workforce. She also taught us that it was possible to do both.

I never knew my grandmother, Genoveva Aragón, but the stories Tía Emma shared with us about her mother portrayed a very religious, family-focused woman with the healing skills of a *curandera* and a generous love for her community, which showed in her visiting the sick and the poor. She used a cure for *mal de ojo*, rubbing an egg over the patient’s body, along with prayer. The egg is put into a glass of water and placed under the bed of the ill person. And for *susto*, she would sweep herbs such as *yerba buena* or *estafiate* over the patient’s body three times while saying prayers. My tía learned these lessons early in life and taught us to always help our neighbors and family. She told us that this blessing would be returned double.

Tía Emma’s beauty can only be described as an angelic aura of light shining from within, and glowing all around her in a magical hue that made her skin tone ivory. She had short, curly ebony hair, eyes that twinkled with mischievousness and intelligence, and a heavenly scent of vanilla and sweet pea. Her smile when she danced seemed dangerous, because she giggled and swayed her hips until everyone joined her on the dance floor. Her green chili and tortillas had the *gente* lined up around the block for just a taste, her fridge was always full, and her home was always open to anyone who came to visit.

Her life story ended, but as the saying goes, if someone speaks your name, you are never truly gone, nor forgotten. My novel includes a character named Emma who had a dream of leaving her home to her daughters upon her death, to create a place for homeless women and children, called Emma’s Recovery House. I know that my Tía Emma, in the next world, hears me telling her story, and smiles. She lives forever in my words, my books, and my heart. Emma Aragón Medina, *presente*.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>café con leche</i> | Coffee with milk or cream |
| <i>curandera</i> | Healer |
| <i>estafiate</i> | Prairie sage |
| <i>frijoles</i> | Beans |
| <i>gente</i> | People |
| <i>jita</i> | Short for hijita, (literally, my little daughter) — a term of endearment that can be used for both a daughter and for a friend or relative |
| <i>mal de ojo</i> | The “evil eye” — a jinx or spell cast to make someone else sick |
| <i>Mujeres muy mujeres</i> | (Meant as praise) - Womanly women, OR women who are really women |
| <i>presente</i> | Present (is here) |
| <i>susto</i> | Fright, or anxiety |
| <i>(mi) tía</i> | (My) aunt |
| <i>teatro</i> | Theater |
| <i>yerba buena</i> | Peppermint |

Karen D. Gonzales

DENVER, COLORADO

Karen Darlene (Trujillo) Gonzales is the author of a short memoir, "Finding the Lady Llorona," published in the *Almagre Review - Issue 5: Race-Class-Gender*. She is a Chicana from Denver's Westside. She attended two years of college and had a 30-year federal and state government working career. She retired in 2009 with 25 years of service from the Colorado Department of Transportation, where she worked in the Center for Equal Opportunity as a Program Manager and Civil Rights Specialist, a job in which she enjoyed assisting small, minority, and women-owned transportation businesses. Presently, she is the Denver Coordinator of Las Comadres & Friends National Latino Book Club and Co-Founder of the Colorado Alliance of Latino Mentors and Authors (CALMA). Karen is also an activist, author, inventor, genealogist, and collector. She is the proud parent of one son and three grandchildren, a proud daughter of centenarians, and was honored to be their caregiver.

KAREN'S

Life Quote

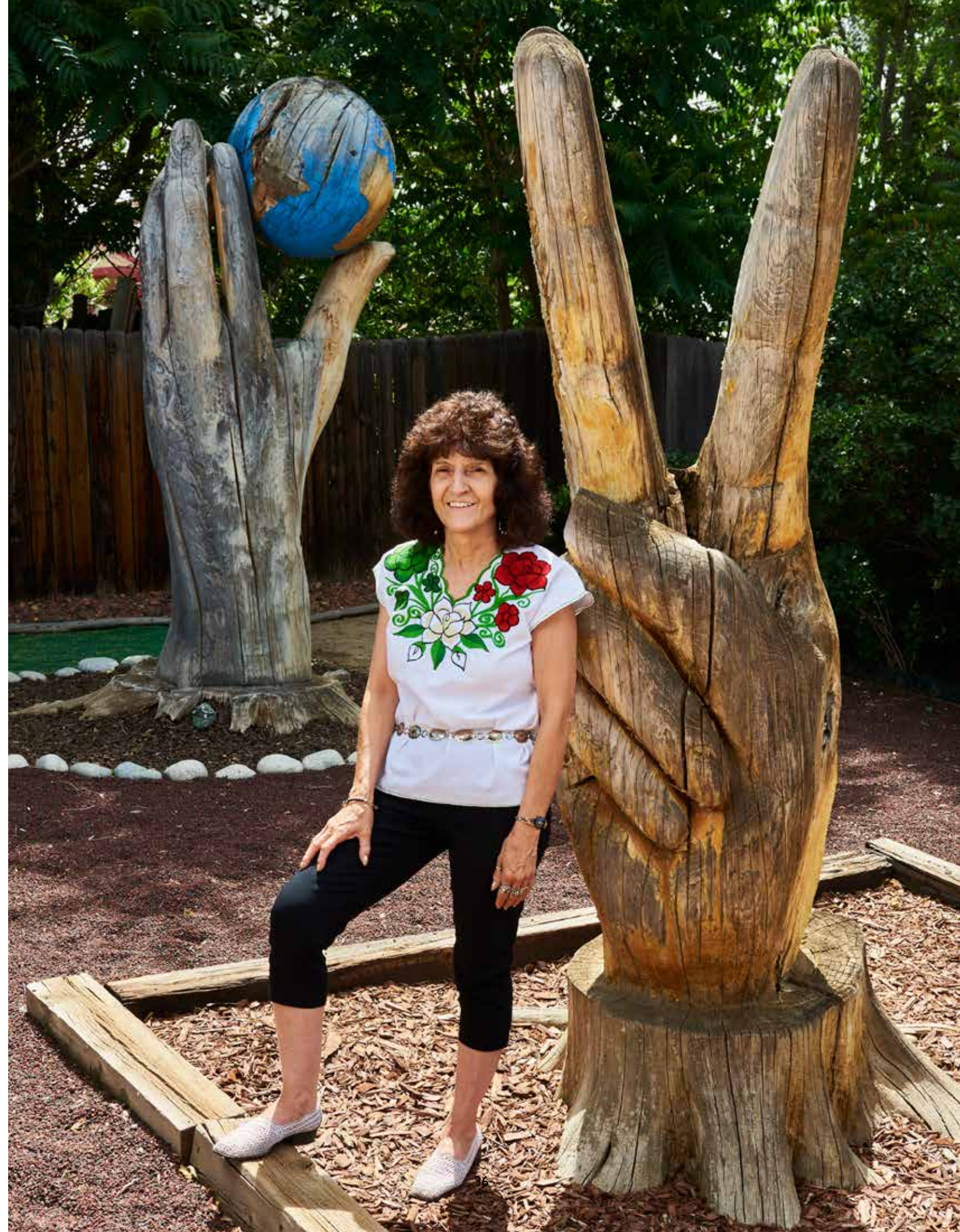
"THE WARRIOR, FOR US, IS ONE WHO SACRIFICES HIMSELF FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. HIS TASK IS TO TAKE CARE OF THE ELDERLY, THE DEFENSELESS, THOSE WHO CAN NOT PROVIDE FOR THEMSELVES, AND ABOVE ALL, THE CHILDREN, THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY."

– SITTING BULL, HUNKPAPA LAKOTA

PHILOSOPHY

In the 1970s, the Chicano Movimiento brought an awareness to me about my Raza. It inspired me to take Chicano Studies in high school and college and join a MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) group. We presented a Cinco de Mayo event on campus and spent a semester in Mexico City visiting churches, museums, and pyramids, and learning indigenous history. In my working career, other co-workers and I coordinated annual Cinco de Mayo potlucks to share our heritage at the Colorado Department of Transportation. I joined the Colorado Society of Hispanic Genealogy to research my ancestors and met many new cousins with the same ancestors. I coordinated the Las Comadres and Friends National Latino Book Club in Denver. We read books by Latino authors to learn different perspectives on Latino cultures. The Movimiento empowered me, shaped my spirit of activism, and has remained in my heart forever.

My philosophy is "show up, get involved, and make and share connections!" Be inspired by the messages of the warriors who support non-profits and their causes. Get out of your comfort zone, have an open mind, and volunteer and meet great people. If an event looks interesting and there is no one to go with, just show up alone and make a connection with someone. Get involved, and if you don't find an event that involves something you're passionate about, start one. During the Covid pandemic, five Latino authors and I co-founded the Colorado Alliance of Latino Mentors and Authors (CALMA, www.calmaco.org) to promote Latino writers.



Two Centenarians

BY KAREN D. GONZALES

I was honored to become my parents' caregiver when, remarkably, both lived to be centenarians. Our family roots began in New Mexico with our precious Lucero and Trujillo grandparents, who created wonderful children who became the Greatest Generation. My Mama Clorinda Lucero was born in 1919 on a ranch in Cañoncito, New Mexico. She was the fourth child born in a family of nine to Maria Josefita Trujillo and Jose Urbano Lucero, a former New Mexico State Senator. I feel my grandfather's spirit of activism and both their kind, caring spirits living on in their children and grandchildren.

Mama married her loving soulmate Salomon Trujillo in November, 1941 in Las Vegas, New Mexico. They moved to a Hispanic neighborhood in Denver, a block away from St. Elizabeth's Church on 11th Street. They lived in the upstairs of a Victorian home that they called their "honeymoon house." The people of that neighborhood were sadly later displaced for a college campus to be built in what is now the Auraria Campus.

My incredible Dad proudly served in World War II at a 90-day combat zone in the Philippines. Mama worked at Montgomery Ward in Tacoma, Washington while my dad was in training. She returned to Las Vegas and continued working at Montgomery Ward until the war ended. They returned to Denver and Dad worked at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal and Mama again worked at Montgomery Ward on South Broadway. They bought a home in the East side of Denver and had a son, Ernie. Mama's parents also moved to Denver into a house across the street. They would have large Sunday family dinners since several of their children also moved to Denver. Photos of all of them are in History Colorado's Five Points Plus Neighborhood Memory Project webpage.

Along with Mama's parents and siblings, my folks joined the Good Americans Organization (G.A.O.), which was both a club and a civic organization that helped elderly and low-income people find housing. In 1955, they received a plaque, "To Mr. & Mrs. Salomon Trujillo In Appreciation for Their Untiring Efforts On Behalf of G.A.O." and attended banquets and dances at the G.A.O. Hall. A digital photo is available in Auraria's Library.

We moved to the West Colfax Neighborhood in 1962. My folks were blessed to live independently in this new home for 59 years.

When I was born, Mama quit her job. She didn't drive, so she took me on the city bus for doctor visits and to shop downtown. She had a beautiful voice and I remember her singing "Que Será, Será." When I was 10, I joined the Spanish Christmas choir at St. Cajetan's Church with Mama, where we attended church every Sunday. I was very proud to sing songs in Spanish.

Mama loved to sew and would make my clothes when I was in school. She also became the best cook by helping her mother and taught me how to cook traditional New Mexican dishes that I would later cook for her.

I loved the road trips we took to New Mexico, where Dad's parents and some of his and Mama's siblings lived. We had memorable Lucero and Trujillo family reunions with talent shows, dances, races, and games. One year, our Lucero family was in the Las Vegas Fourth of July parade, riding on my cousin's flatbed trucks with a banner that said, "Family Reunions/An American Tradition" and we all proudly sang "We Are Family" and sported our turquoise blue T-Shirts with the New Mexico flag and "Lucero Family Reunion." Whenever I hear that

song I always remember that reunion that took place at the YMCA camp near Las Vegas when all my tías and tíos (uncles and aunts) were still alive.

When Dad retired, he told me some very valuable advice, "Work for the government, because the benefits are good and you will have job security." Fortunately, the summer when I was 16, the bilingual human services agency Servicios de la Raza (Services for the People) referred me to a job with the federal government where I could work while I stayed in school.

I worked 4 years for the federal government and 26 years for state government. My folks cared for my son while I worked and picked him up from school. I'm very grateful for their help enabling me to attend after-work networking events with various Chambers of Commerce doing outreach in the transportation, construction, and engineering industries. As a public servant, I met the greatest people, which included my colleagues and contractors and consultants from the minority, women, and small business communities. It was a blessing to retire at age 50 with 30 years government service, thanks to Dad's great advice!

My folks loved dancing. Dad taught me how to do the Varsouviana – Put Your Little Foot dance that I would watch him gracefully dance with Mama. We had a big 60th Anniversary dance for them. Mama later got osteoporosis and could no longer dance, since she suffered from compression fractures on her spine, heart attacks, and two broken hips. However, she recovered quickly at the rehabs, and everyone admired her strength and courage. She began using a walker and could still cook for Dad until she turned 99. Dad kept driving to church, where he was the usher, until he turned 99. I was proud of all they could still remember and manage to do at their age. They were our family's pride and joy and celebrated 78 years of marriage!

Together Salomon and Clorinda became a true love story and inspiration to all our family. Our family was so proud of them setting a great example of living hard-working, faithful, honest lives dedicated to God. Mama was our Superwoman and Dad our Superman.

My brother and I had the privilege to become their caregivers. The roles were now reversed, I took Dad to church and cooked and cared for them, just as they did for their children. After Dad (age 103) and Ernie both passed away in 2020, I became a full-time caregiver. I treasured the last two years with Mama by my side. She told me, "I'll never forget you." I cared for dear Mama until December, 2021, when she passed away in her home under hospice care at age 102.

Mama and I have gone full circle as caregivers. It's all about love! I thank God for this beautiful, rare blessing to be so much loved and inspired by my folks and see them become Two Centenarians ~ "Que Será, Será, What Will Be, Will Be."



Norma Johnson

BOULDER, COLORADO

Norma Johnson is a healer, inspirationalist, poetic storyteller, and racial justice facilitator who brings a creative background into her distinctive presentation form of activism and education. Using oral forms of storytelling as a spoken word artist and playwright, Norma highlights stories of our shared humanity, history, and heart. She collaborates with a dynamic range of organizations, institutions, faith communities, arts groups, and civic groups, and with educational forums such as the highly regarded annual White Privilege Conference. Her deeply moving poems are featured in racial justice courses taught by educators across the country. Norma's storytelling inspires awareness and insight and the power we have to bring paths of healing into our future. www.allinspirit.com

PHILOSOPHY

I'm glad to be asked about my life philosophy. I haven't had to really think about this before, that is, for other people to consider. The first thing that comes to mind is to bear witness and to engage. I am here to bear witness to life, to my own inner stirring, and to the movement of other people around me, from my inner circles to my community and my world, and to notice the tapestry we weave as we journey together. I am here to bear witness to nature and her fierce gentle beautiful power to never fail to amaze me, to humble me, and to inspire me to pure wonder.

I am here to engage my life in moments and in years, to do and be the best I can, understanding that this includes stumbling as well as soaring, and to allow that full range for myself, as well as for others, as hard as that is sometimes. It is about engaging my life through my creativity, and to use the magic of that to touch hearts and inspire minds in a remembering of what we really are at the center ... divinely human.

NORMA'S

Life Quote

“‘BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD.’ I THINK THAT THE DRAWING BOARD OF LIFE IS A VERY CREATIVE FORMAT. COME BACK TO IT OFTEN AND ENJOY THE ART.”

My Mama, Florence Pearl (Davis) Johnson

BY NORMA JOHNSON

I grew up in a household of four generations — my immediate family and my dad's family. In my home there were three women: my great grandmother, my grandmother, and my mother. Each one was unique in stature, in personality, and in her embodiment of time, history, and culture. They raised me as the only girl sibling of two brothers who were about a decade older than me. I was the girl and the baby child and demanded a lot of their attention, which they all gave lovingly in their own ways.

But of all these women, it is my mama who stays with me as I traverse life. She loved me and counseled me and reprimanded me and taught me. I wonder now, how did she do it? How did love create such patience, such immense intention for my well-being that no matter what I did, good or bad, she was always able to steer me onto a path that would enhance my ability to experience something meaningful, something enriching for my soul? I didn't know then that these were not only her skills of parenting, but also the skills of a healer.

Yes, my mom was a healer. She grew up with elders who were still connected to the old ways, from old places and times, because of necessity and the need to survive and thrive as families and as a community. These elders were Black folks, mostly hailing from the south and putting down roots in northern New Jersey in times when normalized blatant racism prevailed.

I was the product of at least a third-generation lineage in Hackensack, New Jersey. My mama was born there, and so was her mama. But my mama's daddy was from North Carolina. He was a Geechee,

one of the island Gullah folks in the low country who still were infused with the ancient knowledge of their African ancestors.

My mama *knew things*. She knew things about people and about things that were going to happen. And she knew how to heal, not only wounds to the body but also wounds to the soul. She could conjure up and apply a balm that could soothe both. When she told me things about myself and about other people, it was like she had looked straight into our souls.

She was such a healer! I remember the poultices, mutton suet rubs, sugary pungent syrups, hot herb teas, cold compresses, and hot water bottles she used as she tended to my pains and ailments. If the doctor came with his black bag, he always ended up saying, "Whatever you've been doing, Florence, just keep on doing it, because it's working." Then he'd add, "I'll check back with you in a day or two to see how she's doing."

Her "knowing things" led her to guide my life in a way that amazes me to this day. While many Black folks around me were guiding their children to accept what was traditionally expected by society in terms of dreams and ambitions, my mama and daddy, through example, led us to understand that any mindset could be broken, and that following your heart was a true and honest path for that journey.

My mama groomed me, her little girl, to be able to navigate a White world that she didn't know. She made sure I had access to places, types of people, and ways of living that would become keys for my life. Even something as simple as showing me how to set a table with a salad fork, and use it, was her way of preparing me for a broader societal existence. I couldn't see the

point at the time, since we rarely ate salads, and if we did, our regular ole fork did a fine job of it.

Later, when my Little Miss Junior League baseball team finished first, we were treated to dinner at one of the finest restaurants in town. There at my place setting, right where my mama had taught me, was a salad fork, right next to the regular fork. I looked at my mama, smiled, and used it, with the confidence that this "knowing" woman had inspired in me.

She took me to amazing performances at theaters in New York, to nature parks and amusement parks, and the World's Fairs in New York and in Canada. We went to restaurants and department stores and specialty shops. And we stopped at favorite ice cream parlors along the way. In that pre-Civil Rights Act era, we were often among the few Black faces, or were the only ones, in those surroundings. It was in these places that I gained not only insight to what can be available to me, but I also gained my comfort level of knowing that I too, belonged there.

You see, Florence Pearl Davis grew up in the 1920s and 1930s in a segregated neighborhood in a segregated town at a time when lynching and terrorism of Black people were forms of control. She was routinely denied access to the kinds of things that she was so dedicated to exposing me to. In the 1960s, when integration opened things up a bit, she dove in, to make sure I developed the ability to expand my life by experiencing even more of them. But none of this was ever comfortable for her. She didn't like talking to or mingling with White people when she didn't have to, except for a very basic civility and neighborliness as the occasion obliged.

Mama took me to dance classes, sewed my costumes, and got me to all the rehearsals for the many events I performed at, in church, in the community, and in school. She listened with keen interest to what I wrote, even if the teacher had marked much of my grammar with red ink. She encouraged my creativity and contributed to it in every way imaginable. And never once did she say, "You can't do that." I remember how she would ask me about something, "Is this what you want to do?" And if I said, "Yes!" she was behind me 100%.

My parents provided very well for us. My dad was the first Black police sergeant in our town, but like most Black folks at that time, he still had to work "side" jobs to fill the gap between what he was paid and what he should have been paid. Mama also did "days" work, housekeeping at White people's homes to help pay for all the things she wanted to make sure I had a chance to experience.

Back then, I didn't understand the depth of my mom's influence in my life, and the effort she put in to guide and help me. Of course as a kid, I pretty much took it all for granted. But I see now that I was taking it all in — the lessons she taught me, as a background to the story that I now live as my life.

Like my mom, I have my own ability to "know things," most likely inherited from her, which has channeled me into the healing arts, where I became a spiritual healer in the ancient ways of "laying on of hands." And the exposure she gave me to the performing arts paved the way for my love of theater, and for me to become a professional costumer, and later, a playwright. Ultimately, she infused me with my love of creative expression and my love of story, of how it connects us and heals us. This influenced me to become a writer and a social justice advocate, using the art of storytelling and performance as a way into people's hearts. A way to inspire us toward a more just and equitable world. Thank you, Mama.

Elena was born in Paumanok, now known as Long Island, in New York state. She grew up in a mostly middle class neighborhood, where she always sought out Nature from a young age, and felt more aligned with birds, trees, animals, flowers, the ocean, and the sun and sky than with any family or people in the community. She became an activist for peace, justice, and environmental and Indigenous support issues while in high school and college.

As a musician, certified Spanish interpreter, crafts person, and radio producer, she has always tried to use her skills and energy to work for a more just, peaceful, and equitable world with respect for women and for Mother Earth. Her work to support people, organizations, and communities in these efforts is based on the need to respect ecological and spiritual laws and live in balance with the ecosystems that Mother Earth gives us, and which we need to pass down to future generations of all species.

ELENA'S

Life Quote

“EVEN A WOUNDED WORLD IS FEEDING US. EVEN A WOUNDED WORLD HOLDS US, GIVING US MOMENTS OF WONDER AND JOY. I CHOOSE JOY OVER DESPAIR. NOT BECAUSE I HAVE MY HEAD IN THE SAND, BUT BECAUSE JOY IS WHAT THE EARTH GIVES ME DAILY AND I MUST RETURN THE GIFT.”

— ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

Elena Holly Klaver

NIWOT, COLORADO



My Comadre and Corn Mother,

Laurita Naranjo

BY ELENA KLAVER

When you experience abuse as a child, you turn to what is comforting. For me that was always Nature, being outdoors. Although I didn't know the words "Mother Nature," I had the lived experience of Nature as my true Mother. As I grew up, I always felt that my mostly white, middle class Jewish community was alien to me, and that I was alien to it, that I just couldn't fit in and didn't want to. I tried to be outside as much as possible, and always identified more with the trees, birds, flowers, waters, and animals I met.

I felt that everything that was part of my human community — the food, values, actions, institutions, and religious expressions — were things not to embrace, and which I knew I didn't want. When I graduated high school and moved to Arizona for college, I started to meet other people with different values, different practices, and different accents and food, and I felt more fulfilled than I did at home. When I moved to Colorado at the age of 20, I almost immediately became involved with environmental and Indigenous support groups. I was arrested in 1978 in an anti-nuclear demonstration at Rocky Flats, and was invited to attend ceremonies at inipis — traditional sweat lodges.

On this Red Road, the spiritual path, we have the opportunity to look for deeper meaning than what is typically found in the more material world of the dominant culture. I could see and feel, from my lived experience and from listening to others, that the continuum of violence extends from violence against women and children to violence against the Earth.

As a young woman, I felt that I had two paths — the spiritual one, and the environmental / political / social activism one. They were separate for a long time. But when I met Laurita, she exemplified how both paths can and should be integrated.

We first met at actions to close the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons plant that was located between

Boulder and Denver. We both felt the deep need to work to stop production of nuclear weapons, which were contaminating the people and environment around the plant, as well as threatening the planet. Later, we both worked to support Diné (Navajo) elders who were resisting forced relocation from their homes in Arizona by the U.S. government. Laurita and her family were centrally involved, and I was a supporter. I always felt so inspired by her focus of practicality, spirituality, commitment, and humor.

We were also part of the Red Earth Women's Alliance, a group of women working to eliminate the celebration of Columbus Day in Denver. Again, Laurita was a central part of the group, and I was a supporter and ally. The group was begun by Indigenous women as a way to bring prayer, unity, and women's voices to the effort to stop commemorating Columbus Day and to transform it into something positive — the Four Directions All Nations March. The women wanted to transform the effort of saying no to celebrating the lies about Columbus into saying yes to unity and an honest telling of history. Although it took many years, that effort was finally successful.

We also used to cook together at a spiritual camp, working in an outdoor kitchen to support the small community of people who gathered for ceremonies. I always felt inspired learning to cook different things to create healthy meals for the community. I learned from Laurita how preparing food is truly an expression of love for and connection with the people you are serving, and how love is an essential ingredient in any recipe.

Music has also been an important part of our connection. We used to sometimes meet, interestingly enough now that we are both Corn Mothers, at the Corn Mother Restaurant in Boulder, where I would occasionally play music. Laurita is a member of the Two Spirit Society, a group of Indigenous LGBTQ people. Through our singing together, I came to sing

with her in a Two Spirit group. We would joke that I was the "token straight white girl" in the group. This was another example of how she is always inclusive in her relationships.

One time at a protest march, we were walking and singing together. Someone told me to go to a different part of the march, because he wanted the Indigenous people separate from the non-Indigenous people. Laurita told him, no we are singing together, we are family. That exemplified the unity and connection that she has always embodied. It was an example of how harmony in music can also foster harmony in relationships, and how it is an essential part of healing. I have learned so many songs from Laurita, and music is a vital part of my life and work.

I admire Laurita's commitment to nonviolence, and to healing on the individual, as well as the community, national, and international level. Through Laurita's friendship, I have learned about the power of prayer, the power of marching in the streets, of simply walking on the Earth, step after step, and of the medicine of preparing food for beloved friends who become family. I have felt blessed to have found and created family throughout the Americas, and Laura has been an integral part of that.

Many other people have taught and shared with me, from the knowledge of herbs, to traditional dance, to traditional medicine practices, to fighting for justice in the world and balance with Mother Earth. That has all been part of my learning how to always give back to the community and to Mother Earth. Someone once talked about how one can always make new friends, and that is beautiful. But there is something special and irreplaceable about the friends that one has had for decades, who have passed through and shared so many events together, and who knew you when you were just beginning on the true path of your life. Those friends are so special. For me, Laurita is that friend with whom I share a lifetime, and for that I am eternally grateful.

PHILOSOPHY

I believe in the connection of all living beings, in both an ecological and spiritual sense. I believe that the connection we all innately have to Mother Earth is damaged and falls out of balance in the presence of inequality, environmental destruction, misogyny, and threats to communities, whether those threats are racist or genocidal, or cause extinctions. I believe in the sacredness of all Life, and in the need to restore love and respect for Mother Earth and all children of all species.

I have learned from wise elders of many traditions, but mostly from Indigenous ones, whose love and respect for Creation are necessary foundations for restoring the balance of life. I try to live every day using my energy, skills, and privileges to help in that healing. As someone who grew up with experiences of abuse, it has always been important to me to focus on healing at all levels — personal, family, community, and beyond.



Lucha Aztzin Martínez de Luna

GOLDEN, COLORADO

Lucha Aztzin Martínez de Luna was born and raised in Colorado. She has worked on numerous archaeological projects in the Southwest, American West, and central and southern Mexico. She serves as associate curator of Latino Heritage at History Colorado and is a Ph.D. student at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA. She has worked as a curatorial assistant at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Museo de las Americas, and the Regional Museum of Guadalajara, and as the Division Director for the State Council of Culture and Arts in Chiapas, Mexico. Martínez de Luna is director of La Providencia Archaeological Project and a visiting professor at the University of Science and Arts in Chiapas, where she directs an archaeological field school at the Zoque site of O'na Tök, a Preclassic to Postclassic regional center in western Chiapas. In Colorado, she is Executive Director of the Chicano/a/x Murals of Colorado Project, a grass roots organization that advocates to preserve the visual heritage of Colorado. The project collaborates with communities, artists, scholars, and cultural and academic institutions to develop educational and preservation programs to celebrate and advocate for the protection of legacy murals throughout the state.

PHILOSOPHY

As a daughter of civil rights activists, I learned at a very early age how the struggle for a just world requires many sacrifices. Losing my mama in 1996, I realized how little time we have in this world to help future generations live in a more equitable world. WE as people of color have been conditioned to view ourselves as lesser. It is our responsibility to overcome our internalized self-hatred that is thrust upon us when entering an educational system at an early age, and to teach future generations to do the same. It is our communal duty to ensure that our children and their children believe in themselves, so that through acts of compassion they will create enough positive spiritual energy to vanquish hate. It is my hope that each generation will continue to heal and persevere!

LUCHA'S

Life Quote

"¡SÍ SE PUEDE!"

ORIGINALLY A SAYING OF CÉSAR CHÁVEZ AND THE UNITED FARM WORKERS.

LITERALLY, "YES, IT CAN BE DONE!" BUT IT IS USUALLY TRANSLATED AS "YES WE CAN!"

Tribute to Soledad Jovita Trejo Martinez

BY LUCHA MARTÍNEZ DE LUNA

My mama, Soledad Jovita Trejo Martínez, shined like the sun; she always glowed! Her eleven grandchildren and four great grandchildren call her Sol (Sun). Only two of them were able to get to know Sol before her passing, but all of them share a deep connection to her, as do I.

She never put herself before others. Her four daughters and the rest of her family were always her primary concern. She often hitchhiked over 50 miles to take groceries both to her sisters in Northern Colorado and to her cousins in Southern Colorado. She was also greatly compassionate. Although we weren't well off, she often invited homeless individuals to eat with her and share the few possessions she owned. She worried about the welfare of everyone, and often gave vitamins to strangers if she thought they weren't eating well.

She was a deeply spiritual person and always had a candle with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe burning next to a small bronze statue of Buddha, with classical or mariachi music playing in the background. Her compassion for others resonated throughout her life and has left a deep impression on me, as did her fascination with ancient/Indigenous cultures, religions, and history, which inspired me to become an archaeologist.

Growing up in small rural towns in Southern and Northern Colorado, her parents and siblings experienced extreme racial discrimination. Like many Mexican-American/Hispano families living there, often in poor conditions, their heritage and culture were primarily celebrated only in their home. Her father's family migrated from Zacatecas, Mexico in 1907. He met his wife-to-be (my grandmother) in San Luis, Colorado.

Her ancestors, the Palomino and Baca families, migrated from Abiquiu, New Mexico in the 1820s. My grandparents and their young children traveled throughout Colorado working as migrant farm workers until my grandfather became a coal miner and eventually settled in Frederick, a small town about 30 miles north of Denver.

My mama was an avid reader, excelling in school, despite her difficult life at home, especially after her mother passed away when she was 15. She valued her chance at an education, worked hard, and graduated with honors from high school. She then worked as a nanny in East Denver while attending Metropolitan State College of Denver, where she met my father, Emanuel Martínez.

My parents were committed to social justice. They both joined the Crusade for Justice, which sought to address injustices against Chicanos. My father created art for the movement, and my mother advocated for initiatives to help the group's goals. They helped with front line protests, organized events, and edited newsletter articles. They worked together in Colorado, California, and New Mexico to support various Chicano/a/x movements. As always, my mom was very passionate about equality in education and promoted access to learning about Indigenous and Mexican, Hispano, and Latino History in the curriculum.

In California, my parents showed their commitment by supporting the East Los Angeles high school walkouts of 1968, in which 15,000 students walked out to protest racial discrimination in the schools. During the protests, my mama, pregnant with my older sister, was

brutally beaten over the head by a policeman and suffered a major concussion.

In 1969, they returned to Denver to continue supporting the Crusade for Justice. They lived in a building at 13th and Downing, where my mama worked in the curio shop helping to raise money for the Crusade, and for many other community causes. She opposed male domination and extreme misogynistic behavior, whether in the majority culture or in the Chicano community. Because of this, and other practices that were going on, my parents resigned from the Crusade for Justice in 1969, along with other members who were disenfranchised and fearful of their own safety.

Despite their disillusionment, my parents didn't cut back on their commitment to social justice. They moved into the Lincoln Housing Projects and quickly joined forces with a well-organized and equitable social justice movement in the Westside. As experienced organizers, they eagerly supported the growing activism in the neighborhood. In June 1969, the community organized a sign changing event to change the name of Lincoln Park to La Alma (The Soul) park, since it was in the La Alma neighborhood. The police arrived in riot gear and forced all participants into the Lincoln Housing Projects courtyard, and mace bombs were dropped from helicopters onto the crowd. During this event my mama experienced another major concussion and was taken to Denver General Hospital with my sister.

After returning from exploring the muralism of Mexico, my father was determined to start painting murals in public spaces. Together with the community and my mama, he painted the facade of our home, then the shed at Lincoln-La Alma Park, the pool building where I was baptized. In 1971, my mama ran for the School Board, School District 1, under the La Raza Unida party ticket, while continuing to organize. However, the tensions with Crusade for Justice

leaders continued to grow until my parents decided to leave Colorado. We moved to Velarde, New Mexico, where they continued to support the Land Rights Movement led by Reyes López Tijerina. While we lived in New Mexico, my mother became increasingly affected by her concussions and the traumas she experienced as a young adult and began to experience extreme migraines and other afflictions.

For most of my younger adult life, I was very angry and disappointed with the Chicano movement (El Movimiento). I blamed the movement for the physical and mental harm that it caused my mama. Even though she continued to be a kind, considerate person, passionate and willing to fight for human rights despite the struggles faced in her personal life, she remained fearful until the end of the hurt that individuals can inflict on others.

Her passion for ancient history inspired me to study archaeology and to dedicate my career to studying Indigenous cultures. For many years, I was content to focus on my passion for the ancient past, but in the 2010s, I became aware of many efforts to rewrite historical narratives of El Movimiento, in which many individuals, families, and communities that did not agree with others were being excluded. I recognized this toxic behavior that was so harmful to my mama during El Movimiento. I knew that as both her daughter and a woman, I had a responsibility to defend and protect the memory and sacrifices of many, especially women, who have not been recognized for their contributions. As both an archaeologist and historian, I refuse to believe that prehistory, history, and contemporary stories should be written by elites and the people who have the loudest voices. Through space and time, we are all interwoven, and the voices of the many will ultimately prevail, as will the voice of my mama!



Deborah Martinez Martinez

PUEBLO, COLORADO

Deborah Martinez Martinez, Ph.D. is CEO of the publishing company Vanishing Horizons and is a published writer of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry of the Southwest. In conjunction with co-founder and business partner Robert Pacheco, Vanishing Horizons publishes memoir, historical, and cultural works and offers editorial and writing services.

For 20 years, Deborah recruited students in Colorado and New Mexico for Colorado State University at Pueblo and for 8 years she recruited for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Educational Service Center. She served as interim director of the Pueblo Hispanic Education Foundation (PHEF), and was on the boards of PHEF and the Colorado Educational Services and Development Association for 10 years each. She has served as an historical interpreter at El Pueblo History Museum, with a frontier expertise in natural dyes. She is a founding member of the Fray Angelico Chávez Chapter of the Genealogy Society of Hispanic America and currently serves on the Board of El Movimiento Sigue (The Movement Continues), a social justice organization.

Martinez is a 1972 graduate of Walsenburg High School, a 1976 graduate of the University of Southern Colorado (B.A.), a 1982 graduate of University of Northern Colorado (M.A.), and a 2001 graduate of University of Colorado at Denver (Ph.D.).

PHILOSOPHY

I am the product of an extended Catholic family, which includes my mother, father, and hordes of lively cousins. I grew up on a farm in Colorado's Huerfano Valley in the 1960s. This gave me a deep love of the land of the Southwest. Piñon trees dot the landscape of my childhood, along with the brilliant, gold-like cottonwoods in the fall. The land, with its canyons and hills, vortexes, and secret places, allows me to hear the planet. The wind wraps round the piñon trees and speaks to me, the aspen eyes watch, and the interlaced roots of the aspen, the largest biological creature on the planet, surge energy.

But nature has many enemies, among which plastic is a demon. It is my personal campaign to discourage its use. I host plastic talks, like Tupperware parties in reverse. I give away alternate carry bags, and lists of things not to buy, or to buy or use instead of plastics. In this way, I encourage planetary responsibility.

I promote social justice in the same way. I host meetings at my home to encourage dialogue on issues. During the Chicano Movement's early days (1970s), I came of age and went to college. I saw that each person's humanity was being challenged. Because people chose to stand on different sides of issues, some would say, "They are monsters," or "Those people are the anti-christ." I try to give people a different perspective of the issue. I try to keep my mind open to see different ways to encourage responsibility for our planet and to demonstrate that diversity is best for us all. I continue to fight.

DEBORAH'S

Life Quote

"LIFE SHRINKS OR EXPANDS IN PROPORTION TO ONE'S COURAGE."

— ANAIS NIN

My Corn Mothers, Rose Lucero Martinez and Others

BY DEBORAH MARTINEZ MARTINEZ

Sometimes community people said of my mother, “She’s only a stay-at-home mom,” but she was definitely not “only.” She made it possible for me to eat, to learn, and to rise from an introverted young girl embarrassed by her academic aptitude, to become a community leader. Even as a child, I spoke up for those who would not speak for themselves, who were shy like my mother was.

My mother valued school. She was a role model because she fought her shyness, enrolling in a Toastmaster’s course, then attending community college. At her Toastmaster’s graduation banquet, I saw the respect her classmates had for her. So learning to speak well also became a goal for me.

Mama was persistent. And she took things into her own hands. When a contractor didn’t show up to take down a wall, she took a sledgehammer to it. She didn’t quit, and didn’t let me quit either.

Part of the reason I am a writer is because Mama was a reader. Some summer days, all of us — Mama, my brother, my sister, and I — were holed up in different parts of the house, reading. She showed such appreciation for books that the library was our favorite hangout in Walsenburg.

Mama taught us to appreciate the nature around us. I still remember when she cracked open a cottonwood twig to show us the star inside. We went on long drives through the hills with a lunch basket. She talked about the wind and rain and snow as if they were personal friends. She was a role model for me by reaching out beyond her personal limits to make a better life for her children.

My Other Corn Mothers

I met so many wonderful women at the University of Southern Colorado, now Colorado State University at Pueblo. Gloria Gutierrez, the Executive Assistant to the President, served eight presidents. She was a valuable link between the President and the Pueblo community. She modeled calm, friendly, professional behavior in any circumstance. She was, and is, sterling.

Deborah Espinosa, retired director of El Pueblo History Museum, modeled grace and diplomacy. She worked with difficult groups of people and built bridges of cooperation. She raised four daughters who also spoke out for social justice. She gave people as much time as they needed to explain their circumstances. This was hard when so many people needed her attention. When my husband died unexpectedly, she welcomed me as a volunteer at the El Pueblo to distract and comfort me. She found a place for me where my skills were useful.

Librarians have shaped my life. To be a reader, one must read widely. Charlene Garcia Simms introduced me to Chicano writers and to Southwestern history. This history helps me construct a backdrop for every novel I wish to write. Charlene and I worked together on many projects, like the Latinx Book Festival, Aztec Poetry Night, and book launches for many authors. And she was a publisher, a career I now pursue.

With inspiration from Charlene, who owned a publishing company, El Escritorio, I created Vanishing Horizons Publishing, something that had been in my head since I was young. In 2010, my friend Robert Pacheco said he would help, and we were off. We

have published 15 non-fiction books in the past 10 years, most of them about Chicano/a history and culture. Two books have been finalists for the Colorado Book Awards (Humanities). I’m so grateful to Charlene for her inspiration, and to Robert for his help.

The late Rita J. Martinez, a community leader with El Movimiento Sigue, demonstrated that a leader’s primary job is to listen to others. We met in 1976 when we worked for the newspaper La Cucaracha. She was the quintessential community leader and immersed herself in different organizations like Faith Leaders and NAACP. When she called for a protest, people of all walks of life came forward. She made sure to hear everyone’s viewpoint, and generations of folks trusted her. She began her career by helping families write legal complaints about mistreatment by the police. She was dedicated to the needs of our community.

My Corn Father—Ray Aguilera

I met Ray Aguilera, a humble man, but a large leader who envisioned scholarships for Chicanos, and a lot more. I believed in his vision and his leadership as he created the Pueblo Hispanic Education Foundation (PHEF), where I was a board member for 10 years. Through this organization and his connection to other Hispanic leaders, he created Hispanidad, a locally produced PBS show. Ray appointed me to co-produce it with Bob Armendariz and Ron Weekes.

It can be hard to work with all-male groups, but I was able to stand my ground because of the role modeling of my “Corn Parents.” I worked for 10 years on the PHEF Cinco de Mayo Telethon raising scholarship dollars with Ray and with Gloria Gutierrez. He appointed me director of a summer program for 10th graders to help prepare them for college. He also selected me as director of a program for high school mothers mentored by college women. I owe so much of my professional growth to Ray.

My Greatest Life Crisis, and Some Giving Back to My “Corn Parents”

In 2018, my lungs were collapsing from an unknown cause. I was down to my last little piece of unaffected lung and on oxygen 24/7. I started buying birthday gifts for my new grandson because I knew I wouldn’t be around long. Then, on January 2, 2019, we received a call from the University of Colorado transplant center in Denver. They had found potential lungs that might fit me. We had to be there by midnight.

The next day, the ten-hour surgery to transplant both lungs was completed successfully, thanks to the dedicated team of doctors and other support staff. Now, my only problem was to discover what tasks I had left undone. Why did God bring me back?

As I reflected on all the teaching and inspiration from my “Corn Parents,” I realized there was still so much left for me to do. Bob Pacheco and I completed two books in 2019, two in 2020, and two more in 2021, during the rough times of the Pandemic.

I served as Treasurer for Rita Martinez’s organization El Movimiento Sigue and helped her build a strong non-profit. Bob and I supported the publication of Charlene Garcia Simms’ book *Orphan Stalk: Growing Up Adopted in a Manito Culture*.

I don’t know why I was given new lungs, new life, and energy, and why my family and Bob worked so hard to prepare me for a future. But I don’t ask “What’s left to do?” because there are so many causes I feel drawn to, such as campaigning against plastic and promoting equity in school education. There is so much to do to help make this a more positive world.

Jennifer McBride

PARKER, COLORADO

I was born in New York City and raised on Long Island. My B.A. in Communication Design from Parsons School of Design brought me to Colorado in 1978, when Coors hired me as the first woman in their Creative Services Department. I spent 20 years as an art director and graphic designer.

My father's illness and death in 1992 changed the course of my life. I wondered if others felt as overwhelmed as I did in the process of grief. I followed my heart and received a Master's degree in Pastoral Ministry from St. Thomas Theological Seminary in Denver, feeling that I had been called to care for grieving people.

I have served at Horan & McConaty Funeral Service in Denver as Director of Bereavement Support & Community Education since 1996 and later became a Vice President and one of two employee-owners. In 2001, following a dream, and with the support of John

Horan and his mother, Valerie, I helped create HeartLight Center, a non-profit organization for grief support. It has served thousands of people in the past 20 years. I also am a deacon for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

PHILOSOPHY

I was raised and nurtured in a family focused on home and hospitality, and reverence and ritual. My early years in Long Beach, New York were full of extended family, faith, and creativity.

My parents believed in serving others first. No one was ever a stranger in our home. Everyone was welcomed and valued. In the 1960s they helped create a community of interracial and interreligious harmony in our small but diverse community. I remember meetings when leaders of different faith communities came together in our home for important, sensitive conversations.

My parents taught me that everyone has a story. We don't know what kind of burdens others are carrying. Patrick del Zoppo, under whom I studied grief and loss, taught me to always use this as a lens when caring for others: "What does this loss mean to this person at this time in his or her life?"

I deeply believe in following my heart and my dreams. Moving to Colorado 44 years ago took courage, but I trusted it was where I was being called. The work I've been privileged to do over the last 27 years has been a sacred calling. Following my dream of co-founding HeartLight Center as a beacon of light in the darkest times in people's lives is more than I ever hoped to accomplish.

I am grateful beyond words...

JENNIFER'S

Life Quote

"LORD MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT
OF YOUR PEACE."

WHERE THERE IS HATRED
LET ME SOW LOVE,
WHERE THERE IS INJURY, PARDON,
WHERE THERE IS DOUBT, FAITH,
WHERE THERE IS DESPAIR, HOPE,
WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS, LIGHT,
WHERE THERE IS SADNESS, JOY.
DIVINE MASTER, GRANT THAT I MAY
NOT SO MUCH SEEK TO BE CONSOLED
AS TO CONSOLE,
TO BE UNDERSTOOD, AS TO UNDERSTAND,
TO BE LOVED. AS TO LOVE.
FOR IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE,
AND IT IS IN PARDONING THAT WE
ARE PARDONED,
AND IT IS IN DYING THAT WE ARE BORN...
TO ETERNAL LIFE."

— ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI



A String of Pearls

BY JENNIFER MCBRIDE

It is an impossible task to choose one woman who has been significant in my life when I am part of a STRONG matrilineal line of women who came before me and who are coming after me. So, I must honor them all!

As I reflected on this, I kept hearing “String of Pearls,” which Benny Goodman’s orchestra performed, in my head. I looked up the lyrics. I realized that I am one in a string of pearls — the women who came before me and those who will move into the world with their own unique gifts and qualities. We are a continuous “string of pearls.”

*A long time ago when my mother’s hands were all my world
She taught me everything there was
To know about holding and being held
Like a grain of sand in an oyster shell
The seed of knowledge grows
The small thing becomes a pearl
— Lyrics by Deborah Conway*

My Nana (Petrinella Soderbom)

My great grandmother, Petrinella Soderbom, came to New York from Sweden at 16, carrying her valuables in a wooden box her father built for her, with a false bottom to hide her money. She came to Long Beach as it was being settled.

My gifts from Nana – Courage to go to totally new places and begin a new life. She is the anchor of my string of pearls.

My Mom-Mom (Anna Henkel Butler)

My grandmother Anna moved to the next block from us when she married Edmund Butler. They had six children. She also worked as a cook in a school cafeteria. She bought coats at church rummage sales, took them apart, turned them inside out, and made new coats for her children. She made sure there was

always enough to feed another person at the table. Her rule was “FHB” (Family Hold Back) until they were sure the guest had been served. Our church was the People’s Church, a non-denominational church that welcomed all. Nana and Mom-Mom cleaned it every week. Mom and Dad married there, Mom was the first baby baptized there, as were my sister Penny and I. And I was married, and my daughter Emily was baptized, there.

My grandmother was the soul of generosity and hospitality. Her answer to a request for something to eat was always, “All you want!” Her kitchen was barely the size of a closet, yet she cooked the most wonderful meals there. She taught me to make biscuits as I helped her cut the rolled-out dough with a shot glass.

My gifts from Mom-Mom – Unbridled generosity and love, resourcefulness, the ability to make something out of nothing, with a lot of love.

My Mom (Margaret Butler Sutter)

My Mom was the youngest in her family and the first to attend college — Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She was warm, funny, child-like in her sense of joy at the simplest things, and one of the most creative spirits I’ve ever known. I remember how she would saw off the corners of a rectangular table to make it oval, so kids wouldn’t get hurt if they fell on it.

My gifts from Mom – Unbounded creativity, pure joy at the simplest things, gracious hospitality, and including everyone, especially the marginalized.

Aunt Anne (Anne Butler McLoone)

Aunt Anne was SO gracious, and so talented at singing, although she never had lessons because there was no money for them. She made me feel special like no one else could. She read me storybooks, praised the gibberish I typed on her typewriter, and took me to the ballet and lunch in New York City.

My spiritual discussions with her were the deepest I’ve ever had. She had known grief and loss, but figured out how to go on despite being a single mother.

My gifts from Aunt Anne – Deep faith and spiritual inquisitiveness, her incredible ability to listen to and honor other people, her love of music and dance.

Aunt Ellie (Eleanor Butler Coombes)

Aunt Ellie was SO crafty and talented. She did knitting, crocheting, needlepoint, embroidery, crewel, and every other kind of needlework. Like Aunt Anne, she knew grief and loss, but figured out how to go on as a single mother.

My gifts from Aunt Ellie – The courage to try any challenge, whether it was a craft pattern or challenging people’s stereotypes of women.

The women from the previous generation, who I was surrounded, nurtured, and loved by, sang together in harmony in the kitchen while doing the dishes after a shared meal.

My Sister Penny (Penelope Sutter Grote)

My sister Penny - SO lovely, gracious, Phi Beta Kappa, an incredible writer and lifelong learner. She can make me laugh like NO ONE ELSE!

My gifts from Penny – Love, humor and sisterhood that deepens with every passing year, and our shared story.

My Daughter Emily (Emily Mirabella Johnson)

Emily is strong, fierce, and beautiful. She has a serving heart, is well organized and process-oriented, and a wonderful mother to her daughters.

My Daughter Annie (Anne Santina Mirabella)

Annie is super intelligent and intellectual, but has the heart of a spiritual seeker. She reads voraciously, has a deep love of animals, and true to her convictions, sees beyond the stars.

My gifts from my daughters – Emily and Annie are the ultimate loves of my life. They are so different and special, each in her own right. There is no greater experience and honor in my life than being their mother.

My Granddaughters

Hannah (24) – Hardworking, determined, creative, and organized.

Madison (17) – Creative, her own person, cautious, mystical, lover of plants and nature.

Chole (13) – Super caring, helpful, animal lover, affectionate and hilarious.

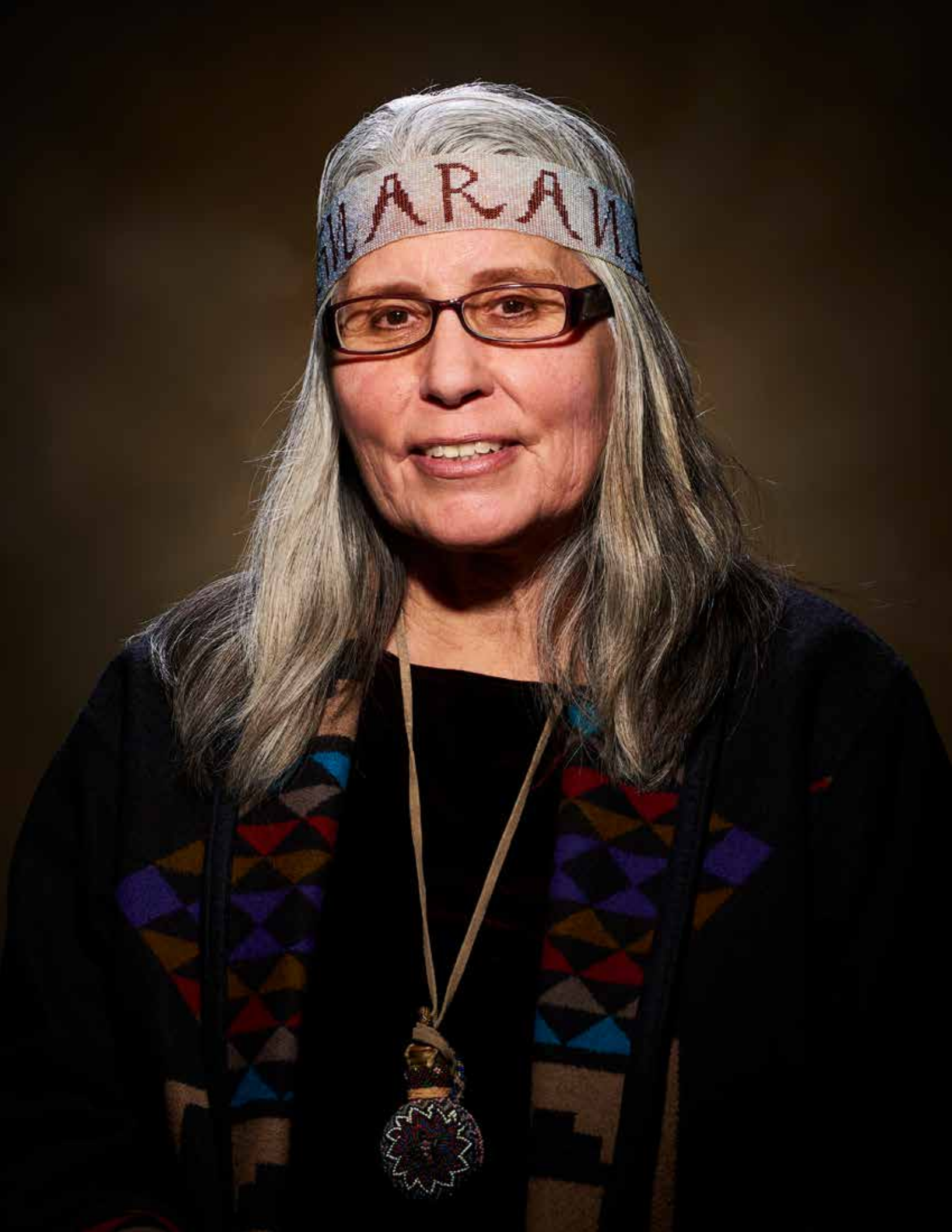
Zoey (9) – Lives life with no holds barred — I wish I had been that free!

My gifts from my granddaughters – Like a beautiful, lush garden of a million hues, their potential will change the world as they continue to bloom!

Pearls are formed in an oyster by an irritant, like a grain of sand. They represent wisdom gained through experience. Challenges can create something beautiful, because of, and in spite of, their difficulty.

The pearls of wisdom from the women who came before me taught me what I needed to know to face challenges and respond with courage, strength, and most of all, love.

And may it continue to be so as this “string of pearls” grows ever longer and stronger! ...



Laura (Laurita) Naranjo

DENVER, COLORADO

Laurita's maternal family moved from Colorado's San Luis Valley (El Valle) to Denver in the 1920s. Her paternal family migrated from Nova Scotia in the mid-1800s. Her parents Evelyn and Paul met in Denver during the Depression. After marrying in 1953, they moved to California, where Laurita was born. Later, they moved back to Denver, where she met her maternal grandparents and learned stories, music, and her family history.

As a child Laurita had nuclear war visions and knew the dangers of fallout and nuclear weapons at Rocky Flats in Colorado. With family support, she committed herself to anti-nuclear, social justice, and First Nations causes, along with working for 17 years in the nonprofit sector.

Throughout life, she has met with community and tribal leaders, the International Two Spirit Society, and women who have become her spiritual maestras. She has three amazing children, born and raised on Denver's Northside. Laurita is blessed with four grandchildren, the most precious loves of her life.

PHILOSOPHY

I am one of the Omecayotl or Two Spirit people, who believe that we are engendered with both female and male "teotl," life force, in unity. Two Spirits are born to balance and defend our indigenous historical identities. Given the brutal record of fear and hatred, I am dedicated to collectively serve the ceremonies of our Indigenous people who predate homophobia in the Western hemisphere. We must reclaim Two Spirit culture, our multi-gendered people who have been so terribly misrepresented and underrepresented.

In native Nahautl culture, North America is described as Anahuac or Nantlalli, Mother Earth. Omecayotl (Two Spirit People) are dedicated to honoring the Indigenous missing and murdered peoples and languages that have impacted by colonization. With other descendants, I help create a safe, sacred space by gathering to celebrate our strengths and culture. My life's philosophy is spiritual activism and co-creating well-being through this solidarity.

In the fun-loving beauty of the Indigenous world that I have experienced in my travels, I received two altars that represent guardianship of the Northern and Southern traditional sacred fires. I received my ceremonial name Quetzalhitlzin, which means Brilliant Feathered Hummingbird. I also welcomed sobriety in honor of our Omecayotl, Two Spirit people. In the spirit of extended family members and all our relations, I hold space in my heart for the hearts of others.

LAURITA'S

Life Quote

"XITETEMACHI TLATZOTLALISTLI.
CONFÍA EN EL AMOR. TRUST LOVE."

— QUETZALHUITLZILIN (BRILLIANT
FEATHERED HUMMINGBIRD) LAURITA
NARANJO

MI ABUELITA SAID
“Put Attention:” STORY ABOUT
MY ABUELITA AND CORN MOTHER,
Angelita Valdez Naranjo
BY LAURA NARANJO

Our family story about the first season of my life says that nine months after my parents moved to Salinas, my Naranjo grandparents showed up at the door and said, “Where’s the baby?” It was their first time outside of Colorado, yet my mom said I wasn’t born until two years after their visit. My siblings were born in Monterey and San Francisco. My youngest two siblings were born in Denver, loving our California family vacations and these stories.

When we moved to Colorado, there were many big changes, like going to church on Sundays. One of the best was getting to know *mis Abuelitos*. I loved the huge family dinners at their home in East Denver. At the time we lived with our grandparents, cramped into their small bungalow.

Mi Abuelita Angelita Valdez Naranjo was truly my Corn Mother. She was my best friend, even though I didn’t meet her until I was 7. She knew my epigenetic childhood trauma, which was in the horrible nuclear war visions I experienced and racial discrimination at school. She and mi Abuelito were prometidos en matrimonio, promised in marriage, from the time they were born. Having an arranged marriage at 14 was customary, and she used her strength to create a great sense of well-being.

After their marriage, they inherited my Abuelo’s rancho and had 5 surviving children of 11 births. She would say each name of the ones who passed and cry. They told my mom that the rancho was lost in the 1920s to levied taxes that accrued without landowners being notified. Another story said that a relative gambled the land away while trying to save it.

I’m sure that Abuelita and Abuelito had to work hard given these losses. Their *rancho* was in Las Sauces in the San Luis Valley. On hundreds of acres they raised cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and crops. I loved to hear mi Abuelita share her love of that land in her stories. She learned to ride a horse and buggy, stood on a wooden box to cook, and made clothes, candles, and soap. On holidays she cooked for visitors, who often spent several days there.

Later they moved to Denver on invitation from Governor Adams, who promised jobs in Denver for people from El Valle. Our grandfather had written Governor Adams that the Naranjos were unfairly displaced. Our Grandpa then worked as a custodian in the Federal Building at 19th and Stout Street. Our Mom, who was the youngest of their children, was born after the move. Evelyn Naranjo was a city girl, the lone urban throwback. As a musician, she enlivened family gatherings by singing and playing popular sheet music. The Naranjos had a piano and guitars, and loved their Whittier neighborhood.

My grandma would walk to La Botanica Caridad del Cobre, off Downing Street, a botanical store. She taught us the *yerbas* she used in the *medicinas* she created: *yerba buena*, *manzanilla*, *alucema*, *epazote*, *cota*, *achiote*, and *osha*. She told stories of local healers, and of the remedies that had helped family members. Although she never called herself a *curandera*, she shared the use of herbs and *remedios*.

She grew a lot of food in her backyard on Vine Street, with fruit trees, berry bushes, and vegetables. She made bread, ample tortillas, delicious *frijoles*,

chicayehue, *biscochitos*, *chiles*, and canned homegrown foods. Given the size of our family, it seemed like she worked nonstop, yet she laughed and told stories at the same time, making it so much fun to help.

It became clear that my ideas were different from those of others in the family. When I was 13, my first activism was refusing Catholic Confirmation. Although Abuelita prayed the rosary daily, she defended me! That was important to me because of all the pressure I received from family members. In the sweet vernacular of her interspersed Spanish and English, her response to my outcries was, “Put attention, mi’hita, imay gonna companion you.” It meant: “Pay attention, my child. I’ll be there with you.”

While I was staying with her during my protest, she brought out a handmade yellow sunbonnet and opened it. Inside was a beaded headband and a small, beaded medicine bag on a beaded necklace. As she gave them to me, she said, “Laurita, tú eres como ellos,” meaning “Laurita, you are like them.” She went on. “She’s hoppin to me before imay born for your Grandpa. So put attention,” meaning “This was part of your Grandpa’s family history that happened before I was born, so pay attention.” Well, this really was confirmation! This was news that not even my mom knew! It led to my journey through our heritage, including our Native American intermarriage. Today, I hold her sacred gifts, and the story of the Naranjos’ link with the Southern Ute Tribe of Ignacio, Colorado in my heart.

She was there in the springtime of my life. Hearing “Put attention” so many times and having her support for refusing Confirmation and her revelation about our family history guided me on my larger path. Our family history turned into part of my search for my sacred self, which shapes me every day.

In the summertime of my life, after my Abuelita passed, I worked to unravel the stories of our family, as well as sharing activism with my mom, until her own passing in the autumn of my life. In my quest, I found the Two Spirit Society, and my life partner. My life continues to be about “putting attention” to

familia, where learning and healing are promoted. As I move deeper into counting the wintertimes of being an Abuelita myself, I feel well-being in good company, especially with my children, grandchildren, and Familia, which shines with our legacy of trusting in love.

| GLOSSARY | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Abuelita(s), Abuelito(s)</i> | Grandmother(s), Grandfather(s) |
| <i>achiote</i> | A spice, often made with annatto seeds, cumin, pepper, coriander, oregano, cloves, and garlic. |
| <i>alucema</i> | Lavender flowers |
| <i>biscochitos</i> | Sugar cookies, made with cinnamon and anise |
| <i>chicayehue</i> [che-kay-yah-way] | Atole or hot blue cornmeal dish |
| <i>chiles</i> | Sauces, soups, and stews made with green or red chilis |
| <i>cota</i> | Cota (also called Navajo tea) |
| <i>curandera</i> | Healer |
| <i>epazote</i> | Mexican food flavoring |
| <i>familia</i> | Family |
| <i>frijoles</i> | Beans |
| <i>maestras</i> | Teachers |
| <i>manzanilla</i> | Chamomile |
| <i>medicinas</i> | Medicines |
| <i>mi(s) Abuelito/a(s)</i> | My Grandparent(s) |
| <i>Nahautl</i> | Root language and culture of Mesoamérica |
| <i>Osha</i> | Osha root, also known as bear root |
| <i>rancho</i> | Ranch |
| <i>remedios</i> | Remedies |
| <i>yerba buena</i> | Peppermint |
| <i>yerba(s)</i> | Herb(s) |

Adrienne Norris

DENVER, COLORADO

My name is Adri Norris. I was born in Barbados and moved to New York when I was 5 years old. When I was 7, my brother had a tutor who showed me an art book featuring the work of Leonardo da Vinci. I was floored. Up until that point, I had no idea that art is something that human hands could create. It wasn't long before I announced that I wanted to be an artist when I grew up.

When I was 12, we moved to the campus of the United World College in Montezuma, New Mexico, an international boarding school with students from over 75 countries around the world. My dad was a French teacher there, so I had the opportunity to spend time with teenagers from just about everywhere.

In 2005 I moved to Denver after spending 5 years in the Marine Corps and enrolled at the Art Institute of Colorado. I studied Media Arts and Animation and graduated with honors. There, we focused on digital artmaking, using over a dozen different types of software. I realized pretty quickly that animation takes FOREVER to create and I would rather be a fine artist, creating one painting at a time, than an animator creating 24 illustrations per second.

These days, I use my art to focus on telling the stories of the past. I use my experiences as a Black, lesbian, immigrant woman in America as a guide when it comes to selecting my subjects. The stories we don't tell get lost or buried, so I have placed my focus on some of the most marginalized among us, to shift the narrative and seek equity in the conversations about our shared history.

ADRIENNE'S

Life Quote

"TAKE IN THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO ARE LEAST LIKE YOU. DO IT THROUGH FICTION, WALK IN THEIR SKIN FOR A WHILE. ONLY THEN WILL YOU UNDERSTAND HOW SIMILAR WE REALLY ARE. ONLY THEN WILL YOU FIND THE VALUE IN OUR DIFFERENCES."



WHY I AM WHO I AM AND *Why I Do What I Do*

BY ADRIENNE NORRIS

PHILOSOPHY

At United World College, I was around kids from all over the world. With its mission of building bridges and fostering international understanding, my time there has led me to think about the world differently than the average American. I recognized the interconnectivity of how we function as a society, and how our differences are assets and not hindrances.

When I joined the Marine Corps the year I graduated, I saw how the military thrives on an us-versus-them mentality. The military uses derogatory terms to define “the enemy,” to dehumanize them and to justify the horrible actions they take against other human beings. This is the same mentality that we as a nation employ against immigrants, minority groups, and anyone we have chosen to marginalize. This kind of thinking is everywhere, and it is enraging.

My work is fueled by rage, my anger at the injustices that humans inflict upon one another every day. But I know that anger begets anger, so I have taken a softer path, one that I hope showcases our shared humanity within our differences and allows us to view the world through someone else's eyes.

My general philosophy of life is that all knowledge has value. I consider myself a gatherer and remixer of information. In the intersections of economics, history, religion, and behavioral science, there are so many facets to the human condition, so many overlaps in experiences, that it's a wonder to me how things like bigotry and inequality can persist. And yet they do. I have taken it upon myself to use my art to grab attention and to shift the lens a bit, to take concepts that mainstream storytellers don't often put together, and to elevate the idea that when we continue to suppress those we have chosen to marginalize, we hinder the advancement of our entire society.

This might seem like a cliché, but the most significant woman in my life has been my mother. For starters, she has been present for the entirety of my life, as no one else has. From the very beginning, Vienna Norris was a force. She made the doctor induce labor before I was born because I was scheduled to arrive on January 16th and she was going to have her first child BEFORE she turned 30. So, I entered this world just an hour before my mother's birthday. The following day, they wanted to keep us in the hospital for observation, but my mother was going home with HER baby on HER birthday, and so she did just that. You see, she was a force!

She raised my brothers and me to value education, to strive for excellence, and to always know who we were, despite what the outside world tried to tell us about ourselves. We were immigrants to this country, living with family members until we were able to stand on our own. We moved from my Nana's basement, to a house that she owned, then to a house that my mother bought. When we were outside, we were a team. If one got into a fight, we were all in a fight. Nobody was allowed to pick on any of us if the others were around. My brothers and I are bonded to this day. Despite the little competitions here and there, despite the fact that we live in different states, we continue to grow together based on the lessons our parents have taught us.

I watched my mother devour self-help books and tapes and chart her own entrepreneurial course, leaving the offices of the Barbados Board of Tourism to start her own Life Insurance practice. She was not about to let anybody dictate what she should do with her life, how much money she should be able to earn, or what conveniences she should be able to afford. I watched her try out different business ideas: starting a learning center when I was old enough to take the SATs; starting a vending machine business

in Las Vegas, New Mexico; becoming a personal financial planner; then finally getting into real estate. She would pivot when one thing or another wasn't working to find a better fit.

My mother would consistently remind us that we always had to strive to be the best at whatever we do. “You're Black, so you have to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good” and “You can do anything you set your mind to” are words I live by. I would approach each new task with the understanding that I was fully capable of mastering that task. If someone could do it, then I definitely could.

Those words were not just a lesson about my potential, they were a reminder that no matter how good I knew myself to be at whatever I was doing, there was always going to be someone out there looking to tear me down because of what I look like. I would be in constant competition with some bigot's idea of who I should be and not the person I actually am.

That was a hard lesson to understand as a child. At the time, I thought I was surrounded by people who wished me well. Looking back at some of those encounters — the “friends” who would never shift their schedules around mine but who I was expected to accommodate, the teachers with low expectations of me until my grades came through, and the individuals who still see fit to talk over me while I am expressing a well thought out and well researched idea — I didn't get it back then, but I do now.

Knowing who I am, what I stand for, what my potential is, and how to bypass anyone who fails to see any or all of these traits in me, are lessons I learned from my mother. Lessons which have brought me to this point and will carry me as I move forward in my career and in my life. Because of her, I don't see obstacles, only stepping stones.



Erica Padilla

DENVER, COLORADO

As a child, I received a bilingual education in the Denver Public Schools, then went to Kent Denver, a predominantly white, upper class private school. It was a difficult environment, but it taught me to handle uncomfortable situations and gave me the skills to be successful in college, grad school, and employment.

After attending the University of New Mexico and a community college, I moved to Denver and enrolled at Metro State. I met many lifelong friends (who I now consider family) and my husband.

I loved being at MSU and being in organizations that helped students, like MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). I worked at the Student Activities office planning culturally relevant events, and the Department of Chicana/o Studies, and was a member of the Journey Through Our Heritage (JTOH) committee.

I will never forget being pregnant, walking across the stage as a first-generation Chicana student who earned a double major in Chicana/o Studies and Spanish.

Later, I was a teacher's assistant Lake Middle School, part of my commitment to help others become educated, and earned an M.A. in Ethnic Studies at Colorado State. I used my skills as a mother and academic at Escuela Tlatelolco, a school in Denver founded by Corky Gonzales, leader of the Crusade for Justice. Later, I was a Family-Community Liaison at Edgewater Elementary, facilitating connections between parents and the school.

Wherever I worked, I always served my community. This meant a lot to me and let me work with many teachers, liaisons, and wonderful families.

PHILOSOPHY

I noticed early that my childhood was different from that of many of my peers. Compared to many fellow Chican@s, I spoke Spanish fluently and had a strong relationship with my extended family. This taught me the importance of family and relationships. The cultural identity this gave me enhanced my work, my experiences, and how I relate to people, and helped me on my path to helping others.

My main goals are getting a good education and helping others get one, and helping the Chican@ community. I believe that while life isn't perfect, you can't give up; you must push through difficulties. Getting through college and grad school was challenging. Between navigating college life, academic expectations, and my personal life, it was sometimes hard to maintain a balance. With support and encouragement from family, friends, and mentors, and my own persistence and tenacity, I completed my higher education.

Giving up also isn't an option when you have children. Parenting can be challenging and exhausting, but it offers many beautiful moments. Children are always watching how we respond to challenges. Because they learn from what we do, we must admit when we are wrong. We need to apologize to our kids, because we are not perfect and make mistakes like everyone else.

My philosophy also comes from stories that my family shared. These stories taught me to respect others and share with them, love and protect my family, be honest, and remember that when things get hard, someone else has it much harder. We should be grateful for what we have, because one day it could be gone. When faced with a challenge, I use my memories of those stories, and their lessons. The same is true of successes — I was also taught to learn from them.

ERICA'S

Life Quote

"HABLANDO SE ENTIENDE LA GENTE."

"BY TALKING, WE UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLE."

Nonanawan

("MY MOTHERS" IN NAHUATL)

BY ERICA PADILLA

I have several Corn Mothers, who helped nurture, teach, guide, and love me, including my mother, aunts, and grandmothers.

My first Corn Mother is my mom, Paulina Gonzalez. As a teenage mother, she had to quickly adapt to that vital role while still growing up. She sacrificed her mind and body to make sure my brother and I had what we needed, which I know was difficult. She showed me what *ganas* (putting yourself wholeheartedly into something), and sacrifice look like.

My mother continues to teach me valuable lessons, like that it's never too late to make changes, to admit when you're wrong, and to apologize to those you have hurt. She is a prime example of someone who never stops learning, growing, and evolving.

My grandmother / Corn Mother María Dolores (Abuelita Lola) is 90 years old. She loves sewing and crocheting and is an excellent herbalist. Seeing her love for animals and how she communicates with them taught me to acknowledge all beings. She helped me see the interdependence between humans and all other beings. When I was young, I frequently read about dogs. I have worked in several vet hospitals, where I gave vaccines and helped with testing, among other things, and have fed crocodiles and nursed baby squirrels that fell out of trees.

Abuelita Lola gave me my love for herbs, teas, and tinctures. She taught me about herbal healing and praying over those who need it. She gives a creative spark to everything she touches. She is superbly creative, and her memory is still keen. She taught me to sew when I was six.

She is an excellent storyteller. She often shared stories from her childhood and young adulthood. I loved hearing how when she and my grandfather traveled, their dog Coca always inspected the inside

of any house before they entered. Coca let people she trusted come near the home and family, and with vigilant eyes, helped keep the kids safe.

My next Corn Mother is my *tía* (aunt) Amada Enriquez, who often cared for me as a child. When Mom was at work, she took care of my brother and me. She taught me skills like cleaning and cooking and took us to the pool and the park. When I didn't want to help clean the kitchen after a meal or sweep the house before bedtime, she reminded me that leaving food out could attract insects. More importantly, she taught me that sweeping the house was a spiritual and ceremonial act that cleansed it of any negative energy that had built up that day.

My aunt and Corn Mother Isabel Montes has also always been there for me. Because I was shy, she encouraged me not be afraid to ask things of other people; she let me know that my needs and desires were as important as anyone else's.

Tía Isabel helped guide me through my teenage years. She said I could be whoever I wanted to be, not what anyone else wanted me to. She helped me problem-solve and put things into perspective. She helped me realize that I didn't need to fulfill other people's expectations. She taught me that everyone sometimes needs to take a break, spend time alone, and do things on their own. This helped me feel empowered and in control of my own life.

My next Corn Mother is Abuelita Jovitah. She was tiny but fierce and loved to laugh and make others laugh. She showed her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren how to hold themselves, respect others, and (when needed) defend themselves. She taught me to be respectful to others; take time to laugh, dance, and sing; take care of myself as I entered womanhood; protect myself; and raise a family.

She also gave me her time, which meant so much to me. Whenever I was upset or had problems, I called her. She listened to my complaints, sorrows, and news and gave me unwavering support, time, and love. When I needed guidance and compassion, she was there. I have tried to follow her example of compassion, especially by helping students deal with problems.

She told me stories about growing up in difficult circumstances, much more difficult than mine were. But she always saw the good things in life, found happiness where she could, and inspired others to do the same.

All these Corn Mothers have taught me lessons that help me as a person and mother, and have always shown me their love. They taught me how to hold myself as a woman and as a human being, firmly grounded and standing firm in my own truth, beliefs, relationships, and community. I am grateful to them for helping me live the life I choose and to pass their lessons to my own children.

There are other significant women in my Chican@ community. They have shown strength by supporting others by participating in marches and community affairs, and by listening to and investing in young people. I have learned much from their experiences and advice.

The first is Charlene Barrientos Ortiz, who taught me to confront challenges with grace and determination and always welcomed me with open arms. When I was on the César Chávez Peace and Justice Committee with her, she inspired me to speak up firmly and respectfully, so my voice and opinions could be heard.

Others are Lisa Saldaña and Renee Fajardo. Lisa was my doula when I was pregnant with twins. She helped me stay calm and centered, before, during, and after the birth. She continues to provide insightful parenting advice and help me deal with some unresolved issues from my childhood.

Renee is always helping others and benefiting the community. When I was pregnant with twins, she shared her experiences giving birth to two sets of twins. She helped me resist the doctor's suggestion that we sacrifice one twin in utero for the sake of the other.

Renee is deeply involved with Grupo Hutizilopochtli, an important Mexican dance group, booking their events and dealing with contract details. She found them a permanent practice space and strengthened this important cultural and spiritual expression for the Chican@ community. She is the guiding force behind the Corn Mothers book and exhibit, and works tirelessly for the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council. She is Director of Metro State's Journey Through Our Heritage program, for which I had the honor of serving on the student committee.

There are many other sisters in our community that I look up to. They have fought relentlessly for our community's survival. Their paths haven't been easy, but they rise to any challenge with love, compassion, heart, and *ganas*. They help people find the will and strength to meet challenges and accomplish their goals.

I have been blessed with many beautiful, kind, resilient, creative, and fun women, who helped me become who I am and always push me to grow. Tlazcamati Cihuameh – thank you, women who have helped me.

Jo Elizabeth Pinto

BRIGHTON, COLORADO

Jo Elizabeth Pinto was among the first blind students to integrate the public schools in the 1970s, when federal law changed to allow special needs children into mainstream classrooms. Her first husband fell ill with Lou Gehrig's disease soon after their marriage in 1991, and over the next ten years, their home became a refuge for many disadvantaged kids who needed adult companionship and guidance. In 1992, Jo Elizabeth received a degree in Human Services from the University of Northern Colorado. While teaching students how to use adaptive technology, she earned a second degree in 2004 from Metropolitan State College of Denver (now Metropolitan State University - Metro State) in Nonprofit Management. These days, she freelances as an editor and braille proofreader.

As an author, Jo Elizabeth entertains her readers while giving them food for thought. In her fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, she draws on personal experience to illustrate that hope is always an action away. She lives in Colorado with her husband, her teenage daughter, and their pets.

JO'S

Life Quote

"NEVER LET YOUR HEAD HANG DOWN. NEVER GIVE UP AND SIT DOWN AND GRIEVE. FIND ANOTHER WAY. AND DON'T PRAY WHEN IT RAINS IF YOU DON'T PRAY WHEN THE SUN SHINES."

— LEROY "SATCHEL" PAIGE, LEGENDARY AFRICAN-AMERICAN BASEBALL PLAYER



Paid In Full

BY JO ELIZABETH PINTO

PHILOSOPHY

I believe that in every situation, a person has two choices to make. The first is between positivity and negativity, and the second is between action and inertia. Having a positive attitude doesn't come automatically. It's an active, disciplined decision, just as eating nutritious foods and exercising regularly are conscious choices. Deciding to be grateful and optimistic, like getting proper nutrition and adequate exercise, is essential to personal well-being, and by extension, to the health of families and communities.

Once a person decides to look at the world in a positive way, the second choice — between action and inertia — becomes much easier to make. When everything seems negative, inertia is the logical outcome. Why try to change the hopeless? But a positive outlook alters the formula. If one person with a positive attitude makes one change, that change triggers another, and then that change sets off the next one, and the next and the next and the next. Soon, the ripple becomes a tsunami.

I explore this concept in my novel, *The Bright Side of Darkness*. The book follows a group of young men who begin their lives in the projects. When all seems hopeless, someone is willing to intervene and give one of them a second chance. The story is about mentorship and redemption and the resilience of the human spirit.

I grew up in a family of volunteers, so I suppose the idea of giving back to my community has been baked into my DNA. I remember riding around as a little kid on hot summer mornings in the 1970s, when Brighton, Colorado was a dot-on-the-map farm town, while my mom delivered Meals on Wheels in her aging Ford Vega hatchback. My brother and sister and I enjoyed carrying lunches to the elderly clients, saying hello, hearing their heartfelt greetings, and sometimes getting oranges or old Halloween candy for our efforts. The treats didn't matter much to us. Even as kids, we picked up on the fact that we were often the only company besides the TV those elderly shut-ins had all day long.

As I got older, my parents were active with the Boy and Girl Scouts, the local community hospital, and many other causes. My mom was a major contributor to the rewriting of the Brighton municipal charter in the 1990s, and she worked to get support for building the new state-of-the-art medical center as the city grew.

My mom and dad did a lot to help young people. My dad coached wrestling for the Police Athletic League, a program that sponsored tournaments between the elementary schools in the town where we lived. My mom scored the tournaments, registered the kids, and handed out and collected uniforms. That meant that between 1975 and 1998, a majority of the boys between the ages of five and twelve in town knocked on our back door with at least one of their parents, met my mom, and stood on a bathroom scale in our kitchen so she could put them in the proper weight bracket for tournaments. She and my dad got to know a whole generation of local boys, and they took a real interest in those kids. They helped many of them find after-school jobs that got them needed money and kept them out of trouble. They assisted others in locating the necessary resources to go to college.

My mom fought many barriers to get me the education I needed. The law was on our side, but many times, the system was not. When other parents saw me participating fully in school, enjoying access to braille books, the services of an itinerant teacher for the blind, and mobility lessons to show me how to travel with a white cane, they asked my mom how she had gotten cooperation from the school. She often helped those parents advocate for their own children, as she had done for me. Even today, after I've been out of high school for more than thirty years, the district where I graduated has one of the best special education programs in the state. My mom (and I) had a lot to do with that, and it was always one of the accomplishments that gave her the most satisfaction.

When my brother got to high school, he took a real interest in drama and was also a great clarinet player. My mom spent endless hours sewing band uniforms and costumes for plays, and my dad built sets and props. Plays are fun to watch, but an incredible amount of work goes into them behind the scenes!

My mom also volunteered in many ways the public never saw. When a boy who went to school with my brother broke his leg, his mother couldn't take him to physical therapy appointments three times a week because she had a job outside her home. My mom stepped up and drove him to therapy for the better part of a year.

She donated regularly to food banks, and she didn't just contribute the same old canned vegetables and boxed macaroni and cheese most people handed over. "People who are down on their luck need happy food," she always told us as she tossed a box of doughnuts or a bag of fun-sized candy bars into each sack she filled for the food bank.

Mom's volunteering spirit inspired my siblings and me. We followed her example in helping the community. I took my first volunteer job the summer I turned fourteen. I spent three mornings a week developing X-rays by hand in the darkroom at the local hospital, since there were no digital films in 1985. Most people didn't like to stay in the tiny, pitch-black room for very long, but I didn't mind it at all, since I couldn't see anything to begin with. I set a goal and got my fifty-hour pin that summer. Today, following Mom's example of civic duty, I have a seat on the Brighton Historical Commission, and I consult for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Council as a person with a disability. My brother does child advocacy work with Mi Casa and is on the board of Almost Home, a housing organization in Adams County. My sister, who teaches kindergarten in the local public schools, has devoted countless hours to helping disadvantaged kids and teens keep their lives on track.

My mom used to quote the boxer Muhammad Ali now and then. "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth."

If that's true, by the time she passed away in 2014, her rent was more than paid in full.



Sandra Ortega

SAN LUIS,
COLORADO

San Luis, Colorado's oldest town, was established in 1851, 101 years before I was born, on a sunny and beautiful July 3rd. I am a 10th-generation native of San Luis. I'm the daughter of Daisy Vigil Ortega, from San Luis (daughter of Theresa Garcia and Moises de La Luz Vigil) and Praxedes Arthur Ortega (son of Onofre Vigil and Delfino Ortega), who was born in San Francisco, Colorado (also called El Rito and "La Valley").

I had seven siblings. My parents taught us the importance of doing our best at everything we chose to try. Because of this, my 55 years of work experience have been diverse and full of life lessons. My first and favorite job was waitressing, which I did off and on, even while doing other jobs. I also spent time in social work, teaching, research, and office administration before joining my husband Antonio Garcia in running a passive solar and adobe construction company. We built and remodeled homes and businesses all over the San Luis Valley, with our faith in and our commitment to sustainability as our cornerstones. Our crown jewel was the construction of La Capilla de Todos los Santos (All Saints' Chapel) in my hometown.

Now I serve as a volunteer, dividing my time, talent, and obligations between our local hospital, Adams State University's Alumni Association, the Alamosa City Planning Commission, the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, and as a victim's advocate for the Alamosa County Sheriff's Office.

PHILOSOPHY

My husband and I are organic farmers. We are passionate about stainability and self-sufficiency, and growing quality food for our community and ourselves. We believe you truly are what you eat. My grandmother Onofre always grew the most amazing garden, then canned and preserved food in the root cellar so we could enjoy it throughout the cold winter months, because the growing season in the San Luis Valley is short, while the winter is long and frigid.

She and my parents influenced my respect for the land and what it provides for us, making me an advocate of healthy eating and being a good steward of Mother Earth, which I have loved and respected since childhood. My parents also taught me the importance of respect and generosity to others, and the value of our Catholic faith. My father was known as El Padre de los Pobres – the Father of the Poor. We always had guests for lunch, that Dad would invite on his walk home from work. Mom always cooked in abundance. Everything in my hometown was within walking distance — we knew everyone and were always available to lend a helping hand.

The cycle of life is an upward spiral. We are born and immediately begin building our stairway to heaven. The love and generosity my parents modeled throughout their lives taught me that what matters is not the material things we leave behind, but the legacy we leave and the lives we touch. I was blessed to grow up in a family that modeled and taught me these things, and that’s how I want to be remembered.

SANDRA’S

Life Quote

“LA VIDA ES UN REGALO NO RENOVABLE ... ¡VALÓRALO!”
“LIFE IS A NON-RENEWABLE GIFT ... CHERISH IT!”

A Tribute to

BY SANDRA ORTEGA

I am the woman I am today because I am the daughter of a real Corn Mother, Daisy Vigil Ortega. What an amazing woman my *mamacita* is. I don't say “was,” because her memory lives on forever. Her wisdom empowered me to create my present and is helping me leave a legacy for the future.

My mother taught me the art of putting love into everything I do. Mom especially put extra love into all the delicious food she cooked and the delicious pastries she baked. She cooked everything from scratch on her wood burning stove. I keep it in my own home now as a loving tribute to her. We did everything manually — washing clothes, chopping wood, hanging clothes out to dry. I even learned how to butcher chickens! I wouldn't trade the lessons I learned from my mother for anything in the world.

In the winter months, we would sit around our cozy kitchen table and crochet, knit, embroider, and make quilts. We were always working on some exciting project; we had no time to be bored. Mom was always eager to play jacks, color with us, and help us make clothes for our dolls. We had taffy pulling contests and baked *biscochitos*, *empanadas*, and the best cinnamon rolls. My classmates always wanted to come to my house after school. I thought it was because I was popular; little did I know it was my mom's baking they wanted! My father was the breadwinner, but my mother was our domestic goddess and the heart of our home.

My mother also loved music. She was always whistling or singing from sunup to sundown. She encouraged me to learn to play the piano, and she sang as I played. Her rendition of Ave Maria blessed many weddings at the Sangre de Cristo Catholic Church. It was also the last song she sang to us just two weeks before our dear Lord took her home. How I miss my *mamacita*! She was my role model, my inspiration,

My Mamacita, Daisy Vigil Ortega

and my everything, and still is, at every moment. She was the wind beneath my wings. All the lessons I learned from her influence my life every day.

My mother taught me the importance of a purpose-driven life and did everything with a passionate spirit. She taught me not to take anything for granted and always reminded us to “waste not, want not.” She was a master at recycling; everything had a dual purpose.

My parents always emphasized the importance of health and always stressed that our health is our greatest treasure. My mother said, “Sin salud no tienes nada” (“Without health you have nothing”). How true that is. It is so important to treasure our body, mind, and spirit. Our body is our temple; my body is the only vehicle I have to go on this incredible journey of life. My mother knew many of the great secrets of Mother Earth. She empowered me by teaching me the healing properties of plants, herbs, and food, including many valuable *remedios*. God gave me a brilliant mind and the ability to read and understand how my body functions, and it is my responsibility to care for my body. Life is circular, and we must also learn to protect our Mother Earth. Mom and Dad taught us to recycle, and to preserve and protect our great Earth, things I take as seriously now as I did growing up.

Gracias a Dios por la vida (Thank God for life). Mom also taught me the importance of my relationship with God. Our first words upon rising in the morning were to give thanks to God for the peaceful night and to pray for the grace to live a new day, a tradition I continue now. Before going to bed, we would ask her for “la bendición” (the blessing). She would tell us, “Dios te haga una santita, patita.” (“May God make you a little saint, my little duckling.”)

My mother always told us “Be not afraid,” and to accept life challenges, to embrace all of life’s opportunities, and never say never. I learned to value the gift of life and to seize the moment. My mother’s wisdom, strength, and devotion were given to her by my grandmothers and by our Blessed Virgin Mary. To totally trust in the Lord and always ask for God’s protection, wisdom, and guidance is my life’s ultimate goal.

I dedicate this tribute to my nieces and nephews and their children. May they never forget the amazing treasures of life that their *Granmita Daisy* and *Granpita Prax* left for us, just as I will never forget. They were the past, my generation is the present, and my young nieces and nephews are the future. They will become the keepers and carriers of the life lessons that we learned from our elders.

We are all held responsible for the preservation of our lives and the future of Mother Earth. I thank God for the tremendous gift of life.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>biscochitos</i> | Mexican sugar cookies, made with anise. |
| <i>empanadas</i> | Meat turnovers, often made with sugar, pork, mincemeat, cinnamon, vanilla, raisins, and piñon nuts. |
| <i>Granmita</i> | Grannie – a combination of <i>Gran</i> (Grand), and <i>mita</i> (a fond diminutive for <i>mama</i>). |
| <i>Granpita</i> | Granddaddy – a combination of <i>Gran</i> (Grand) and <i>pita</i> (a fond diminutive for <i>papá</i>). |
| <i>mamacita</i> | Mommy (literally, little mother – a fond diminutive). It can also be translated as <i>my dear mother</i> . |
| <i>remedios</i> | Remedies |



Shirley Romero Otero

SAN LUIS, COLORADO

I was born at home in 1955 in San Pablo, Colorado to Moises and Esmeralda Olivas Romero. I had three older brothers and a younger sister, Dorothy. My sister and I are the only ones still alive. My parents and grandparents were involved with La Sierra, especially with efforts to ensure communal access to common land on the La Sierra portion of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in Colorado, particularly after that access was taken away in 1960.

I trace my ancestry to Mexican arrivants and Jicarilla Apaches and have spent my life as a public educator and leader for land rights in southern Colorado. Following in my parents' footsteps, I have taken on wealthy absentee landowners who blocked communal access to common land on the La Sierra portion of the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in Colorado. I was deeply involved in a decades-long court case that culminated with a 2002 Colorado Supreme Court decision restoring grazing, wood gathering, and other use rights to the original land-grant families and successors. I continue as President of the Land Rights Council, serve as Director of the Move Mountains youth project, and am a newly appointed member of the Board of Directors of The Acequia Institute.

In addition to serving for more than a decade on fundraising committees for low-income families and as chief organizer of the annual La Raza Youth Leadership Conference from 1992 to 2009, I have served as Director of the local chapter of the Move Mountains youth project. I have also served on the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition and the Latino Advisory Committee for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy as an educator, land rights activist, youth advocate, and community organizer is guided by my Chicano / Indigenous cultural identity, which is deeply rooted. My guiding value in all these areas is summed up by the principle of generosity. Being generous with our knowledge is vital whenever we are confronting the erasure by the dominant society of who we are and of the places we co-inhabit with all our relations, including all human beings, animals, plants, trees, and resources such as water.

Generosity also means that in working with our youth we are guided by a desire to empower them to be integral parts of the process of social and economic change in the service of environmental and social justice.

This philosophy affects how I approach community organizing, which must be bottom-up. Community participation means building the next generation of organizers, rather than just "leading" the people. It also means cultivating leadership among people who have been excluded, such as women, LGBTQ+, and others. It is our moral obligation to share the knowledge they need to become self-organizing agents of change, and a political necessity.

From my work with the Colorado Statewide Parents Coalition, to my current work with Move Mountains, I have seen mothers, daughters, and other women achieve educational excellence to become teachers, health care providers, professors, and business leaders. The power of their Chicana cultural identity has played a crucial role in the success of these women.

My Mother Esmeralda

BY SHIRLEY ROMERO OTERO

My Corn Mother is my own mom, Esmeralda A. Olivas Romero. She was a working single parent who raised three boys and two girls. She was a lunch cook at the local school district, but she was so much more than a cook; she was a teacher and mentor to the youth in the lunchroom. She received a lot of disapproval from school administrators and teachers for her willingness to comfort and advise the students, who trusted her. She stood her ground and refused to ignore the students, who needed and sought her advice and counsel.

When I got involved in the Land Rights Council, she trusted my judgement and valued my commitment. Although she didn't understand everything about the land grant movement, she prayed a novena for it from 1981 to 2002 (when a Colorado Supreme Court decision restored long-lost rights), lighting candles and offering daily prayers. I remember a moment when my mother and I were in her kitchen. She turned to me, put her hand on my shoulder, and said, "Me doy cuenta que quizás con esta batalla te

SHIRLEY'S

Life Quote

WHAT I TOLD MY DAUGHTERS AS THEY STEPPED INTO THE SCHOOL BUS:

"YOU ARE GOING TO SCHOOL FOR MORE THAN YOURSELF. WHAT YOUR MIND CAN CONCEIVE AND YOUR HEART CAN BELIEVE, YOU WILL ACHIEVE."

venga daño. Te tengo confianza y sé que sabes lo que estás haciendo. Voy a rogar cada día que estés segura y que tengas éxito." ("I know that this struggle may bring harm to you. I trust you and realize that you know what you are doing. I will pray every day that you are safe and successful." Her unyielding faith strengthened my resolve in many areas of my life.

My mother was also an artist. For decades she generously weaved afghans for others, to express gratitude to family and friends. This gave her joy, which spread to me, and to the recipients of her generosity.

I learned many lessons from my mom. Trust. Unconditional support for your children. Standing your ground against those who are more powerful and have higher status than yourself. Doing and caring for others, even at risk to yourself. All these values affected my own way of being and relating with my own children and grandchildren and the youth I have mentored and educated over the past forty-plus years.

These values also helped me in my commitment to the causes and organizations that I have supported and worked for over time. As a result of my experiences in the public schools and the land rights movement, it slowly dawned on me that my commitment to the broader social justice struggle was in many ways something I was doing for my mother.

This wasn't because I felt obligated, but to honor her and advance the largely untold story of a quiet but consistent hero. She has always been proud of me for extending her legacy this way. Her example greatly influenced me in deciding to become a public-school teacher. Like my mother, I wanted to advise students on matters that reach beyond curriculum and instruction. I realized that students are also our relations. They need us beyond the focus of our work inside the classroom. Beyond schools, we need to be willing to use the entire world as a learning opportunity.

In her own way, my mom embodies the tradition of Latina/Chicana mothers as underappreciated political actors. I won't say "activists" because that implies a more public and visible role. But these quiet political

actors are people who nurture *all* their relations, so that they will be empowered and renewed in actively resisting all the forms of domination that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) women face.

This includes our own immediate relations. We need healing paths to confront how our own intimate partners often internalize the worst tendencies of toxic manhood – a result of the forces of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy, often the results of racist and misogynist beliefs. Through my mom's example, I first realized that by standing our ground, we can challenge these ways of being, which sever and destroy our most intimate partnerships through acts of interpersonal and cultural violence. This means we have to always act in a manner worthy of ancestors such as my mom, and of being good ancestors ourselves. This is the only truly valuable thing I can leave my own daughters: be your own advocate, and advocate for others in the face of the interpersonal, cultural, and structural violence we face.

This leads me back to cultural identity. My mom was limited in what she was able to do. But now, there is a movement led by a coalition of working-class and professional Chicanas who recognize the power of motherhood as a fountain of political organizing and resistance, which the mothers of her generation could not conceive of when I was growing up. Inspired by our own mothers, the Chicana Motherworks collective emphasizes the idea of *maternalista* feminist thinking. Gabriela Spears-Rico describes how in Michoacán, Indigenous mothers have played the key active role in defense of communal land. This, she says, is in sync with "maternalista feminist theory ... motherhood as a practice can bring elements for civic participation and re-thinking political life." That's not something my mom would have thought of saying, but by her example, she has helped me understand it.

With my mother's inspiration, in my labor of love as a mother I have worked to make sure that my daughters would receive from me and other like-minded political women the wisdom and determination they didn't receive in school, and that women of my mother's generation were not generally aware of, given the times. One of my nieces acknowledged this when she told me: "What I saw you do as a family led me to become an activist for the homeless." Of course, even back then,

my mother's giving advice to students at her school, and refusing to stop, was part of this, an inspiring and pioneering kind of force for good. My niece's activism got her out of a terrible world she was trapped in. She has become a powerful mother and grandmother.

Land-based communities from Cherán, Michoacán to La Sierra de la Culebra in the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant have this tradition of "political motherhood." The movements for land rights and self-defense have always involved the participation and leadership of mothers. From my mom's work as an artist, I have learned that this political motherhood goes beyond political resistance. It is more importantly about creation, ceremony, and the joy of a way of being in the world that offers paths to peace and dignity for all.

This is why I keep my yard filled with medicine plants and traditional food crops. Osha (bear root) lines the southside fence of my yard. Native corn, beans, calabaza (squash), and other crops thrive in, my huerto de la cocina (my kitchen garden). This beautiful yard is also a testament and living celebration to honor my mom, who loved her garden, made a loving home for us, and left it to us when she passed. This place of renewal and sanctuary was made possible by decades of love and work by my mother. I sustain it for her, and on behalf of my community.

GLOSSARY

maternalista

Maternalist — A viewpoint that focuses on women's capacity to give multiple kinds of care, both to their children and to society as a whole

Evangeline Roybal Sena

BLANCA, COLORADO

Dr. Evangeline Roybal Sena grew up on a farm in the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado. Mt. Blanca was visible out of her kitchen window and served as daily inspiration. She earned Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from Adams State College, Alamosa, Colorado in 1957 and 1961. She earned her Ph.D. in Education from the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 1983. In 1991, she received the Governor's Award for Excellence in Education.

After retiring from the Denver Public Schools, she joined the Jeffco Spellbinders (a group of oral storytellers in Jefferson County, Colorado) so she could return to the school setting to tell stories to children. She and her husband, Val Sena, were awarded the Premio Hilos Culturales (Cultural Threads Award) for their longtime contributions to the traditional folk arts of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado in September 2018. She was inducted into the Adams State University Educators Hall of fame in May 2020. She and Val have been married for 62 years; they have four children, ten grandchildren, and twelve great grandchildren.

EVANGELINE'S

Life Quote

"IN ANY SITUATION YOU ENCOUNTER, ALWAYS LEAVE IT BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT."

PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy of life centers around respect and responsibility. My parents raised us to respect ourselves, our siblings, and elders. They encouraged us to be active and positive in whatever situation we encountered. Mom would say, "You can attract more bees with honey than you can with vinegar; kind words will accomplish more than harsh words." She also said, "Don't just stand around; look to see what needs to be done, and do it." I soon learned that positivity and self-motivation would help me succeed.

I've confronted many obstacles in life and have discovered that with each obstacle there is an opportunity. For example, my college career seemed over when my brothers were drafted to serve in the armed forces, and I lost my rides to school twenty miles away. We couldn't afford a dorm room, and Dad didn't want me to drive the icy roads in winter.

I met a nice lady in one of my classes. After she learned that I wouldn't be able to return the following year, she and her husband visited my parents and offered an opportunity. They wanted a Spanish speaker to help their girls learn Spanish. They offered to take me in so I could finish school. I spent three years with them, and I went home on weekends and during the summer so I could keep my job at the local grocery store to earn money for school. I had a scholarship for tuition, but I needed thirty-three dollars a quarter for fees, which were not covered by the scholarship. I saved every penny I earned and could gather the hundred dollars I needed for the year. I helped with household chores when I was there, and I learned that a positive attitude, along with being responsible, helped me achieve an important goal.

As a teacher and elementary school principal, I helped children learn about respect and responsibility by encouraging good citizenship and rewarding good behavior. After retirement, I became a storyteller so I could continue to work with children. I often tell character building stories that teach respect for others.



My Two Corn Mothers

BY EVANGELINE ROYBAL SENA

My mother, Clorinda Lobato Roybal, and her mother, Andreita Cordova Lobato, had a great influence on my early years. They are both Corn Mothers to me. My Grandma Andreita came to live with us when she lost her sight. Even before that, she had not had an easy life. She was 16 when she married a man in his early forties. His wife had died and had left him with 8 children. Grandma Andreita took on the job of raising his children, as well as 6 more of their own.

She was a small person with white hair, a softspoken voice, and the patience of an angel. She sat on the edge of her bed and prayed the rosary several times a day, and she never complained. My siblings and I would sit by her and talk to her. She loved it when the great-grandchildren approached her, and she could hold their hands and touch their faces. We anticipated her needs and helped her get to the bathroom and go to the table to eat. We would help her get ready for bed at night and get dressed in the morning. From this experience, I learned to be patient, and the joy of serving my gentle, sweet grandmother, the only grandparent I ever knew.

My main Corn Mother is my mother, Clorinda. She came from humble beginnings. She was born on October 30, 1898 in a horse-drawn wagon carrying wool pelts that Grandpa was taking from San Luis, Colorado to Alamosa, Colorado, about 25 miles cross country over a bumpy trail. They were taking the pelts to Alamosa to sell them to buy flannel to make baby clothes.

Mother survived the ordeal and grew up to be kind, considerate, and very responsible. This was probably the result of growing up in such a large family. She was married at 16 to my father, who was 20. They raised 8 children to adulthood. I am next to the youngest.

She worked hard to help Dad with many farm chores and a growing family. As my siblings and I grew older,

we took on some of the chores. We had several milk cows, and mom helped milk them if Dad was away at work. We had a herd of sheep, and I remember Mom going out to the barn with Dad late at night wearing a pair of rubber gloves. She helped many baby lambs come into this world. We would wake up to the sound of a baby lamb's bleating as it was being warmed in a box behind the stove. We were proud of her, and knew she was helping Dad provide a living for all of us.

Mom took good care of her children, sewing and cooking constantly to keep us fed and clothed. Twice a week she baked bread — a dozen loaves and a pan of buns. We often woke up to the smell of sugar cookies baking for our school lunches she packed daily. The sandwiches were usually home-made bread with a piece of fried pork or peanut butter and jelly. There was usually an apple, orange, or banana, along with a sugar cookie. Occasionally there was a thermos full of soup and crackers to go with it. I always loved the lunches she made for us,

She also made pies, cakes, cookies, cinnamon rolls, and puddings. One thing I admired in her was her thoughtfulness. We always had to share whatever we had, and I noticed that she often went without so there would be enough for Dad and the children.

I had three older sisters. One died when I was 2, and the other two were 15 and 17 years older than me. They left home before I was 10, so I grew up with four brothers. Since I was the only girl left to help Mom, she and I canned many jars of fruit, vegetables, jams, and butters together. She taught me so patiently, and she always praised me for being such a good helper.

We grew carrots, turnips, and winter squash that we kept in the root cellar Dad had made. One year, when I was about 12, Grandma Andreita had a bountiful crop of August apples on her trees. We picked sacks of apples, and Mom and I processed them. She

patiently showed me how to peel and slice apples and take them to the roof, where we spread them out on a sheet to dry. We covered them with mosquito netting to keep the flies off. If it looked like it was going to rain, I had to run up the ladder and gather the apples and bring them in. After the sun came out and the roof was dry, I took them back to the roof to continue drying. We also canned apples, applesauce, and apple butter.

I learned many skills from my mother. She worked hard and encouraged us to do the same. I remember her saying, "Don't stand around waiting to be told what to do. Look around and do what needs to be done." She taught us the "Golden Rule," often saying, "Treat others the way you would like to be treated." She taught us to respect our elders, including our siblings. That part was a little harder, for me, but I did it!

Mom was a caring, loving person who worked hard to be sure our needs were met. She loved her family, which consisted of her husband, her children, their spouses, and her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Her door was always open, and meals were prepared at the drop of a hat when visitors came by. There was always food that could be put together quickly from all the jars and food stored in the root cellar. She was a wonderful role model for me, and I have many wonderful memories of her. I'm thankful that she taught me to live with a positive attitude, respect for others, and a "can do" spirit. I think of her often, especially when I have a difficult job to do or when I am surrounded by all our family. I am blessed to have had Clorinda Lobato Roybal as my mother and Corn Mother!

MT. BLANCA

BY DR. EVANGELINE ROYBAL SENA

I have yielded all my moisture to feed the Valley I hold dear.

Now I watch with pride as crops and stacks of hay appear.

Humans scurry to gather the harvest before afternoon showers.

I stand as sentinel to the north and watch the clouds for hours.

I watch the dirt devils chase each other across the valley floor.

My mood changes by the season, the time of day, or the view you explore.

In the fall my swirling peaks stand tall, serene and clear.

Casting shadows of gray and lavender as sunset does appear.

My meadows change from green to gold and then to scrub oak red.

My work is done for now, and the families are all fed.

There is a stillness about me that is serene and satisfied.

My craggy peaks and valleys wait for cooler days and nights

And the big white flakes that follow create a wondrous sight.

The winter months go slowly; are dreary, cold and long

As you wait for spring to hear the Meadow Lark's song.

The cycle is repeated as the Valley floor is plowed

And seeds are sown again to wait for the promise of melted snow

To irrigate the crops that will be grown down below.

Again I'll yield my moisture to the Valley I love so!



Marge Taniwaki

DENVER, COLORADO

Marge spent her formative years incarcerated near Death Valley at Manzanar, one of 10 major US concentration camps for those of Japanese ancestry during WWII. Born in Los Angeles, she is a birthright U.S. citizen, like two-thirds of the 120,000 Japanese who were unlawfully imprisoned. Marge's family was relocated to Colorado after their release from Manzanar at the end of WWII. Her activism began soon after an early marriage and the birth of two children. Haunted by her own memories of imprisonment and the reluctance of incarcerated to even speak about atrocities in camp, Marge began her own research to find a more accurate accounting of the forced removal. In 1975, she organized the first formal pilgrimage to Amache Concentration Camp in southeastern Colorado, a first step in healing from the PTSD then unknowingly suffered by camp survivors.

Her activism has taken Marge to revolutionary Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, Tohono O'odham land at the U.S. southern border, the Navajo Nation, and to the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota nations. Marge regularly speaks on the incarceration and other social issues at schools, universities, and justice organizations while being actively involved with the Asian community across the U.S.

For more than 30 years, Marge has co-produced La Lucha Sigue (The Struggle Continues), a radio program on Latin America and the Caribbean that airs on KGNU 88.5 FM/1390 AM. Her participation in annual pilgrimages, as well as restoration and preservation of Amache, recently culminated in its designation as a National Historic Site.

PHILOSOPHY

Because I have never believed in an afterlife, I try to use every moment to the fullest. It took years of self-education, research, and personal reflection to understand how to work to effect change to bring about social justice. I was raised in a time when females were expected to grow up, get married, bear children, and be a good housewife. It took years of working with women's support groups to change my marital status and commit myself to work for social change.

While still recovering from PTSD, and with chronic health issues caused by lack of nutrition during my incarceration, I continue to heal and educate. I try to listen, learn, and absorb before acting, then act with purpose. Because making change is difficult, you must put aside your own ego. You cannot promote yourself when the future of the people is at stake. Face each obstacle with care and planning, always keeping the objective in mind. Analyze, seek out allies, and persuade others to value all sentient beings. There is enough for everyone and every being, if we set aside greed and share. It's mainly a problem of distribution — and justice.

MARGE'S

Life Quote

"BE COURAGEOUS."

My Corn Mothers

BY MARGE TANIWAKI

One of the few Japanese words I know is “Onesan” — older sister. Speaking Japanese was forbidden in prison camp and growing up all-American was emphasized. My older sister was my Corn Mother when our mother Kimiko Yamada could not be due to her own difficult upbringing. My earliest memory of Irene is when she sang me lullabies while we were quarantined with chicken pox in the barracks hospital at Manzanar, a WWII concentration camp near Death Valley where we were imprisoned solely because of our Japanese ancestry.

After nearly four years behind barbed wire, we were relocated to Denver in late 1945. We couldn't return home to Los Angeles because the authorities said that even though the war was over, our mother Kimiko Yamada could still be loyal to Japan because of being educated there. She was a birthright U.S. citizen born in San Francisco, then sent to Yokohama at age 5 and returning to the U.S. at age 19 after graduating from high school and finishing school, an accomplishment for a woman born in 1914. Our family were all U.S. citizens by birth except for our father.

My mother's difficult upbringing left her unable to show empathy or affection, but often cruelty. She was deprived of her inheritance in an aristocratic Japanese family, then forced into an arranged marriage to a man 11 years older. She never received from her family, and never learned to give us, the encouragement, praise, or affection we saw other kids get at school or in Denver's Five Points neighborhood where we lived. So, although she was only 5 years older than me, my sister Irene became my first Corn Mother.

She did her best to give me what our mother couldn't. She read me comics from the newspaper and drew me pictures of pets we couldn't have. She coaxed the neighbor's dog, Rusty, into our house so I could pet him. Irene wrote stories for me, letting me escape into a dream world away from the day-long rants my mother often subjected me to as she listed all the wrongs she felt had been done to her. It must have been therapy for her to unburden herself on me. She disdainfully told me that I was the softest of her children — not gentle or understanding, but weak.

It made me happy that Irene always supported me and showed me that she cared. She walked with me to the Warren Branch Library to check out the three books allowed per visit. In the summer reading program, we often exceeded the number of books allowed to be checked out and asked for more. Irene opened my world to learning and discovering. She loved operas like Aida, and together we would listen to performances on the radio. My world was much happier with her in it.

When Irene graduated from Manual High School in Denver, she received a full scholarship to Wellesley, a prestigious private women's college in Massachusetts. I still treasure the long letters she wrote me from Wellesley, using a fountain pen and turquoise ink on onion-skin paper. I felt so happy to read them.

Airmail was expensive, so she filled every inch with news of her experiences. In later years, Irene asked me to be Maid of Honor at her wedding. Even in our later years, I still seek her counsel although she now

lives a thousand miles away. Irene helped me survive our imprisonment at Manzanar. We have returned on pilgrimages there and know that a part of each of us is still buried beneath its sands.

My second Corn Mother was Mary Pagano, my counselor at Manual High School. In the early 1940s, she volunteered to teach at Heart Mountain Concentration Camp in Wyoming, near Yellowstone. Miss Pagano was stern, but fair in her counseling and teaching, caring for each of her many students, who often came from lower income and broken families. She helped me apply to several colleges, including her alma mater, which admitted me. But when my son was born soon after, I married and did not go to college. Miss Pagano even visited me in the hospital, giving me encouragement that my mother did not. It meant everything to me.

I kept up with her for years after I graduated and took her to events that I thought would interest her. One day, Miss Pagano wanted to take several winter coats and dozens of children's books to one of the events. I realized she was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. She mistook me for one of her students at Heart Mountain, thought I was being sent back to prison, and was willing to go back with me. Even in her fog of memory, she remembered the temperature at Heart Mountain could fall as low as 30 degrees below zero and that the children had few supplies in their makeshift classroom. It broke my heart to see her decline. I hope I was able to give back some of the support that she had given me.

My third Corn Mother was Alice Benally, who lived at Big Mountain on the Navajo Res in northern Arizona. For years I would go there to support ceremonies once denied to the Indigenous by the U.S. government. She taught me to make fry bread over a wood fire and often invited me to a nearby sweat lodge. We activists arranged for donations of livestock feed to be hauled in. Peabody Coal Company's mining operations had depleted and tainted the water table, making people and livestock sick, as well as affecting the growth of medicinal plants. Hogans were built using radioactive uranium mine tailings, causing cancer and death to those who lived in them. On visits to Denver, I would show people the Rocky Flats plant where the uranium mined by them on their land was turned into plutonium triggers and told them how we activists were trying to shut it down.

I continue to learn from women as I journey through life, healing along the way while trying to protect those whose paths I cross. I have learned much from my Corn Mothers, which I try to apply every day. How I wish I could have reached through the barriers that my mother placed in front of herself and helped her overcome the bitterness that filled so many of her years. Perhaps she can do that in a future life, if there is one.

Jeanette Trujillo-Lucero

DENVER, COLORADO

Jeanette Trujillo-Lucero is a native of Denver and one of the most recognized dance performers in Colorado. She is a versatile dancer with experience in ballet, tap, jazz, and musical theater, but her specialty is Spanish and Mexican Dance. She has performed as a soloist in Colorado's most prestigious theaters, museums, and historic venues, and with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. She is known by the stage name "La Muñeca" (The Doll) for her delicate, petite stature. In costume, she swirls in a flaring Spanish dress and skillfully executes her Flamenco footwork in red shoes and impeccably plays castanets with her graceful hands. This is the image she is most known for.

Jeanette has received many honors, including Living Legend of Dance, Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, and Outstanding Woman of Colorado. She is a Latina Trailblazer and has received many Lifetime Achievement Awards for her community service. She has a lifetime of study in dance and other subjects from the University of Colorado, Loretto Heights College, and Red Rocks Community College.

In 1972, she was instrumental in staging the very first "Fiesta Colorado" performance at Denver's historic Cosmopolitan Hotel. She started training other dancers, leading to the Fiesta Colorado Dance Company being formed in 1997. It would become one of Colorado's most highly recognized dance companies.

Jeanette has danced all her life and given thousands of children the joy of dance, changing the lives of those who have studied and danced with her. Her life's work will continue through the thousands of dancers she has taught, some of whom are among the best in the world. She has been a seed for learning and the link between generations of Hispanic dance.

One of her legacies is the Fiesta Colorado Folklórico Stage, on which folklórico dance groups from throughout Colorado share the full spectrum of the Latino arts in

Newsed's "Celebrate Culture / Cinco de Mayo Event" in Denver's Civic Center Park. This is just one example of the cultural inclusion she gives to the community.

The La Voz newspaper has called her "A Diamond in the World of Dance."

PHILOSOPHY

I love the art form of Dance. It is said that Dancing is the loftiest, most moving, most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction from life: it is life itself.

To be a complete dancer, each dance must stem from your Mind, Heart, Body, and Soul. The most meaningful dance is given from the inside out ... not from the outside in. The deeper the expression, the more meaning and impact it will have on yourself and others. Also ... remember to always do your best, because you never know who is watching!

To find accomplishment, you must be the beginning, the middle, and the end. Initiate the idea, do the work, and be sure to finish it. Be proud of every step in reaching your goal. The joy is in the process of creating, learning, and performing.

Dance teaches us more than just Dance. It helps us build character. I always perform and teach with this in mind. I try to give others my knowledge of dance and the lessons of life. What you share and teach may not be understood right away but will be reflected upon and understood later.

It takes COURAGE to do what you want to do. Although you may be afraid, take the chance to pursue your dream. Dance with your heart, work hard, and pave the road for yourself and for others to follow. The outcome will be the true preservation of yourself, your art, and your culture!



The Three Corn Mothers in My Life

BY JEANETTE TRUJILLO-LUCERO

In the many seasons of my life, I have been influenced by several Corn Mothers. I am honored and thankful to be included in this book, and to tell their stories.

Martha Baca Trujillo, My First Corn Mother

My first Corn Mother is my mother Martha. She met my father Jim at the ballroom of the famous Lakeside Amusement Park in Denver. They married in 1950, and I was their first-born.

When I was growing up as a Hispanic American in the 1950s, Latinos were not accepted in mainstream society. But my parents were sure their very own daughter would stand out and be the best dressed girl at the Scenic View country school. They were proud of me as I danced in many talent shows.

I always loved my favorite school celebration, the May Pole Dance. Mother made me a red dress with a white pinafore, matching shoes, and a perfectly formed rag-curl-banana-twisted ponytail, which would swing as I walked. I felt so happy! Even then, I knew I loved to dance!

One day before dance class, I couldn't find my dance shoes! I went without them, and my teacher refused to teach me. My mother then took me out of that class. What a traumatic experience! I cried for two weeks, but this became a turning point for my next step in life. From that day on, the focus of my dance completely changed direction. If not for my mother's love of dance and her encouragement, I would not have found a new cultural path with my new Spanish Dance teacher, Lucille Campa.

My mother gave me the great gift of dance. It became my identity and the success I would enjoy the rest of my life. I am most thankful for everything she did for me in my childhood years.

Lucille Campa, My Second Corn Mother

Later, we moved to Harvey Park in Denver. We got to know our neighbors, the Ulibarri family. Their daughters Aleta and Beth were Spanish dancers and studied with the famous Maestra Lucille Campa, "La Charrita," who became my second Corn Mother. I started studying with her. It was the beginning of my love for Spanish Dance. I studied with her for 10 years, benefiting from her deep knowledge and teachings. At first, I loved to dance to the music and its story. I learned the grace of dance and learned to execute the intricate, complicated footwork. In the beginning, I didn't realize how much a part of me it would become.

Lucille was among the first to bring Spanish and Mexican dance to Denver. Under her tutelage, I joyfully danced and played my castanets all over town. I was Little Miss Brentwood in the Little Miss Colorado Pageant. I danced at Ruby Hill Park in what is now called the Levitt Pavilion, and on television. That was the real beginning of my Spanish Dance career.

Maestra Lucille instilled in me her beautiful, unique Spanish style. She beaded, sequined, and adorned my beautiful costumes. I felt so elegant and authentic!

Lucille supported me my entire life. My greatest honor was that when she passed, her family gave me "the heart of her lifetime of work" — her castanets! I cherish them as part of my own body and honor her as I perform many of her classic dances, such as "La Boda de Luis Alonso" and "La Malagueña." She would be proud to know that for 40 years, I have been a featured performer of Spanish Classical and Traditional Mexican dance with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra.

My Corn Mother Lucille taught me to honor and respect my elders. She taught me to give my best as a person and artist. She said that Dance is a moving

picture, a framed expression of your heart and spirit! You can make your own personal mark in history through the unique culture of who you are.

Rita Flores de Wallace, My Third Corn Mother

When I entered college I was introduced to traditional styles of Mexican folk dances. This was in the 1970s, at the height of the Chicano Movement. Many Mexican folk dance groups were forming. Two legendary Maestros (Masters) had come to Denver — Augustine Del Razo, the master of old school traditions, and Raul Valdez, a more contemporary dancer from the Mexico's Ballet Folclórico.

More importantly, a very important woman came into my life — Rita Flores de Wallace, from Saltillo, Mexico. She had married John Wallace of Denver and moved here. She brought rich Mexican Folk Art treasures to Colorado. Little did I know how Rita would change the course of my life, and of Denver's entire cultural community!

Rita was a lifetime folclorista (folklorist), a beautiful dancer, a master folk crafter and muralist, and a skilled costume designer! Her skills and imagination, based on the simplicity of Mexican folk traditions, make her a cultural living treasure!

We shared dance experiences and became lifetime friends and collaborators. Through our cultural research and original choreography, we helped introduce the traditional celebration of El Día de Los Muertos to Denver. She also taught me traditional Aztec dances from the 1920s. They were part of the earth, of the cycles of Time, Life, and Death. The traditional music and dances we performed are presented each year in many theaters, museums, and memorials. World Dance Review magazine hailed our program as the purest preservation of the meaningful cultural dance traditions of El Día de Los Muertos.

Rita always put her heart, body, and soul into each production. She danced as the Mexican folkloric legend La Llorona. She skillfully designed and made the folk costumes of the Jarabe Tlaxcalteca characters — the Colorful Life, Old Man Time, and the Skeleton

of Death! She made sure we all understood the ritual for each performance and she made the props for the graveyard scene, with a white tablecloth setting for the celebration dinner and a cross on a grave, with photos of loved ones who have passed.

Rita is a true Corn Mother! She is folk art in motion and in spirit! She is a gentle living soul of art! She is always truthful, giving of herself, and truly supportive of others, with her kind spirit. I learned that the more talented a person is, the more impactful, sharing, and caring they are! She is admired and loved by everyone! I learned from her to always give, with understanding. She made me proud of my culture and feel richness in my soul!

JEANETTE'S

Life Quotes

BECAUSE WE CANNOT CHANGE THE PAST, NOR PREDICT THE FUTURE, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE MAKE THE MOST OF TODAY.

"MAMA MAY HAVE AND PAPA MAY HAVE, BUT GOD BLESS THE CHILD WHO HAS GOT HIS OWN," FROM A SONG CO-WRITTEN BY BILLIE HOLIDAY

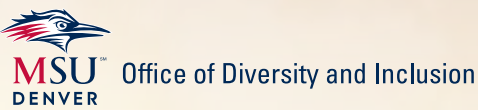
A TIME TO WEEP, A TIME TO LAUGH, A TIME TO MOURN AND ... A TIME TO DANCE — ECCLESIASTES 3:4.

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