

**Their spirit was still here.**

I grew up in the wilds of the Southwest. My family heritage has deep roots in the Southwest, dating back hundreds of years. This book is in honor of my ancestors, which include Picuris Pueblo, Pilipino, Irish, Jewish, and Spanish lineages. I had 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 Colorado.

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 mesquite. 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 Katchinas. 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, most times without recognition and for little or no money. Some are native, indigenous to this region. 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 compadres 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

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Return of the Corn Mothers: Inspiring Women of the Southwest



# RETURN of the Corn Mothers

INSPIRING WOMEN  
OF THE SOUTHWEST



## 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. Although her influence diminished with the coming of the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity, Pueblo communities still 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 are native, indigenous to this region. 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.

*Painting by Arlette Lucero*



## ARTISTIC TALENT

**Renee Fajardo**, Renee Fajardo, curator and artistic creator of the project wrote the seed grant to the 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.

**Arlette Lucero**, arts activist, muralist, and illustrator, has dedicated over forty years to advocating for arts education in Colorado. She created the original Return of the Corn Mothers painting.

**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.

**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 and has been actively involved in the American Advertising Federation Black Hills.

**Ed Winograd**, experienced editor, proofreader, tech 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.

**C'Rodrigo**, Instructional Designer and Co-Founder of nDigiDreams, a woman-owned indigenous-focused consulting and training company devoted to instructional technology and digital storytelling. She created the digital storytelling video of the project.

**Asia Fajardo Diamond**, Public Relations Director at the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council ( CHAC ) , holds a Masters in Music from the University of Wyoming. She composed the original score for the video documentary.

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# Elizabeth Aragon-Blanton

## RYE, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

Elizabeth Aragon-Blanton was born on July 29, 1969 in Rocky Ford, Colorado to Joe N. Aragon and Mary Ann (Rodriguez) Aragon. She had one brother, Richard, who was approximately two years older. The family lived in a segregated labor camp in Fowler, Colorado and remained there until the death of her parents in 2006. She has a daughter, Kimberly Blanton; a son, Joshua Blanton; and two grandchildren, Leighland and Rowdy.

In 1987, Elizabeth enrolled at Western State College (now Western Colorado University) in Gunnison, Colorado and graduated in 1992. During the early 1990s, she married Wesley B. Blanton and had two children. Shortly after graduation, she began her teaching career in one of Denver's urban city schools and then moved to Pueblo in 1994. She has taught history for Pueblo School District 60 for twenty-four years. In 2005, she began teaching Chicano studies and received her Master's degree in history. She continued her research on the segregated Mexican schools in the Arkansas Valley, and in 2017, she earned her Doctorate. She remains in teaching and continues to conduct research.

### PHILOSOPHY

I believe that to create positive change in the world, we must feed the body, mind, and soul of the people we encounter. In my childhood home, the preparation of a meal, and the meal itself, were very symbolic. To my mother, cooking not only nourished us, but was an expression of her love. She often used her recipes to provide emotional comfort and support to others. I wish I could describe the countless times she prepared a special meal for someone or invited a person into our home to break bread with us. My mother would remind me of how important it was to help people. She would say, "God wants us to feed his people." It is our responsibility to help others, and we have the power to ease someone's pain.

Both of my parents lived in severe poverty as children and were forced to work low-paying jobs all their lives. I think those experiences impacted the upbringing of my brother and myself. Although they were unable to provide financial luxuries for us, they always provided us with unconditional love and support. They sacrificed so that we would have the opportunity to become educated, and instilled the importance of education in me at a very early age. Education was the only way for us to break the cycle of poverty and change our lives. Teaching became my way of changing the world, and a way to nourish the whole person.

ELIZABETH'S

## Life Quote

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

— SIR ISAAC NEWTON





# My Two Corn Mothers

BY ELIZABETH ARAGON-BLANTON

The two most influential women in my life are my mother, Mary Ann (Rodriguez) Aragon and my aunt, Cecilia J. (Rodriguez) Aragon. They were born in the 1940s and raised in the Arkansas Valley of Colorado. When my mother was three and my aunt was seven, their father was killed when he was struck by lightning while working on a farm. Shortly after his death, they moved to Fowler, Colorado to be near their maternal grandparents in a *colonia* (colony) on the outskirts of town. At the time, Fowler was a segregated community, where de facto segregation was a common practice. A majority of the Spanish and Mexican population were treated like second-class citizens, and the impoverished conditions in which they lived made for a difficult existence.

The loss of their father left the children extremely vulnerable. Both my aunt and mother had very difficult and painful childhoods, which affected them their entire lives. But despite this, neither of them became bitter or angry. Instead, they grew up to be very compassionate and empathetic women. I believe this happened because my aunt Cecilia took on a maternal role for my mother. Cecilia nurtured and protected her from the time they were small until my mother's death in 2006.

The relationship that Cecilia and Mary shared was a very beautiful and unique one. There was never any sibling rivalry between them. They loved, supported, and empowered each other throughout their lives. When my mother or aunt faced any type of hardship, the other sister was always there to help, or simply to offer her love or support. I was very fortunate to have seen this growing up. These events have impacted my life the most. I grew up watching the two most important women in my life love each other and their own families unconditionally. Both of these women gave everything they had to offer to the people they loved. If a friend

or family member needed help, they offered their assistance. They impacted the lives of so many people in their family and community by a simple act of kindness or a comforting word.

As with so many women, the influence my mother had on my life was immeasurable. The values and life lessons she shared with me have shaped my values and ethics and made me the woman I have become. She remains at the core of my soul. I also believe my mother's life was deeply influenced by my aunt Cecilia and her caring nature. Cecilia is intelligent, beautiful, strong, and a natural-born leader.

Anytime someone is in need, she does everything in her power to help ease that person's suffering. She makes the lives of people better, and her strong religious faith has led her to serve others in many different capacities. For example, when my mother had complications from my delivery, my aunt took me home while my mother recovered. This created one of the most important bonds in my life. To me, she is "Auntie Chila," not Cecilia. I have watched this woman commit her life to serving others. She has played a major role in the Catholic Church by preparing Mass, praying the rosary, arranging the church for funerals, preparing baptisms, serving as a Eucharistic minister, and preparing the clothing for the priest. Every week she prepares communion and visits the residents at the nursing home. She has recited to me the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, "Where there is hatred, let me sow love." Auntie Chila truly lives her faith and believes she can create positive change in this world.

My aunt has always been a positive part of my life. She not only loved and cared for me, she always made me feel like I was someone special in her world. That was a very valuable gift, especially because I was the second child in my family, and female. My aunt always told me that she loved us like her own children, and

that her family and mine were just "one family." She always had words of encouragement for me and has empowered me to accomplish my goals.

Another special connection I have with my aunt is that we are both historians at heart. She may not realize the importance of her role, or that she is indeed a historian. My love of history originated when I was small. When I was little, my father, mother, and aunt would all share stories about their families, about growing up, and the struggles that many of the Spanish and Mexican-American people experienced in the Arkansas Valley. I remembered every vivid detail and yearned to learn as much as I could about people like me. My aunt became one of my greatest sources of information, and she shared her knowledge with me. Her memory and recollections have provided me with names, dates, and she has given me beautiful old photographs. For the past five years, she has helped me conduct research and find others who will share their stories with me.

Each and every day, I enter my classroom to teach my students history, and I see how the *cuentos* (stories) she and my parents shared with me are being passed down to my students. I remember the *cuentos* and hope that my students will pass them on to others. I teach about strong and courageous women, and I am lucky enough to have had them in my family. I am even more fortunate to have known women who really did change a small part of the world.

Auntie Chila is currently creating scrapbooks with the obituaries of people that she knew, and is writing a brief biography about each one, so that when she is gone, others can learn something about their ancestors. They are quite impressive, but then so is she. As I reflect upon my life, I realize that my values and beliefs are deeply rooted in the past, but I am working to build the future.







# Amy Banker

DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

Amy Banker was born and raised in the small community of Russell, Kansas, one of four girls. Her parents ran a retail business that had been in the family since 1881. Books opened a world of ideas far beyond her farming town, as Amy attempted to read all the volumes in its tiny library. After graduating from the University of Kansas, she moved to the East Coast and then to the West Coast, on a quest for adventure, hoping to bring positive change into the world. Disillusioned by politics in D.C., she worked for grass roots justice movements in Portland, Oregon, such as Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste Northwest Tree Planters and Farm Workers United). In 1998, Amy came to Denver, where she worked at Metro State's Center for Visual Arts, implementing programs that reached throughout the community and combined her love of arts and learning. In 2007, she joined the Denver Housing Authority in developing the Youth Employment Academy, leading young adults in the philosophy, "If you can dream it, you can achieve it." Amy has a global circle of family and friends, whose love and inspiration have supported her in being able to accomplish her own dreams.

## PHILOSOPHY

Life is short. Many years ago, a dear friend of mine who was dying of cancer held my hand, looked me in the eye and said, "Don't waste any time." She had spent her long life working for justice, when one could be imprisoned for simply expressing one's opinion, and fought to the end. I live my life inspired by incredible examples from my family, friends, and others who believe in making the world a better place. Growing up in a small town, I saw that one single person could accomplish great things that affected many.

I believe we are obligated to continually work toward equality, and that even though "life isn't fair," we should do our best to make it so. I try to live my life as an example of what I want the world to be. I want to live this brief moment of time with meaningful connections to my loved ones and those in my community. I believe that all dreams are reachable, but we must all support each other for those dreams to become a reality for many. I believe one should have focus, dedication, and tenaciousness in their life work, but that one should also laugh often, have great adventures, create beauty in many forms, and love deeply.

## AMY'S

### *Life Quote*

NEVER GIVE UP, FOR  
THAT IS JUST THE PLACE  
AND TIME THAT THE TIDE  
WILL TURN.

— HARRIET BEECHER STOWE



# Little But Mighty

BY AMY BANKER

My maternal Great-Grandmother Keller was all of five feet tall. Her daughter, my Grandma Knoche, was maybe 4'11", and her daughter, my mother, is 5'2" on a good day. They called my grandma "little but mighty." In my mind, none of them are little; they are all ... simply mighty. I am walking with my grandma through colorful autumn leaves scattered on the ground, and I scramble to pick up the most beautiful ones and hold them in my small six-year-old hands. Grandma tells me about each fallen leaf, what tree it comes from, how and where that tree grows. My grandma knows so much. She shows me how to create a Santa Claus out of a Sears catalog, and how to pick dandelions and make jelly from the blossoms. She plays Shirley Temple songs on the piano, and we all sing along. However, most times are tempered by her sternness. She doesn't allow for any sass, and we all must do our chores and mind our elders.

It really started with my great-grandmother. Even though I never knew her, she came alive through my grandma's stories. From these stories, I knew she grew up in the late 1800s in the eastern Tennessee hills, the last of fourteen children, in a poor, but hardworking farming family. She married a man, the papa that my grandma remembered fondly. But as she told us, he was restless and a chaser of rainbows, and he ultimately deserted his wife and their four young children.

My mom said she remembers Grandma Keller always saying, "Don't trust a man further than you can throw 'em." My grandma revered her mama, telling us how she worked long, hard hours to support her family alone. I have heard tales of how Great-Grandmother Keller, without a formal education, had an amazing knowledge of plants and their value to man and beast. In my mind, I picture her gathering herbs and making poultices, and being the person who neighbors came

to when their horses were sick. She was known for her healing, her gardening prowess, and her beautiful, creative handiwork. Her colorful sayings, strong opinions, and quick wit all combined with her tenaciousness and resourcefulness to hold her family together. Her image is not of the quiet, sweet, little old lady. In fact, I think of her as fierce.

With my tiny grandma, the saga continued. Grandma told me stories about her family's struggle in rural Kansas, and how she became a teacher. She remembered a happy marriage and the purchase of a farm in 1929, which gave her hope for better days. With the economic crash and dust bowl days, she said they owed much and made little. Their farm home was filled with six children, and they were barely scraping by, when my grandfather died, and then one of their daughters.

My grandma was fortunate in that her mama moved to the farm and became a great asset in helping raise the children and keep the farm. My grandma started teaching again, while her children and her mama managed the farm. Grandma knew that education was a way out of poverty, and she had a continuous thirst for knowledge. Besides teaching school in town, she spent summers going to college. It took her over ten years, but she got her college degree. Determined, indeed. In 1955, Grandma won the honor of Kansas Mother of the Year. A newspaper clipping from that time says, "Over the years, friends and acquaintances have been aware that Mrs. Knoche was winning a tough struggle. Probably what endeared her most to people was that she never complained, never asked for special consideration. Always cheerful and patient, her courage was the kind that does not attract attention. Best of all, she was able to transmit this same faith and determination to her children." So yes, my grandma was stern, but that sternness included

a powerful love of family, and was simply one of the tools she used to survive. When I think of her now, I still see the seriousness on her face, but I also see her kindness as she gently guides me in drawing a bird that is sitting on a limb outside her kitchen window. If my great-grandmother was fierce, in my mind, my grandma is a rock—solid and unshaken.

The saying "little but mighty" doesn't stop with my grandma. Although my mom had a traditional partner to help support the family, her example was always one of strength. She had not had an easy childhood, yet she never dwelled on those experiences. Instead, she only focused on what she could do. She succeeded in school and in 4-H, earning scholarships and wonderful travel experiences. She worked her way through college and started her career. When she got married, she cared for four children and a household while working six days a week next to my dad in our family retail business. She sewed many of our clothes, cooked amazing meals, kept a spotless house, and managed it all on a small budget. She was active in our schools, 4-H club, and church; in local, state, and national politics; in town promotion, and on boards, from the historical society to the local arts groups. She did everything, and she did it well.

I understood from a very young age that education was the top priority, along with contributing to your community and taking care of your family. She was a feminist by example without even knowing it and encouraged all of her four girls by repeatedly saying, "You can do anything you want to do." And I believed it. Like these women, I, too, am little. But at five feet tall, I have never felt small. The women I emulate conquered huge challenges, contributed widely to their community, and never gave up hope. Why would I feel anything but mighty?





## BRIGHTON, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 13, 2008

# Lois Burrell

Lois Burrell is an internationally known storyteller, who has thrilled listeners with stories from various cultures. Her treasure chest includes biographies, myths, pioneer tales, personal stories, and

her specialty—African and African-American folktales and slave stories. Lois has been a longtime board member and presenter for the Rocky Mountain Storytellers' Conference and a member of the Traveling Rainbow Tellers, a multicultural storytelling troupe that has enlightened as it has entertained.

She has contributed stories to three Tummy Tales books—Pinch a Lotta Enchiladas, Ole! Posole! and Biscochitos for Mis Jitos. Lois has a B.A. in Sociology from Virginia State University and an M.A. in Medical Social Work from Indiana University. A widow, she has one daughter, Pameela. Though she is retired, Lois has been active in community activities, particularly at the Senior Center in Brighton, Colorado, where she has long resided. She has received many awards, including Brighton's Outstanding Senior Award, the AARP National Community Senior Award, the Norwest Bank Red Sweater Award, and the Denver Urban Spectrum

### LOIS'S

## Life Quote

ONE OF MY FAVORITE QUOTATIONS IS FROM MY COUSIN, COLONEL GUION BLUFORD, THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN TO GO INTO SPACE.

"HARD WORK, DEDICATION, AND PERSEVERANCE ARE THE KEYS TO SUCCESS. WORK TO GET AN EDUCATION AND BE AS PREPARED AS YOU CAN POSSIBLY BE FOR ANY OPPORTUNITIES THAT MAY COME YOUR WAY. YOU CAN ACHIEVE ANY WORTHWHILE GOAL YOU SET YOUR MIND ON IF YOU WORK HARD AND PERSIST LONG ENOUGH."

Community Person of the Month Award. In 2019, she was honored by Denver's Corky Gonzales Library for her decades-long contributions to Colorado's cultural legacy.

### PHILOSOPHY

As a child, I understood that sometimes you have to create your own path to success. In Hampton, Virginia, where I grew up, the black schools got hand-me-down books from the white schools. I spent hours in a small college library to compensate for those outdated books.

I've always been willing to try new things. When I was four and wanted to go to school, I showed the elementary school principal that I could read, print, and add numbers. He was so impressed that he put me in first grade at the start of the school year. I also look forward to new adventures. When I enrolled at the Indiana School of Social Work in 1950, I was the only black female student in my class. I have a red belt in Tae Kwan Do. And after retiring, I became a professional storyteller.

My life's work and journey are driven by my passion to help make the world a better place in which to live. I got this from my mother, a fearless community activist who lost her teaching job for helping blacks pay poll taxes and vote. She later received a Master's Degree in Special Education from Columbia University and taught deaf and blind minority students at a state school in Hampton. The city council named a street in her honor and nominated her for a national award, which she received.

As a medical social worker, I tried to help patients make the best adjustments to their illnesses. In my storytelling, I've used healing stories to make a positive difference. I teach aerobics classes to senior citizens. One of my students, who had two strokes, now walks with a cane. I volunteer with a home health agency that provides free nursing care, housekeeping services, and preventive screening for the poor. My deepest desire is peace between individuals that spreads throughout the world. I'm not afraid to express my opinion, but I try to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and look for the good in everyone. I am an active member of my church.





# Valeria - My Corn Mother

BY LOIS BURRELL

Kind, gentle, loving, intelligent, and calm, Valeria was a constant presence in my childhood. She was my mother's cousin, and she was like a second mother to me.

When I was a child, Valeria was my ideal. She was a graduate of the Dixie Hospital School of Nursing in Hampton, Virginia. After her marriage, she and her husband Luke moved to Norfolk, Virginia, where she joined the staff at King's Daughters Hospital. The same qualities that had made her my hero also helped her ascend rapidly to the position of head nurse. Visits to Valeria's home were always highlights in my life. Norfolk was across the bay from my home in Hampton, and a visit to Valeria required traveling on a ferry boat. I loved those ferry boat rides. I would stand on the rear deck and concentrate on the foam-capped waves. I luxuriated in the feel of the salty mist on my face and the scent of fresh seawater in my nostrils.

My nostrils got another treat whenever I went through the front door of Valeria's home. Valeria was an excellent baker—one trait I admired, but have never tried to emulate. Entering Valeria's house was a culinary delight. The enticing smells of baking teased me. She always kept two pies (lemon meringue, sweet potato, or apple) and a pound cake available for snacking. I always assumed that she baked them just for me, and, at least on the days of my visits, she did. She loved to see people eat and enjoy food, and I was always happy to oblige her.

As I ate, Valeria would enchant me with stories about her work at the children's hospital. She never had any children of her own, and the hospital children had become her special family. She loved them with a special passion. I believe Valeria made me unconsciously realize the importance of having passion for everything you do, whether it's baking or helping to save lives.

I begged her to allow me to accompany her to work. I wanted to enter that magical place where sick bodies were transformed into healthy ones. She told me that the hospital rules prevented children under the age of twelve from visiting because they could be carrying diseases like measles. If the hospitalized children caught these diseases, it could cause serious problems for them, or even death. Wanting to seem grown up for Valeria, I stopped begging outwardly, but inside I waited with great impatience to turn twelve.

I was full of anticipation on the day of my twelfth birthday when Valeria took me to the children's hospital for the first time. The strong odor of disinfectant assaulted my senses as I entered the building. Everything there looked so sterile and so spotless. I was given a tour. It was exciting to see the hospital, but I experienced a wave of emotions as I viewed the ill children. I felt sadness, fear, and anger that those so young should have to face such negative trials. I was in awe of the doctors, nurses, and the other staff as I observed their efficient competence and the great love with which they performed their duties.

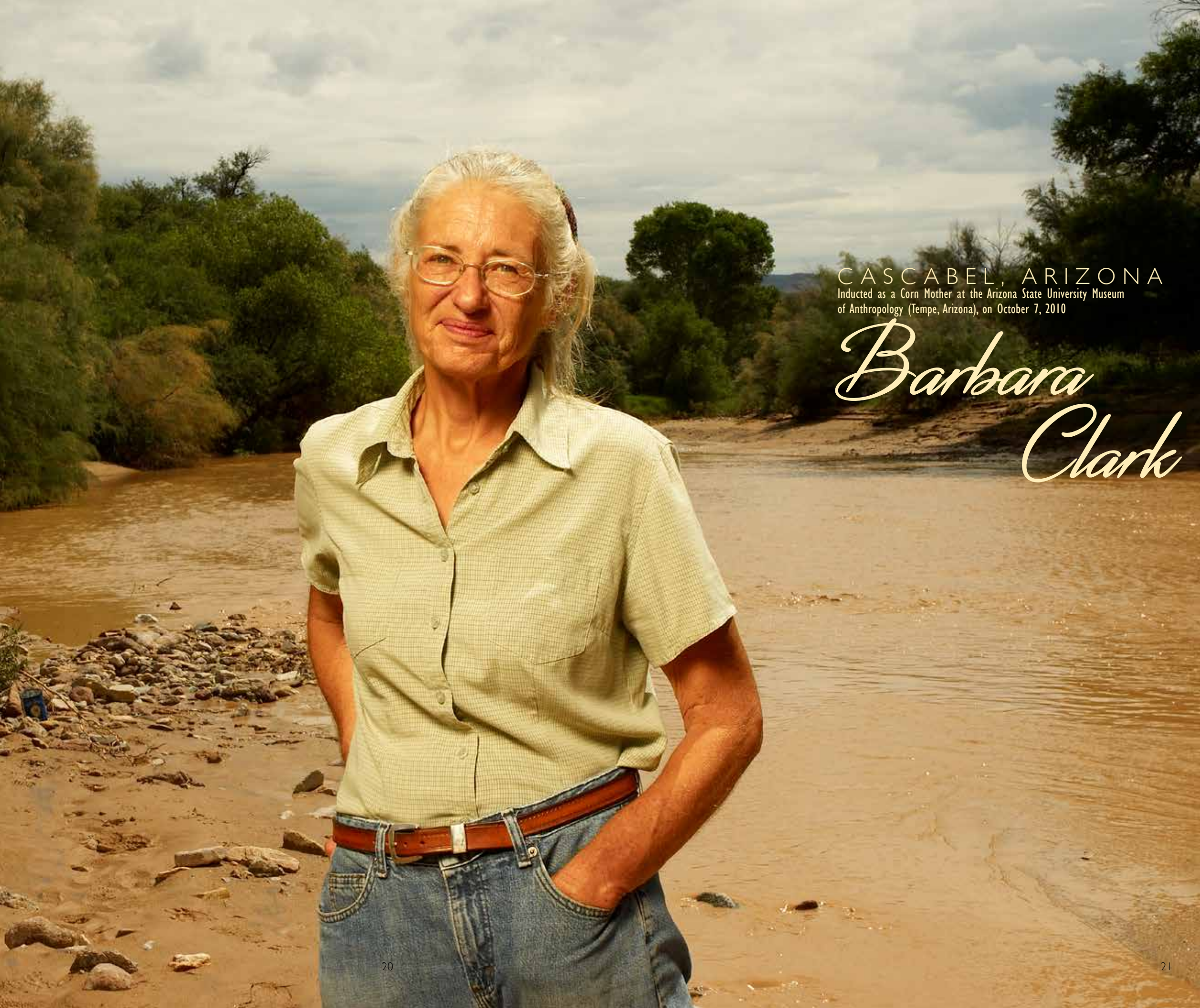
Valeria wisely assigned me to read stories to bedridden children, and oh, how I loved doing that! Through my stories, I was able to take children to a pain-free world and to bring smiles to their faces. The smile disappeared from my own face, though, when a twelve-year-old girl who had enjoyed my stories died. Life and death became a reality to me then. Valeria did not believe in shielding the young from life. She persuaded the doctors to allow me to observe many of the medical procedures. A boy who suffered from a serious kidney problem made a deep impression on me. This was prior to the advent of dialysis machines. The treatment was to insert a needle into his abdominal area and then remove

the large amounts of retained fluid. It was a painful procedure, and he was always screaming in agony by the end. He was advised to avoid candy, potato chips, and soda pop. He did not obey, and he required frequent hospitalizations. From this, I learned early on about the reality of pain and about the importance of will power. I learned that actions have consequences.

The example that Valeria set, and the life experiences that she opened up for me, have guided the direction of my life in so many ways. I understand the importance of perseverance, in part because of Valeria. The value that she placed on education influenced me to pursue college and to get a master's degree. Her dedication to caring for the sick inspired me to enter the medical arena through social work. My interest in aerobics and fitness came from the worth that she taught me to place on my health. Reading to bedridden children planted a seed that sprouted and led to me become a professional storyteller. She taught me the importance of seeing the good in people. And I still love pies and cakes.

Before she retired, Valeria French became known to all the staff and patients at King's Daughters Hospital as "Mother French." For me, Valeria Pritchett French was truly a mother figure in all the ways that matter.





## CASCABEL, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

*Barbara Clark*

Barbara Clark was born in Grand Island, Nebraska in the late forties. When she was four years old, her parents divorced and her mother moved to Denver and became the sole provider for the family. She spent summers with her grandparents in Mankato, Kansas.

She graduated from Denver's Thomas Jefferson High School. After a year at the University of Colorado in Boulder, she had the opportunity to apprentice to Mana Pottery's Denver studio. A few years later, she and several other young potters homesteaded undeveloped land along the San Pedro River in Arizona. Their joint creation, Cascabel Clayworks, continues to thrive as a part of the local community today.

Barbara has helped restore watershed function through her work for The Nature Conservancy. She and her husband David made hand-thrown utilitarian pottery for many years, although osteoarthritis made her stop in 2019. Along with neighbors, they work to solve issues that threaten rural life in their arid region.

### BARBARA'S

## *Life Quote*

ALL WE NEED IS LOVE  
AND A SENSE OF  
PLACE—TIME TO GROW  
TO LOVE AND RESPECT  
ALL THE ELEMENTS  
OF WHERE WE ARE,  
COUPLED WITH A  
COMMITMENT TO WORK  
TOGETHER TOWARD THE  
COMMON GOOD.



## PHILOSOPHY

I believe it is vital to be aware of the ecosystem in which one lives and is a part. We must live within our means, so that the natural system continues to function. By doing so, we sustain all the parts—animal, vegetable, and mineral—that contribute to its health and to everyone’s ultimate survival.

It is important to “know the place you live” and nurture the people and steward the ecosystem you are part of. That sense of place and community responsibility can come from independent people who see themselves as part of an entire organism, important in their own right and as part of the whole.

We are all partners in this game. We are all dependently independent.

I consciously engage in loving my neighbor as myself. I hope this will help us all be fearless enough to look beyond our short-term, selfish needs and see that a healthy landscape is vitally important for our future and a source of joy and rejuvenation in the present. The world we live in—our beautiful, live planet—is composed of interconnected parts that function together to create life. I believe that the seen and unseen universe reflects this, too, and are the same—interconnected molecules and facets working together for the good of the whole.

We must make land-use decisions based on the healthy, best functioning of that landscape/ecosystem. I believe we cannot heal our planet without healing our relationships with other people.

I first learned the principles I live by from my mother and grandmother. My mother taught me I could do anything I had to—and that it should be done well. She taught me that true joy does not come from a surfeit of material goods, but that taking good care of our possessions is the responsible way to behave. My grandmother taught me to respect every human being, and that great people came from every walk of life, race, social stratum, and culture.

# About Pancakes

BY BARBARA CLARK

My mother Margaret grew up in rural Kansas during the Great Depression and reached adulthood as World War II began. The frugal ways of those eras became a way of life for her; without any sense of resentment; we were taught the value of manufactured goods and that they were neither to be wasted nor worshipped. We never passed up scrap lumber in empty lots for our fireplace and always grew vegetables for our table.

She played violin in the symphony and never understood why as a professional medical technologist she wasn’t paid as much for the same job and workload as her male coworkers. But as a single “head of household” she provided generously for us. I never doubted that she loved us, even if I didn’t always agree with her. She had high standards for herself, and for us.

She took us camping in the Rockies every summer and made sure we experienced living in small towns, as well as a large city. Many of those experiences helped me choose my path later on.

My aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents gave me a deep sense of community. Our family gatherings reinforced pride in our ancestors and our love for each other. I heard stories about current and past family members. I treasure them, because they were about events of life that endure forever—and that I continue to see enacted in my extended family of rural neighbors.

One story that sticks in my mind is something that happened one summer when I was young. My mother would send my brother Scott and me to stay with her parents in Mankato, Kansas. As a single parent, she needed every opportunity to work and save. We adored our grandparents, so it seemed absolutely wonderful to experience their rural world.

They lived on the ground floor of a huge, old, well-kept, three-story Victorian that had been converted to apartments. Three similar homes shared that

block, and the alley was lined with hollyhocks and sunflowers. Mourning doves called from the utility lines above the red-brick streets. A wide porch wrapped around most of the house, from the front entrance with its cut glass windows, past the big bay window, to a side door. Scott and I loved the house and grounds and the adventures we had there.

We boarded the train in the huge Denver station, notes for the conductor pinned to our coats. The tracks ran through the high plains of Eastern Colorado and Western Kansas, with its limestone fence posts and un-irrigated corn and wheat fields. I worried that on arriving, we’d miss the small frame station with its wooden benches and pot-bellied stove. So I watched the grain elevators and water tanks for clues about each town we approached. At last, I was relieved to hear the conductor call out our destination.

This was the mid-1950s, and our sense of fun was a bit different then. Going to church, watching trains come through town, swimming in the town pool with neighbor kids, helping in the garden and with household tasks, reading and being read to, playing the old pump organ, and playing Scrabble filled our long verdant days with meaning and adventure.

One morning there was a knock on the door. My grandmother, Adah, straightened her dress and apron and opened it, while Scott and I peered from behind the curtains. Three children stood on the steps, the oldest holding a towel-wrapped bundle. We could tell they were different from the usual visitors and neighbors. Their clothes were faded and mismatched, their hair blond and unkempt, and they stood together, straightly and shyly, away from the door. We thought they were very strange.

They told Grandmother their mother was sending a thank-you gift for something she had done for their family. From behind the window, entranced by these visitors from another world and their bundle, I didn’t hear what Grandmother had done, and she never

dwelled on it. Maybe she shared bounty from the garden, or tutored one of the children, or maybe she gave clothing or charity through her church. They said they hoped we’d would “enjoy the pancakes.” Pancakes, Scott and I laughed! Grandmother seemed quite pleased and kindly accepted the offering. We watched the children leave. I couldn’t believe they had brought pancakes as a thank-you gift; cookies, or better yet cake, but pancakes?

Grandmother set the table with the pink Depression glass plates we always used. She served the big thick, fragrant pancakes, something still highly suspect in my opinion. Sensing my hesitation, she passed the butter and syrup and said that we respected every person’s effort to be an honorable part of society. I could tell from her look that she meant business, and almost felt shame as I took my first bite. They were delicious. I learned a humbling lesson.

Now I live “not too far from the county line” on the San Pedro River. We are blessed with good neighbors, as diverse as the flora and fauna around us. Our pottery shop holds utilitarian ware, painted with scenes of our local landscape, and our goats help keep our grounds mowed.

Perhaps it’s the rural character of this place, and perhaps it’s due to intention, but in the almost forty years I’ve lived here, many projects and social events have been held by the community of neighbors who share the dirt road into town and the river that flows down the valley. Some years ago, we got together and bought a hammer mill to grind mesquite beans into meal. Each fall, we take our harvested bounty to the Community Center (which we built together) and help each other grind the golden pods, a nutritious and sweet addition to batters and breads, a native-foods gift from a durable and versatile desert tree.

Milling day begins with a potluck breakfast, featuring foods from our gardens or the desert, complementing the featured mesquite pancakes served hot with prickly pear syrup. The pancakes are still delicious.





# Maria de la Cruz

AGUILAR, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

Throughout her life, Maria has worked in various capacities to help empower others. During the 1980s she worked for the eastern office of the American Indian Movement out of the Piscataway Tribal Office in Southern Maryland. She advocated for indigenous peoples by lobbying Congressional representatives; fighting for Native religious freedom on federal sites, including prisons; and documenting Human Rights violations against tribes throughout the Americas. During this time, she became a mother and also advocated for women's health issues. She moved to Colorado in 1989 and lobbied with the Colorado Midwives Association for the legalization of midwifery. As a midwife, she has always felt blessed and honored to assist women in childbirth. All of her five children were born at home. When her youngest was five weeks old, she went to college. Her baby went with her for her first semester. Maria earned her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a 4.0 GPA and was the commencement speaker.

For a time she held the title of Director of Enrollment at Trinidad State Junior College in Colorado. After that, she worked as a high school Counselor, a job

where she could directly impact impoverished youth by encouraging and assisting them in the pursuit of college educations and careers. Currently, Maria is the Academic Excellence Administrator at Pueblo Community College, in the Division of Business and Advanced Technology. However, her most meaningful work is the spiritual work done at her home with her family. Maria, her husband Daniel Ordaz, and their children have conducted and hosted many prayer services at a ceremonial site at their mountain home. Over the years, hundreds of people have prayed there.

## PHILOSOPHY

I never liked History when I was a youngster in school, but I realized it was because of the perspective from which it was taught. History was reintroduced to me in the form of storytelling. I learned the stories of people: people who lived collaboratively, who survived atrocities, who understood the interwoven relationships between the Earth and all of her inhabitants. I learned History from an indigenous perspective and it consisted of simple, beautiful, and powerful truths.

My philosophy is to look at my life as a small part of a continuum from the seventh generation past to the seventh generation to come. We can learn from the stories, the histories, of our peoples. We can live in a way that makes our ancestors proud by providing a strong foundation for the future generations. Very simply, my philosophy is to live cleanly—spiritually, physically, environmentally, and emotionally; and to educate and encourage others to do the same. Be thankful. Care for the resources and gifts provided by the Earth so we do not diminish the quality of life for our children's children. I want my Creator and my ancestors to be proud of me, and I strive to be an example for the generations to come.

## MARIA'S

### Life Quote

HISTORY IS "HIS STORY."  
TRUTHS VARY AMONG  
PEOPLE. HEAR MANY  
STORIES TO DETERMINE  
YOUR OWN TRUTHS.

-CHIEF BILLY REDWING  
TAYAC



# Stories of Inspiration

BY MARIA DE LA CRUZ

Throughout my time upon our Mother Earth, I have been blessed to meet a multitude of women who have persevered in spite of difficulty. Although I may not remember each of their names, their courage and work have profoundly moved and inspired me. I am honored to recognize them collectively today. There are many stories that characterize the gentle power of a woman's strength.

These are a few:

My chief's wife, Shirley Tayac, was a foundation for decades of political and spiritual work in the Piscataway tribal lands of Washington D.C. and Maryland. She did not give speeches or conduct ceremonies. However, she was a key force behind numerous events. She coordinated kitchen crews, lobbying efforts, transportation, communication, cleanup crews, and ceremonial preparations. She was the queen of logistics, and more importantly, provided her opinion, which was highly respected. Frequently, there are women who are the cornerstones of communities. Some are not recognized, but their lifework is invaluable. Shirley Tayac has passed but she is remembered, valued, and cherished.

I met a woman in El Salvador whose husband had been killed in a massacre. She had nine children and lived in a small hut. She worked thirteen hours each day picking coffee beans with the children who were old enough to help. As a family, they earned about \$2 per week. She could have been defeated; instead, she found a voice within ANIS (the National Association of Indigenous Salvadorans). She is one of many women in El Salvador and Guatemala who

suffered horrendous violations, but who shared their stories, hoping that future generations would not have to tolerate such atrocities.

Roberta Blackgoat and the grandmothers of Big Mountain were pillars of inspiration. They stood up against multinational corporations and governmental entities that were trying to relocate thousands of Diné (Navajo) families to access coal. They had no resources for such a battle other than a love for their homeland and their traditional way of life. They ultimately won the right to stay.

My mother, Dorothy de la Cruz, as a young white woman of sixteen, married my father, Conrad de la Cruz, during the peak of racism in this country. It took great courage to do such a thing at that time. She and my mother-in-law, Maria Ordaz, have ALWAYS shown tremendous love and commitment to their families, regardless of any hardships they had to endure.

I met a group of women in the early 1980s who documented cases of forced sterilizations of women in poor community hospitals. They presented this information to anyone who would listen in the Washington D.C. area to stop this genocidal practice.

As a midwife, there have been many women who have deeply touched my heart. There are the underground midwives who helped women in childbirth, even though it was illegal in many states. They revolutionized protocols in hospitals where women had previously been put in stirrups, and drugged, so the male doctor could "deliver" the baby. Now there is greater consideration of the birthing woman's natural, physical, emotional, and spiritual

process. It is a sacred time in the life of a woman as she transitions into motherhood and welcomes a new soul into our world. The midwives have brought this concept into society's consciousness as they have fought for legalization of midwifery throughout the country.

Each and every one of the women I have helped through the birthing process has been inspirational. With the love of family and a faith in God, these women have been able to dig deep within themselves and find the strength, passion, and commitment to birth their children. There are no words that can fully describe the sacredness of this ceremony.

Finally, I would like to recognize my children and grandchildren. Although we have had struggles juggling this contemporary world and traditional values, they have a love for the Earth, for our family, and for Creator God. I am inspired and thankful for my husband Daniel and each and every one of my children and grandchildren. My sons: Tlalok, Itsa, and Sunny. My daughters: Danita and Tlalli. My granddaughters: Nevaeh and Umalia. My grandsons: Lucio, John, Elias, and Ayut. My children's partners: Ahni, Mariana, and Dominic. Many blessings to all of you and the grandbabies to come. Aho.



Dawn DiPrince was born in Pueblo, Colorado, a fourth-generation descendent of ancestors who established the community home. She has done many things in her work over the years, including teaching, publishing, and design. Most recently, Dawn served as the Chief Community Museum Officer for History Colorado, where she oversaw eight community museums/sites throughout Colorado. She is now Executive Director of History Colorado. In these jobs she has been a champion for work that helps share the history of communities and peoples in Colorado.

She founded and directed the Museum of Memory public history initiative, which works with people in communities to share their stories as part of the communities' collective history and memory. She was Co-Chair of the Governor's Ludlow Centennial Commemoration Commission, which worked to memorialize and add new understanding to the history of the Ludlow Massacre, in which two dozen miners and family members were killed during a coal miners' strike in 1914. She is a cofounder of Bridging Borders Teen Girl Fellowship, which is dedicated to the belief that a greater sense of place and a greater sense of history are the building blocks of a strong self-identity. DiPrince is also the proud mother of three beautiful children. .



*Dawn  
DiPrince*

PUEBLO, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019



## PHILOSOPHY

History can heal communities. When you consider that history—as most of us learned in school and is still being taught in many classrooms—is purposely filled with gaps and erasures that fortify a narrative that does not include all peoples and communities, it is not hard to understand the healing power of resuscitating and reanimating what was once lost. One of the devastating generational traumas of genocide, slavery, conquest, colonization, and dispossession is the loss of history, culture, language, and ancestry. Anthropologist Claude Meillassoux wrote of the “social death” that happens when people are cut off from their roots. Our intuitive knowledge also tells us that we are stronger when we know where we come from, when we are rooted, grounded and moored.

I often ask the question: Who has the right to remember? Of course, we all do. But even within the institutional practices of History, centuries of records often deliberately privilege only certain ways of knowing that exclude the many who didn't have access to populate the official historical records. Part of rearticulating historical erasure (or “re-memory” in the words of Toni Morrison) is making space for other ways of knowing and remembering, reclaiming grandmother knowledge, kitchen table histories, oral traditions, cultural inheritances, food traditions, and healing practices.

DAWN'S

## Life Quote

“FEMINIST ANALYSIS HAS ALWAYS RECOGNIZED THE CENTRALITY OF REWRITING AND REMEMBERING HISTORY, A PROCESS THAT IS SIGNIFICANT NOT MERELY AS A CORRECTIVE TO THE GAPS, ERASURES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINIST HISTORY BUT BECAUSE THE VERY PRACTICE OF REMEMBERING AND REWRITING LEADS TO THE FORMATION OF POLITICIZED CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-IDENTITY.”

— CHANDRA TALPADE MOHANTY, *FEMINISM WITHOUT BORDERS: DECOLONIZING THEORY, PRACTICING SOLIDARITY*

## Tribute to La Junta

BY DAWN DIPRINCE

I grew up in the small town of La Junta, Colorado, in the fertile and beautiful Arkansas River Valley. The name La Junta means “the junction” in Spanish. It once was the junction of the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail and the Trappers Trail, and provided a path into the mountains and gold camps of Colorado. It was a small town, where everyone was related through marriage or birth.

My family, who are Italians and ethnic Serbs from Croatia, originally came to Pueblo, Colorado in the early 1900s. They worked for Colorado Fuel and Iron (CF&I) in the steel mill and the lime quarries. Eventually they made their way to La Junta, which was formerly called Otero. It was renamed by the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad (usually called the Santa Fe) to also signify the railroad junction, with one branch heading west along the Arkansas River to Pueblo, and the other southwest along Timpas Creek to Trinidad, Colorado.

I am a proud fourth-generation Southern Coloradoan. What strikes me most about La Junta is that I grew up there with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, which taught me understanding. And I was surrounded by many strong female role models who worked together to nurture the community. I saw how these women just “got things done.” They never waited for permission when it came to organizing.

Whether they were making dozens of tamales for the church bazaar, or helping kids with 4-H sewing projects, cooking for

## and My Corn Mother, Jerry Fleischacker

funerals, or consoling grieving families, these women saw what was needed and moved forward. They worked quietly and patiently behind the scenes, out of the spotlight. They planned over cookies and coffee how to make things happen. They were observant. They paid attention to who was having hard times, who could use extra work or extra food, who needed a ride to a doctor in Pueblo, or to the hospital to visit a loved one. And they orchestrated solutions to these issues that it was easy for those not directly affected to overlook.

Many of these women could have been my Corn Mother. But it was one of my 6th grade teachers, Jerry Fleischacker, who taught me to cherish, and help out, my own small-town community. I had always loved books. Whatever else was happening in my life, there was always a book at my side or next to my bed. Books shaped how I viewed the world. I was enthralled by Jane Austen's novels about upper-class people in the English countryside, and the southern society described in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. But it was Jerry who taught me to focus on my own real-life community.

She was a dear family friend, and like my dad, she taught P.E. He taught at West Elementary, while she taught at East Elementary, where I went. She wore her wavy hair short and very much looked the gym teacher. She was a single mom and had a rural air and earthy softness about her, which made you feel at ease. She was practical, but also jolly and cheerful. When she saw us students, she always greeted us in a way that made everyone light up.

Jerry always knew who needed extra love, and found ways to make them feel loved. She cheerfully lifted up the lonely and offered a hug to the heartbroken. With her practicality, she taught us how to make things. And she showed me how to do a lot with very little and how to cheerfully juggle many needs. She often had a houseful of kids at different stages of 4-H projects and would teach one to add a button and another to set a hem.

I never learned to really sew—my hands don't work that way. But Jerry taught me something even more valuable—the power and importance of showing people you cared, and of dropping everything to help someone. If I couldn't talk to my parents about something, I could go to her. I remember hanging out at her house, eating plates of cookies or bowls of beans. My sister was in 4-H, and Jerry would sew with her. When our family car broke down, she lent us her truck.

And she shared more than just the practicalities of 4-H projects with us kids. At Jerry's house, there was always lots of banter, and always a happy face to greet you and offer you a soft place to sit. She told us kids stories about living on a farm, about chasing cows who had strayed, about canning peaches, beans, and tomatoes, and about picking choke cherries for jelly.

Following Jerry's model of caring, when I was a high school senior, I volunteered in the mornings with her at the grade school where she now worked with kids who had physical disabilities. She organized it so that I could give a ride each morning to other high school students with special needs who needed to be at her school at the same time that I volunteered. She taught me how to be both tough and gentle in guiding these students in practices that improved their motor skills. I especially remember the celebration we threw when one of her students (who had cerebral palsy), walked around the track.

In her every interaction, Jerry gave me the growing-up lesson that patience, love, listening, good cheer, doing quiet favors, being present, and taking the time to hear people's stories all have healing power. I learned how effective it can be to take action without asking for recognition or permission, the value of joy in the face of adversity, and that life can actually be better when it is messy. I'm sure I will never fully realize all of the ways that she has woven magic in our community and through people's lives, but I hope that I honor her by carrying on these same practices in the work I do and the ways in which I serve our community.



Amy Duncan spent her childhood in a small mountain town on the California-Oregon border. She grew up surrounded by a strong extended Swiss-Italian family and a wealth of female influences—mother, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and aunts. In 1994, she attended her first birth, just to help a friend. To her surprise, she felt the calling of the ancient art of midwifery wrapped around her at that time. In Amy's words, "The more I tried to deny it, the more it pulled."

Amy spent seven years studying and apprenticing in hospitals and clinics throughout Guatemala, Jamaica, and the American Southwest. She obtained a license as a midwife in the state of New Mexico, and a national certificate as a Certified Professional Midwife (CPM). She also works with plant medicines. Amy and her husband raised their two children on an organic farm in Gila, New Mexico, where she founded the Generation Birth and Family Center in Silver City, New Mexico.

## GILA, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

*Amy Duncan*





## PHILOSOPHY

My strongest belief is that we are all here to awaken to the Divine. Every time a woman is in labor, I see this instantly. The Divine Mother moves through her, is within her, and is there guiding the baby, mother, and all of us to the light.

When I was a child, I spent a great deal of time with my great-grandmothers. I used to love to touch their hands and felt a deep connection to them. I realized that I was seeing myself in them. It was almost like looking into a mirror fifty years in the future. I knew they were once like me and that one day I would be as they were. I felt a deep cosmic connection to life through them, and it has stayed with me my whole life. It is as if life weaves this most profoundly beautiful tapestry and enfolds us all in its sacredness.

We spend a lot of time forgetting our true purpose and getting distracted, but during sacred times, such as giving birth, we are reminded of our true purpose and potential. Of course, this is not easy, and as I watch a woman working with the pains of labor I am always reminded of how much fierce perseverance it takes. I also feel that being of service to others can also help us on this journey. Seeing the many faces of the Divine Mother all around us, remembering her message of compassion and love, living in harmony and giving through selfless service—this is what I aspire to in my life. I hope my work can empower women to remember their own ancient wisdom and deep knowledge of how to birth their babies, as well as their selves.



# The Fabric of

As a young girl, I had a deep fascination with my great-grandmothers, the matriarchs of the family.

My Nona (great-grandmother on my father's side) was born in 1904 in Tassin Canton, on the border of Switzerland and Italy. From my earliest years, she wove stories about her life for me into a beautiful tapestry. I recall how she told me that when she was in Switzerland, she was able to go to school, unlike her other siblings. I remember what she told me about her hard-working mother, and how she worshiped her father, even though he went to America when she was three years old.

In 1913, at the age of nine, my Nona, Nilda Mastellot; her two siblings; and her mother took a ship from France to New York City to reunite with her father. She told me about her travels across the U.S. by train, their struggles because they couldn't speak English, and her mother's strength in making these travels with three small children. My Nona's first experiences with living in a foreign land were incredible to me. Eventually they reached Northern California, where her father worked on a large ranch.

In 1918, my Nona and her family relocated to a very small town in the mountains of Northern California (Scotts Valley) and had a dairy farm. She quickly learned English, and from then on she refused to speak her native language because of her deep embarrassment of being a foreigner. She told me how she quit high school, although she loved learning, because the other kids called her "spaghetti," which was a painful insult. She wasn't shy about telling me about her first menstrual cycle, and about how little she knew about becoming a woman. Her honesty and openness about how alone and insecure she felt during this time of her life helped me gain confidence in educating myself about the cycles of being a woman. This would prove instrumental later on, as I realized that I felt a deep passion about wanting to help other women have confidence and faith in their bodies when I grew up.

# Life

BY AMY DUNCAN

Even though I was only a child when I first heard my Nona's stories, I could feel her great sorrow and loss. I've kept these stories with me all my life. Her ability to survive in this New World, her fears, and her perseverance and determination, have wrapped around me.

I also remember sitting with my Great-Grandmother Mabel, my mother's grandmother. She was born in 1890 into a farming family. She was German, and her family came across the U.S. in wagon trains. I don't have much information on my Great-Grandmother Mabel. I know she was a teacher. We always sat silently and enjoyed holding hands. I enjoyed being around her quiet and ancient wisdom.

She had such a deep stillness with all her years, yet such a spark twinkling in her eyes. We said little but I held her hands, ancient hands, stroking her deep wrinkles, caressing her years. She was always so positive, even through the hardships and struggles that naturally occur over 102 years. I could sit for hours holding her hands; something moved me so much to see her hands next to mine. It was if I could see the web of life right there. As I gazed upon the youth of my hands next to the many years of her hands, I knew then that I was a part of this very intricate fabric of life. I could feel no separation, just fascination with how this wheel of life keeps turning.

Many years later, in my early twenties, I was invited to be a part of a friend's birthing. I had never seen a baby born, yet I was very compelled to be there. As I watched this young mother in labor, something so ancient and familiar came through me. It was as if I was sitting in my Nona's kitchen again or stroking the hands of my Great-Grandmother Mabel. Once again, I felt wrapped in the comfort of this fabric of life, fully embracing these powerful cycles. All the faces of all the women who had ever given birth were there, within this woman giving birth. She was strong yet humble, allowing perseverance and determination

to guide her. My hands tingled to hold her, to be with her in this ever so real moment. With every contraction, I could feel an earthquake awakening something deep within me, and I was a part of this ancient journey through pain and suffering to joy and release, bringing new life to the light.

Every birth I attend, I am there to hold the woman and child, helping her to do the deep work of confronting her fears and sorrows. All I can do is hold her as she traverses the dark cavernous recesses of herself. I know I cannot do it for her and would never want to, because through this journey she too will see her deep connection with all the ancient ones; great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers and sisters that have come before her. Every contraction being a gift to this new life, allowing the knowledge to be carried on to all the generations. Guiding and reminding us all that we are a part of this intricate fabric of life. I know instinctively that my great-grandmothers went through this same process and were there for many women too. I carry on what they did and lived, in ways I cannot even begin to describe. But for me, I know what I do is directly related to what they did. It is a sacred honor I continue in their memory and pass on to a new generation.

AMY'S

## Life Quote

THERE IS NOTHING IN  
THIS WORLD THAT HASN'T  
NOURISHED OUR GROWTH  
IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.  
— AMMACHI



# Kristy L. Duran

## ALAMOSA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

Kristy L. Duran grew up in Antonito, Colorado, and is a sixth-generation resident of the San Luis Valley. Her maternal grandparents raised nine children, and insisted that all of them become educators. Education was always extremely important in her family. Her grandmother would constantly remind them, "Education is the one thing no one can take away from you."

After graduating from high school, she pursued a Bachelor of Science in Biology, followed by a Masters in Neuroscience, and finally, a Doctorate in Evolutionary Biology. She taught as a professor of Biology at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado. As a mother, she felt it was important for her to return with her family to the San Luis Valley in Colorado. She wanted to give back to the community that had enriched her life. She is passionate about introducing students to the wonders of science, and teaching them that they, too, can be scientists and be successful in all they choose to accomplish.

### KRISTY'S

## Life Quote

"EVERYONE HAS THE POWER  
TO CREATE AND DISCOVER.  
IT IS MY JOB TO HELP UNLEASH  
THAT POWER."





# Picking Champé

BY KRISTY L. DURAN

Fall is my favorite time of the year. Chamisos erupt with a sea of yellow flowers, turning the dull shrub a golden yellow. Wild rose bushes lose their flowers as their fruits ripen into a ruby red berry—champé. It is a tradition in our family to pick the fall fruit and make jelly from champés. For me, fall is also a time to reflect on the past, my life, and the lives of those who came before me.

I remember, as a young girl, picking champé with my grandma Eloyda and my mom. Three generations sharing a tradition. In my mind, I see old hands, mature hands, and young hands beckoning berries into buckets. These are the two women who have most influenced my life journey. I can hear my grandmother singing as she worked, and I am flooded with memories of her.

My grandma, Eloyda Valdez Ruybal, was born in 1911 in Las Mesitas, Colorado, and lived in the house that my grandpa Chris built for her there. She often said that one of the happiest days of her life was when my grandpa asked her, “¿Done quieres tu casa?” (“Where do you want your house to be?”) She chose the spot between her childhood home and my grandfather’s. Together they raised nine children: eight girls and one boy. My grandpa was a carpenter and my grandma cooked, cleaned, made clothing, and managed the house. None of her children ever remember her raising her voice.

I remember three main things about my grandmother. She loved music and poetry, she valued education, and she had a joyous spirit. I remember her singing or humming often. Sometimes she would break into a dance. She loved to dance! She loved poetry, often reciting poems she had memorized as a child. Although she never said it, I always thought she was enamored with words.

Because of her, I always try to choose my words carefully, as they have the power to build someone up, or tear them down. My grandma Eloyda valued education and loved learning. Her only regret in life was that she didn’t continue her education. Instead, she and my grandpa insisted that all their children earn their college degrees in education. Eight went into education, and one became a nurse (she later became a professor of nursing). Grandma Eloyda often told me, “Education is the one thing no one can take away from you.” Taking her words to heart, I earned my B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees. Just as she loved learning, I strive to instill the love of learning in my students.

My grandma also had such a joyous spirit. I mostly remember her being happy. She had an amazing outlook on life. I remember one day it was cold and rainy as I rushed into her house to escape the nasty weather. Contrary to my mood, grandma cheerfully greeted me, saying, “Isn’t this rain a blessing! Soon the flowers will bloom with this much-needed rain!” When life gets hard, I try to see situations through my grandma’s eyes, and hopefully inspire others to do the same.

After picking champé, we would take it home and clean it. My sister and I would clean an hour or two after school, and my mom would spend hours on a weekend making jelly. On Monday morning, after a tortilla and champé, we would all head to school.

Both my parents were teachers. My mom, Cristina Duran, was a math and chemistry major and taught high school for thirty years. Growing up, I knew my mom was very intelligent and good at her job, but in my eyes, she was first and foremost an amazing mom. It’s hard to recall one prominent memory of her from my childhood, because it was the sum of all the little things that made her

a great mom. She always had or made time to listen to me. She played my silly childhood games over and over, seeming never to tire of them. She nurtured my independence and let me attempt things well beyond my age, like being the only second grader to enter the mile race for third and fourth graders, and applying for a post office cleaning job when I was eight.

She never told me I wasn’t old / good / fast / smart enough to do anything. When I was in high school, my mom was also my chemistry, physics, and computer teacher. It was interesting to see my mom in a different role. I admired her even more because she seemed to be amazing at everything she did. I still burst with pride when I meet her former students and they tell me my mom was the best teacher they ever had.

I learned three important lessons from my mother. First, take time for people. Second, confidence and independence must be nurtured, not taught. They begin when you believe in someone, especially when they don’t believe in themselves. Finally, teach people to aim big, and that it is OK to fail. These lessons drive how I teach, mentor, and interact with my students and mentees.

Now, I pick champé with my mom and four-year-old son—another three generations. It is fall again, a word that is often associated with decline, or an end. However, fall can also mean coming into existence. I think about the qualities my mom and grandma possessed, and how I strive to nurture them into existence in me. Each of them is, after all, the sum of the qualities inspired by those who came before them. They continue to influence my life journey, reminding me that every future holds promise.

## PHILOSOPHY

Growing up in a small town, I was aware of only a handful of careers from which to choose. When I went off to college, I didn’t know exactly what career I wanted to pursue, but I knew I loved science. I was fortunate to become involved in undergraduate research. That really changed my life, and opened my eyes to the wonder of discovery in science and the idea that I could be a “discoverer.” I was fortunate throughout my education to have mentors who believed in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself. Without them, I wouldn’t be where I am today or the person I am today. It became my lifelong goal to be that kind of mentor.

All through my education, I began to notice that few of my professors looked like me or shared my background. I found this discouraging. In a world that is extremely diverse, there was little diversity in those who study and teach science. I wanted to help change this. I was fortunate to return to my community and do my work here. It has become my mission to give my students the undergraduate research experience I enjoyed, take them to conferences, teach them to network, and above all, teach them to believe in themselves. I am the advisor for our local SACNAS Chapter (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science), where I am working to be a lifelong mentor to my students. Science), where I am working to be a lifelong mentor to my students.



## ALAMOSA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley  
Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016,  
in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

*Claudia  
Ebel*

CLAUDIA'S

*Life Quote*

WE MUST WORK TO  
PICK UP EACH BEACH-  
STRICKEN STARFISH  
WASHED UP ON SHORE  
FROM THE STORM AND  
PUT THEM BACK INTO  
THE OCEAN ONE-BY-  
ONE EVERY DAY, EVEN  
IF WE CAN'T GET THEM  
ALL, FOR THE VERY  
PRACTICE OF DOING  
THE BEST WE CAN IN  
EVERY MOMENT THAT  
WE CAN.

(STARFISH STORY,  
ORIGINALLY SOURCE  
UNKNOWN)





# Lucia, a Woman of the Corn

BY CLAUDIA EBEL

Claudia was born with a deep passion and strong aptitude to work with people and the planet. She grew up in Denver, and as she saw the city expand, she was prompted to explore her interest in both food production and community development. She began traveling throughout Latin America, and beyond. Her professional life was a patchwork of many experiences that wove together principles of education, health, food production, and food preparation, and she was involved in a myriad of non-profit organizations and business ventures. Complementing her work life, she loves to explore nature, pull weeds, try her hand at visual arts, and cook up whatever is in harvest. She speaks Spanish as a second language. At home in Alamosa, Colorado in the San Luis Valley, Claudia has taught low-income families how to eat nutritiously on a budget, while helping build a 38-acre agricultural park along the Colorado River.

## PHILOSOPHY

Just as geese naturally form a “V” for efficiency when flying in formation, we humans are meant to collaborate with each other as community entities, to make the world a better place. As an individual, I too must focus on my own form and function, my style, and my protection from danger, to be an effective part of the whole.

I feel most valued where I am most needed, and most satisfied when I am deep in the trenches of our human condition. I believe in mutually beneficial solutions between people and places, and in the deep visceral nature of food to help connect the two and heal the wounds of our health.

I believe strongly in the small nuances, connections, and coincidences of daily life that keep us smiling at how funny and intertwined our stories can be. Ultimately, I trust in the overall development of what we are all taking part in, though it might seem messy and confusing from above. I believe we are led in certain directions and learn the lessons we need to when we need to. Sometimes patience, motivation, and persistence can be difficult to muster up day by day; however, we must consistently be disciplined and active dream-seekers to realize the fruits of our commonly held orchard.

Whether a certain path seems more difficult, or less straightforward, than another, it still may be the right path for us if the arrows of our heart point us in that direction. Whether through the power of music, or friendship, or deep contemplation, every day can be another layer in realizing the meaning of our journey. Sometimes, just seeing a certain child or holding the smallest of seeds in my hand can be enough to inspire the current development of a life-long dream or idea.

Lucia is a woman of the corn—literally as a member of the Mayan community, whose traditional origins identify them strongly with maize (corn), and as someone I have gotten to know when standing among the many varieties of native corn growing in the Guatemalan community gardens, which we are both a part of, in Alamosa.

I have gathered bits and pieces of her family story and her life here in the United States. Lucia travelled here from Guatemala several decades ago to start a new life in a place that was very different from her home. Even among the trials she has endured, Lucia is a woman of la Luz. She is such a light in the world that I am struck by her whenever I see her. For Lucia, to be in the garden is to be in a place of bright lightness, which allows her to be fully herself. She takes a deep breath of the fresh valley air, soaks up some of those high-elevation sun rays, and walks among the corn stalks in the garden, with birds flying overhead. This is a space for her to feel free, and to participate in the plenty and gratitude that this rich river soil offers to those who patiently cultivate it and care for its life, such as Lucia with her motherly warm spirit.

Sometimes when we are in the gardens, she picks me handfuls of fava beans, cilantro, and mora greens from her family’s plot for me to take home and try. “Take them home, Claudia,” she says. “Try them and enjoy them,” she adds, filling my arms and pockets with samples of her hard-earned harvest while insisting on practicing her English with me. I respond “Gracias, mi amiga. ¡También guárdalas para ti misma!” (“Thank you, my friend. Also save some for yourself!”), as I try to practice my Spanish back with her. We often communicate this way, trying to learn the other one’s dominant language. But Lucia of course more traditionally speaks Q’anjob’al, a Mayan dialect of Huehuetenango.

The garden is a place for her to maintain her language, and to share in the beautiful sacred space that she knows best—the land of bright sunshine and rich agricultural cultivation.

Lucia has proved to be quite creative and assertive when we are working together. When we find ourselves on the land without the proper tool to do a job, Lucia finds a way to get the job done—usually by hand, and with limited tools. Her strength belies her small stature, and her smile glistens more than her sweat. If I have to leave before she has finished a project, when I come back, it is perfectly done. I come back to a project that is complete, knowing that this woman’s tenacity can’t be overestimated. She is strong, yet careful and gracious in her work. I am constantly amazed by Lucia’s attitude, which drives her to try and try again, and to overcome obstacles.

Lucia is a leader in her community. When she speaks, she gently and naturally holds everyone’s attention. There is always great value in the stories she tells, and the opinions she holds. She is truly a woman of the corn—strong, sturdy, pointing up toward the sky, yet diligently participating with all of her compañer@s (companions) in the vast network of cross-pollination that she works to cultivate every day in her life. When the sun rises, you will see her inside a great big building, laboring over floors, corners, counters, and walls to make a paycheck. But whenever she gets the chance, she returns to the land of the corn, the Guatemalan community gardens, the place where her brightest self-shows, where she can be a woman of the corn, inspiring and impelling other women to aspire to live as fully and positively as she does.



# Geneva Escobedo

## TUCSON, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

Geneva was born on Friday, August 13, 1949 in the Year of the Ox, under the earth branch. It was a lucky day for her and for her parents, Pedro and Brijida Escobedo. She is the oldest of five and was a second mom to her four brothers. She raised three stepdaughters and a nephew, and is a grandmother of seventeen.

Geneva received a Business Administration degree from Arizona State University, and received her M.B.A. from the University of Phoenix. She was Executive Assistant to the President of the West Campus of Pima Community College in Tucson. Her twenty-eight year career in higher education has included student development, community college instruction, marketing and public relations, developing and directing grants, and creating partnership programs. She was also the Downtown Center Director for Arizona State University. Her mission in life is to help others achieve a college degree. She is the author of the book *Dichos de mi Padre* (Sayings of My Father), published in 2017.

### GENEVA'S

## Life Quote

"¡QUÉ A GUSTO ES DESCANSAR, Y DESPUÉS NO HACER NADA!"

"HOW WONDERFUL IT IS TO REST (ESPECIALLY AFTER A HARD DAY'S WORK), AND AFTER THAT, DO NOTHING."

### PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy of life has evolved over my sixty years on this blessed planet. As a young woman, I lived by the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." As a member of the baby boomer generation, I have embraced the philosophy that no matter what obstacles are placed in front of me, I must dust myself off, renew my commitment to the goals I have set, and not look back on the mistakes of the past.

When I am faced with confusing choices, I have learned to trust my instincts. When I did not listen to my gut feelings, things usually went awry. During challenging times, I learned the importance of seeking professional help. When I became the stepmother of three girls (ages seven, five, and three), I was not sure how to parent. I was not confident in my abilities to parent. My counselor helped me put things into perspective. She helped me understand that parenting is a journey and that I would learn as much from my children as they learned from me.

I also believe that it is critical to be a lifelong learner. We never get too old to learn something new. I never want to stop growing intellectually and spiritually. I enjoy participating in lectures, going to the theater, and taking courses that will expand my knowledge.





# Nina and Mom

BY GENEVA ESCOBEDO

The significant women in my life have always been a team. My Nina (Godmother) Nellie Escobedo Plasencio, and my mom, Brijida Escobedo, are my mentors and supporters, and the greatest cheerleaders a woman could ever have. Throughout my personal and professional life, they have given me sound advice, provided a shoulder to cry on, and have been there for every important milestone in my life.

Mom told me that when I was a little girl, I said, “I’m going to be a secretary, just like my Nina.” I was in awe of how professional she was, that she earned her own money, and that she was educated and had an important position in the small town I grew up in—Safford, Arizona.

After graduating from Eastern Arizona College (just like Nina) my first job was as Executive Secretary to the Vice President of the International Department at the Arizona Bank in Phoenix. I worked for six years in Phoenix and decided to return to college for my bachelor’s degree. Mom and Nina encouraged me to get my degree and said I was bright and could obtain higher-level positions with my degree in hand. My last position before returning to college was as Program Planner for Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc., a non-profit community development corporation. Because of Nina’s example of community service, I decided to contribute to the Hispanic community through projects to improve education, health, housing, and economic development.

Working at Chicanos Por La Causa gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in politics and learn about community empowerment. But politics wasn’t new to me. Mom and Nina were very active in the Democratic Party. They worked endless hours registering citizens to vote and supporting candidates that they felt would best represent the community. I helped develop Nina’s campaign brochures when she ran for Graham County Treasurer.

When I was selected to participate in the National Hispana Leadership Institute in 1995, Mom and Nina flew to Washington, D.C. to attend the graduation ceremonies. In my speech, I acknowledged the support they had given me and said what excellent role models they had been. They enjoyed their Washington, D.C. trip immensely and were delighted to visit the Capitol, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Lincoln Memorial, the National Cathedral, and the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Wall.

These two amazing women guided me on my spiritual journey. Raised a Catholic, I went to Sunday mass with Mom and Nina when I visited Safford. They taught me the power of prayer and told me that novenas (nine days of praying the rosary) are an important way to pray for loved ones who struggle with addiction, divorce, financial setbacks, and illness. I also learned about the saints through them. Mom and I both pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe (the mother of our Lord) and ask her to intervene on our behalf to help family and friends who are in need of strength and healing. Through Mom and Nina, I learned that the Virgen de Guadalupe is a source of empowerment for Latinas. I call on her when I am confused, in doubt, or worried about someone I love.

Both women are now in their 80’s. They are active, brilliant, and full of life. They teach me that no matter how old we are, we can make a difference. Their motto is, “Never give up, and keep your mind and body moving!” When the three of us are together, we sing, laugh, tell stories, and discuss our favorite dichos. Dichos are proverbs handed down from generation to generation. They always have a message about a life value.

One of my favorite dichos is:

“No hay mal que por bien no venga.”

“When something bad happens, it is always followed by something good.”

When I think about this dicho, I am reminded of the time that I did not get an administrative position that I really wanted. It would have been a great promotion. Then, a year later, this position was eliminated. It was a blessing in disguise.

Another dicho they shared was “Cada perico en su palo” (“Every bird chooses its own branch”). It means that we all make our own life choices. As I reflect on this dicho, I think about the many choices I have made in my life—good and not so good. The good choices, like pursuing a college degree, volunteering to organize an event, or serving as young woman’s mentor are rewarding. The not so good choices, such as getting romantically involved with the wrong person, or not speaking well of a colleague, served as life lessons.

One of my favorite activities is reading novels, poems and short stories. Mom and Nina are voracious readers. Their example has served me well. I love to immerse myself in the characters of the novel and learn about the history and triumphs of famous women who contributed so much to mankind. When I began my journey as a writer and poet, they encouraged me, critiqued my work, and complimented me. They were present when I recited my first poem at a local bookstore. They helped me in the development of my first book, *Dichos de mi Padre (Sayings of My Father)*. Mom and Nina contributed to the family history section of my book and encouraged me every step of the way.

I am blessed to have these two strong women in my life. They epitomize the words “role model.” They keep me grounded to Mother Earth. They have shaped my outlook on life and inspire me to remain positive at all times, no matter what barriers are placed in front of me.





## SAFFORD, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

*Nellie Escobedo  
Plasencio*

Nellie Escobedo Plasencio was born in Solomonville, Arizona in 1925. She was married to Mike Plasencio for over 40 years. At 22 years of age, she had four children to raise. She began work at 17 and retired at 75. Her first job was as a stenographer for the County Attorney in Safford, Arizona. At one point in her career, she was not hired at a telephone company because she was Mexican-American, although she was educated and experienced.

After working for twelve years at the courthouse, Nellie pursued an Associate's Degree in Office Procedures at Eastern Arizona College. She worked for 33 years for her favorite employer, Emil Crockett, who owned an insurance agency. She became an insurance agent and part owner. After retiring, Nellie was elected to three terms as County Treasurer. She was the first Mexican-American elected to this position. She served her community for many years through her work on the Safford School Board, Eastern Arizona Alumni Board, and for the Graham County Association for Children with Disabilities.

*Nellie Escobedo Plasencio was born on February 27, 1925 and passed away on November 2, 2014.*

### NELLIE'S

## *Life Quote*

"¡QUÉ A GUSTO ES DESCANSAR, Y DESPUÉS NO HACER NADA!"

"HOW WONDERFUL IT IS TO REST (ESPECIALLY AFTER A HARD DAY'S WORK), AND AFTER THAT, TO DO NOTHING."



# Doña Petra

## PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy is to think twice before speaking. It is better to be cautious with your words than to be sorry later. I learned that if I approached interpersonal relationships with calmness and directness, it would not only benefit me, but would strengthen my relationships with others. Communicating with compassion, understanding, and empathy is essential if we are to establish lifelong bonds. Communicating with an open mind lets us gain a better understanding of the social, political, and religious views of those we encounter. Communicating openly also helps us understand the particular concerns of others. Open communication creates a safe space where others can be heard. When communicating, don't pour syrup all over people when you give a compliment. It can be interpreted as insincere. When you recognize your employees' good work, they will be motivated to do better. Always give credit where credit is due.

Our talents, skills, and education cannot replace good character. Good character is not given to us; we have to work at it daily by making good choices and having integrity. Doing your best is more important than being the best. Wisdom comes more from living than from studying. I live my mom's words of wisdom: "Speak in a soft and sweet manner." And "Don't ever be afraid to admit you are wrong." And "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice." These dichos, or sayings, resonate with me, because I tend to take on too much, and I need to remember to maintain a balanced life.

My mother, Petra Hernandez Escobedo, was born in Chihuahua, Mexico on October 1, 1901 to Pedro and Rafaela Hernandez. Although she passed away twelve years ago at age 94, she continues to influence my life every day through the many values and life lessons she shared. My Mamá raised one son and five daughters; Romana, Linda, me, Gloria, Julio Jr., and Margie. She was a very spiritual woman, who taught us to dedicate ourselves to our Catholic faith.

My grandfather was a cowboy; grandmother Rafaela was a seamstress. She learned how to sew by watching her mother sew dresses for her and her sister, Rafaela. My mother's only sister, Rafaela (aka "Tala") was one year older. My aunt and mother grew up without a father as a result of a tragic event. Before Mom was born, her father, while herding cattle, got tired and decided to rest and take a drink of water. Unfortunately, he grabbed the wrong bottle, which contained poison. He died instantly. When cowboys were stung by snakes, they would apply this poison to their bite.

A few years after my grandfather's death, grandmother Rafaela died unexpectedly on Christmas Eve, leaving Mom and my aunt orphans. They went to live with my great-grandmother. After two years, she died, leaving them on their own. Fortunately, their uncles, who were compassionate men and very close to Mom and my aunt, took them in and raised them until about the age of twelve.

Mom's uncles decided to emigrate to the United States and walked from a small town in Chihuahua to El Paso, Texas with my Mom and aunt in tow. Once settled in El Paso, Mom and Aunt Rafaela both got jobs at a candy shop. They never complained about the work. They were happy to be employed and to earn their own money.

# Hernandez Escobedo

BY NELLIE ESCOBEDO PLASENCIO

When Mom was about sixteen, she traveled to Silver City, New Mexico with Aunt Rafaela to meet up with her friend Carmen and with Carmen's brother. Carmen Escobedo is my father's oldest sister. When my father Julio met my mother, it was love at first sight! After two dates, they decided to get married. My father worked in Silver City for the railroads. Their first home was a railroad box car. Mom fixed it up as best as she could by sewing curtains, adding plants, and creating a cozy nest. They lived there until 1920, moved to El Paso for a few years, and had two children to raise. Dad always wanted to return to Arizona to be with his brothers and sister Carmen in Solomonville. When he talked about it with Mom, she said "Ni de reina me voy para Solomon" ("Not even as a queen will I move to Solomon.") Dad convinced her that she was "one in a million" and that all would be fine. The family of four moved to Solomonville so Dad could work with his older brother Tomás on the farms.

Mom had several jobs while raising me and my siblings, but she never complained. She worked as a seamstress, cooked for families, and cleaned homes. She was very active in the church and served as Secretary/Treasurer for the Alianza Hispana Americana. This was a social service organization for the Mexican American community and was a vital resource during the time of the Depression. Its mantra was "Give a helping hand to each other where needed."

My mother's example of serving others greatly influenced my life. She has been an inspiration as a parent, a devoted wife, and a teacher of Christian values. Her example has led me on a path of service to others through my professional work, church activities, and volunteer projects. The Escobedo extended family has honored my mother in many ways, because she was affectionate and welcomed everyone to her home. Her community honored my dad and her during a Pioneer Days event in Safford, Arizona. My parents were selected to represent the Mexican American community because of their civic contributions. Mom's community service activities varied from ministering Holy Communion, taking care of toddlers for parents who attended mass, and preparing burritos, frijoles, and salsa for the church fiestas and yearly county fairs.

At home, Mom ensured that we learned our prayers, went to weekly mass, and completed our chores. She said, "If the beds are made and the dishes are clean, half of your work is done." Her organizing skills in raising five girls and a rambunctious boy were something to behold. She kept us all in line and taught us the importance of respecting our parents and each other. We were a close-knit family, and this continues through our annual reunions. At the yearly family reunions, we pay a special tribute to Mom and Dad. We pray the rosary in their honor at their grave site and offer a special mass. This is a celebration of their life and the continuation of the values they ingrained in us from our childhood.

I'll never forget Mom's 90th birthday party. Over 500 family and friends attended. We gathered in the large back yard of the family home. She was so excited to see everyone that she hyperventilated and we had to call the paramedics. She was ordered to lie down and rest, but in her heart and soul she wanted to be among everyone and partake of the exciting conversations and stories that were shared by all the people that loved her. Mom died on July 3, 1996 at age 94 and left clear instructions on her funeral. She requested mariachis and two special priests to say the mass and said she wanted to wear her favorite lilac dress. During the viewing, my cousin Pedro Escobedo, Jr. stated, "Qué bonita se ve, tanto como su vida." ("How beautiful she looks, just like the life she led.")





## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

*Dora Esquibel*

Dora Esquibel was born on April 11, 1937, in Sabinoso, New Mexico, thirty miles East of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Her father, Pedro Garcia, was also born in Sabinoso, to a family of Apache ancestry. Her mother, Dometilia Madrid Garcia, was born in La Cinta, New Mexico and was of Spanish and Navajo ancestry.

Born during the Great Depression, Dora remembered the powerful impact of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which President Franklin D. Roosevelt created to give employment opportunities to people. From a young age, she followed Roosevelt's administration, because he developed important, equitable, supportive service programs, such as Welfare and Social Security. President Roosevelt was a powerful and influential figure in Dora's lifelong commitment to human rights and political activism.

*María Isidorita "Dora" Esquibel, Ixpanhueyotzin, was born April 11, 1937 and passed away on May 7, 2013.*

DORA'S

## *Life Quote*

"NADIE SE VA DE ESTE MUNDO SIN PAGAR LO QUE DEBE."

"NO ONE LEAVES THIS WORLD WITHOUT PAYING WHAT THEY OWE."



## PHILOSOPHY

Dora's philosophy of life centers around treating others honestly, loyally, and respectfully. She especially expects this from her people—Native Americans, Chicanos, and Mexicanos. By giving respect, they can provide a positive example to society. Respect has always been a foundation of her people. Because her people were disrespected in the past, Dora strongly believes we must focus on giving respect, rather than on differences and negativity, which are destructive and divide us, both among her people and in society as a whole.

This philosophy comes mostly from her mother, Dometilia Garcia. A curandera (herbal healer), she especially loved working with children. She cured empacho (stomach ailments), el mal de ojo (evil eye), and other sicknesses, any time, day or night. She worked hard in the fields and cleaned houses. She never refused food or water to anyone in need, though she had little herself. She had a seventh grade education and seldom read, watched television, or listened to the radio. But she was tuned into everything around her.

Dometilia was a great cook, sewed beautiful clothes, and preserved food every way possible: canning, drying meat and vegetables, and preserving fruit in holes in the ground in winter. She was a woman of mystery to her family with her knowledge, skills, stamina, and psychic abilities. Her strong spirituality was a combination of Native American beliefs and Catholicism. She believed in doing what's right. She told stories from her people's history and her own life, focusing on justice and injustice. She said one must always behave respectfully to others or suffer the consequences of not doing so.

Dora's father also influenced her spiritual beliefs. He made sure the family prayed the rosary for hours each Friday during Lenten season. Dora attributes her strength for her work in human rights and political activism to her parents.

## The Birthday

My mother, Domitilia Madrid Garcia, was born in Maez, New Mexico to a cattle ranching family. She came from a humble, proud people and loved the land. She married my father, Pedro Garcia, at sixteen. They had a loving relationship and eight children, of which five survived. My father's people were not as well off as my mother's, but he worked hard to provide a decent living for us. Times were hard, and we were very poor. This was during the Depression, and basic needs like food and clothing were difficult to come by.

Life was a struggle when I was growing up. When the cattle on the ranch died from a drought, my father became a migrant farmer. We moved to Wyoming, where there was work picking beets and other produce. This was a major life change for a family used to living in the wide open spaces of a rancho (ranch), but we were resilient, as our people had learned to be over the generations, and we adjusted.

When I was seven, we moved back to New Mexico. This was the land of my birth, and I was so happy. I went to school there for two years. Although I have little memory of this time, it sticks in my mind as one of the happiest times of my life, one that influenced me into my adulthood.

One of my most vivid memories of then is one of my birthdays. Because we were very poor (which we kids did not know, by the way) we had no money for birthday presents and celebrations like other children had. But we never complained, because we were just happy to be together and to be warm and fed. So for my birthday, I did not expect too much.

That morning, my mother had us gather eggs for the farmer we worked for, as always. We finished our

## Cake Lesson

BY DORA ESQUIBEL

chores and went about the day like it was any other day. But then she called us in. She said to look for any extra eggs that had been overlooked and bring them to her.

This may seem easy, but believe me, when you have already searched and collected all the eggs, it doesn't seem possible that there are any stray eggs lying around. My mother, a woman of integrity, never even thought about telling us to take an extra egg from the farmer and keep it. She insisted that we act honorably and give the farmer what was his. If there was an egg that had been overlooked after a good honest effort, then that one, and only that one, belonged to us.

For us kids, it was like a giant treasure hunt; but it also taught us a lesson about ethics. We looked everywhere, under straw piles, in window sills, behind doors, even between the wooden crates behind the barn. After what seemed like hours, we had almost given up when, lo and behold, we found an egg, tucked beneath an old pile of overalls in the corner of the barn. It was a miracle, and we were excited. Proudly, we marched into the house and presented that single egg to mama.

She smiled with understanding. She knew how difficult it had been to find this egg. What she did then was awe-inspiring. She gathered flour, sugar, vanilla, salt, and baking powder and started mixing a cake. But this was no ordinary cake—it was my birthday cake. Watching her measure and mix was like watching a magician pull a rabbit out of a hat. The house was filled with the aroma of the cake.

After my mother pulled it from the oven, cooled it, and covered it with a thick layer of creamy frosting, the real magic began. I never understood how someone could take plain sugar and food coloring and make such

beautiful decorations. Using icing bags, her deft hands created ribbons, flowers, and borders along the edges, which would have made a bride cry. To us, she was a master painter, whose canvas was made of edible delights.

I can still see the joy in her eyes as we sat down to light candles and sing Happy Birthday. We did not have presents for our birthdays, but Mama always made sure we had a beautiful cake. As I took my first bite of Mama's cake, I remember thinking how delicious it looked. My mouth began to water, and I could almost taste the love she had put into creating this wonderful gift. I remember thinking how beautiful the cake was as I swallowed hard. The cake stuck in the back of my throat and I held back a little choke.

Actually, I did not like any cake, including this one. But I smiled and laughed as my family devoured it. Although I did not like cake, I was so excited to be part of the ritual and glad it made the others happy. I soon forgot I hated the taste of cake. Mama asked me how I liked it. I hugged her so hard! "It was wonderful!" I cried. And indeed it was. Now, as an adult, I've started to sometimes like the taste of cake.

But the most important thing is that this cake reminds me of my mother. It reminds me of the sacrifices she made, of what it means to act with integrity and honor, and of a lesson I will never forget. To act with humbleness and appreciate what others do on our behalf is more valuable than any birthday gift. If we all learned to put our own dislikes aside sometimes, we could begin to see that there is beauty and deliciousness in everything under the Creator's watchful eye. We are surrounded by beauty, and we can walk in beauty always.



## PHILOSOPHY

I was born in a Spanish-speaking village in the mountains of New Mexico. The constants in my life have been my family, my Catholic faith, and my love of our country. I thank my parents for my family and my Catholic education, and I thank my father for opening my heart and eyes to how fortunate we are to live in this great country. Dad taught me the importance of making good choices, and our responsibility to vote. I thank my military husband for his service, and for the opportunity to travel with him to other destinations.

I witnessed discrimination as I tried to learn the English language, and when we were turned away from a local swimming pool because of the color of our skin. As a young woman I was told I would not be accepted into a professional career because of my last name, Esquibel.

I am grateful for my Catholic education, for living by the Ten Commandments, and for mentors who believed in me. These have helped me meet challenges and have great professional opportunities. I honed my leadership skills and have used my experiences to help our young Hispanic students, and to be a voice for others. In many years of volunteering, I have seen how our Latin community was underserved, and have tried to make a difference.

# Ann Esquibel Redman

## CHEYENNE, WYOMING

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

Ann was born in the mountains of Northern New Mexico, to Martin and Gertrude Esquibel. In 1950 the family moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming. She is a graduate of St. Mary's High School and Parks Business College. She is a 2013 graduate of Leadership Wyoming, which seeks to create committed leaders who understand public policy issues, economic and social diversity, and the challenges facing Wyoming and the nation.

Ann retired from Wyoming state government after serving under Governors Herschler and Sullivan, and served on the Planning Committee for Wyoming's Centennial Celebration and the 50 State QVC, a tour that features products from each state. She also served as an International Trade Assistant. She was administrative assistant to Dave Freudenthal in Governor Herschler's office. After working on Freudenthal's successful campaign for Governor of Wyoming, she also worked in his transition office.

In 2017 she received the Lifetime Achievement for Women of Influence award, given by the Wyoming Business Report. She has also received the Athena Award of the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce. Other awards include the Minority Advocate of the Year award from the Small Business Administration and the Woman of Distinction award from the University of Wyoming.

Ann is the founder of the Wyoming Latina Youth Conference (WLYC) and cofounder of the Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE) and has done extensive work with the Wyoming Women's Foundation. Ann and her husband Ralph have been married for 63 years. They have four sons, six grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. I have met many women in my life whom I admire, and they have all been significant. I did not grow





## ANN'S STORY

up having women role models in my life. That is why I feel it is so important to highlight Latina women who are educated, women who have succeeded in spite of the challenges in their lives. I admire women such as Ellen Ochoa, the former astronaut who is now Director of the Johnson Space Center; Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor; General Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch, who served in the military and then as a community leader; labor and civil rights activist Dolores Huerta; and others who have broken barriers.

The most important women in my young life were the nuns who were my teachers in my Catholic schools, my mother, and my aunts. But there have also been others that I would like to honor.

When I was a teenager, I worked after school as a waitress at a local restaurant. One of my regular customers was a woman by the name of Lola Homsher. When she learned that I was attending school at St. Mary's, she inquired about what classes I was taking. When I told her about my classes in typing and shorthand, she asked if I would be interested in a part-time job at the Wyoming State Museum, where she was the State Historian. She was the first practicing Archivist for the Wyoming State Archives. During her tenure as State Archivist she wrote many articles for newspapers in her column "From the Archives." She also wrote presentations on radio and for various historical entities.

Unfortunately, I was unable to accept her offer because my family really needed the money I made as a waitress. I recommended one of my classmates instead. When she left to attend college after our graduation, I was again offered the job. I went to work for Ms. Homsher as a clerk and was later promoted to assistant.

My experience in these jobs let me hone my skills and encouraged me to go to Parks Business College. This in turn helped me get a job in Denver with two young lawyers, Reibschaid and Machol, while I attended school. The skills I learned on those manual and electronic typewriters were the skills that helped me with various jobs as I traveled with my military husband and worked

in Wyoming's state government.

My mother, Gertrude (Trudy) Vigil Garcia, was born in 1915 and was the oldest of seven siblings in a rural farming community in Ledoux, New Mexico. When she was sixteen, she lost her mother. She quit school to help her dad, my grandfather Alfonso Garcia, raise her siblings, the youngest of which was two. On and off over the years, her siblings lived with us as we moved from New Mexico to Wyoming, where Dad found work. Later, he found work in the orange groves in California. He worked there until he developed asthma and we returned to New Mexico. I saw my mother bear the pain of losing a son—my brother Paul, who was just two. He was buried in Cheyenne, and she had to leave him when we moved away. Years later, when we returned to Cheyenne, she found his grave. She and Dad are now buried close to him.

While we were living in New Mexico, I watched as Mom said goodbye to Dad as he left for Wyoming to work for the Union Pacific. He sent money when he could, but Mom still needed to work. She had learned to drive in California and found a flatbed truck. We would go to the mountains to cut wood, which we sold to buy food and cover other expenses. Even then, Mom also helped her siblings out.

In 1950 we joined Dad in Wyoming. Mom continued to help her siblings, and to raise us in a family atmosphere where family and faith came first. She was a gentle pioneer woman who never had a bad thing to say about anyone, and I never heard a mean word come out of her mouth.

Our priest described her as a woman who reminded him of the Beatitudes, from the Sermon on the Mount. At her funeral, he said, "God must have a very special place for Trudy, because it took him a long time to call her to Heaven." I was blessed to have Mom, with her love and her dedication to family and faith, for so long. Mom passed at the age of 96.

ANN'S

## Life Quote

I TRY TO LIVE BY THE FOLLOWING DICHOS, AND THE QUOTATION THAT FOLLOWS THEM.

- DO NOT LET OTHERS DEFINE WHO YOU ARE.
- IF YOU WANT TO SEE CHANGE, YOU MUST BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.
- LEAVE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE THEN WHEN YOU ENTERED IT.

"ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU—ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY."  
— PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY



# Belinda Garcia

CRESTONE, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

Belinda was born in Denver and comes from Western roots in Colorado and New Mexico. She grew up in the barrios of West Denver. She graduated from St. Joseph High School in Lakewood, California and attended the University of Colorado. While in college, she went back to her Westside barrio and started a school, Escuela Aztlan. She moved to Ojo Caliente, New Mexico with her husband Condo Garcia, whom she married on the San Juan Reservation. They have two children: Adrienna Corrales and Manuko Geronimo Lujan Garcia. After Condo passed away in 1976, Belinda moved to Gallina, New Mexico, where she received an Associate's degree in carpentry from Northern Community College of New Mexico (which she put to good use when she built her own home).

She later graduated with a B.A. in Education from New Mexico Highlands University. After returning to Denver, she started several programs, including the Multicultural Arts program at the Auraria Community Center, and became the Teatro (Theater) director for the Westside Youth Team. In 1989, she and her daughter Adrienna Corrales started Sisters of Color United for Education in Denver, for which she was Executive Director for many years. It has also operated in Walsenburg, Colorado and in Mexico, Guatemala, and Kenya. She lives in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, where she teaches students to create larger-than-life murals that honor Mother Earth.

BELINDA'S

## Life Quote

THE CREATOR REMINDS US THAT BLESSINGS ARE COUNTED IN THE WAY WE CHOOSE TO LOOK AT THEM. OMETEOTL.

### PHILOSOPHY

I know my Grandma Mary was a curandera (herbal healer), because she was always of service to everyone in and around her family. She was the guru of the rosary beads; she said nine rosaries daily. She taught me that everyone is created equal, and that we should not judge others, or what they believed in. She also said that animals and the earth deserve to be treated well.

She always talked from her heart. She had an altar with candles, statues of saints, pictures, water, and flowers. She would say that when you dreamt, it was a message from God to warn you. She could read the sky and tell you what would happen, and what to do. She listened and comforted me when I would tell her about dreams that scared me, because many times they came true. She gave unconditional love and gave warm, healing tea to anyone who came to her.

On my journey I have experienced so much loss, especially when my son Manuko died at age nine, but Mi Abuela (My Grandmother) Mary was by my side, saying, "Don't give up, mija (my child), we will survive this. Everyone has their own journey. There are other plans for you. Manuko is in your heart forever."

So I soaked up the goodness and wisdom of my grandmother, and my mother. My mother always said to treat everyone with kindness, even your enemies. So my philosophy is to live in the moment, be kind to everyone, and accept that no human being lives forever, but their energy never leaves you.





# The Duality of Mis Dos Abuelas

BY BELINDA GARCIA

There were two women who inspired me, and who I carry with me close to my heart. They were mis dos Abuelas, my two Grandmothers. I can't describe my Grandma Rosalie and my Grandma Mary separately from each other, because they both gave me the gift of healing in many different ways. They were the central parts of nuestras familias (our families). The two grandmas who together taught me how to practice healing with their gardens, herbs, foods, prayers, rituals, faith, dreams, the sky that left messages, animals, water, fire, devotion, and the love they showed daily in service to others.

In living with my Grandma Rosalie, I saw and felt her patience when she took care of someone who was sick. It never started only when people got sick. It always started when she began to plant her garden, take her walks at different times of the day or night, and bring back plants with their roots. She tied them up and dried them. She would save them for the winter. Later, she would go to her garden, bring in smelly plants with long stems, and cook them. At other times, she would bring in the flowers and put them in a jar. They smelled sweet or felt calming on a sunburn, or tasted bitter without honey when my stomach hurt from eating too much candy or cake dough.

Remembering her smell, the sweet smell of almonds, was always comforting when you had this hot feeling all over your body, when your ears and throat hurt, when you had fever in your brain, when your nose was running and your chest was tight. You began to slip into dreamland. But she would

pick you up and put you in a tub of warm water and pat you dry with white warm clothes laced with this smell that reached your throat, and you began to breathe deeply. She would take a red handkerchief, fill it with raw sliced potatoes from her garden, which she had soaked in vinegar, and then wrap the handkerchief around your head. Then she put potatoes in your socks and put them on your feet. Then she put this smelly ointment that she made in her kitchen on your chest, and you felt your heart was speeding up.

My Grandma Mary would be in the kitchen cooking. You could smell the beans, chile, and tortillas she was making. You were hungry, but so weak. I could hear her telling my monster little brothers to be quiet, so God could hear her prayers. Prayers she was saying for me, her granddaughter. Grandma Mary would walk into my room with white sheets, and together, the two grandmas would build a makeshift tent with sheets around me, and wrap me tightly with another white sheet.

Grandma Mary would light a candle next to my bed, then hum a singsong as she sat by the side of the bed with the beautiful beads that she manipulated with her fingers. My Grandma Mary was the guru of the rosary. And you knew that her best intentions were being sent like an SOS to her God. You finally fell into a deep sleep and slept until the next morning. You felt better, and you were not hot anymore, but you were very hungry. Grandma Rosalie made you this blue sweet pudding, and you drank the warm green teas, and then the red one. As you drank your tea, you quietly remembered how in the middle of the

night, you thought you saw her shadow waving a branch from a tree over your white tent. In your sleep, you thought you had heard praying and had seen the candlelight flickering next to you. You even thought you had seen the shadows of two women; one was sweeping around your bed, and the other passing an egg over your body.

But you just weren't sure. You thought you were in dreamland. But when you woke up, you were healed. That morning, your fever was gone and your throat didn't hurt. You knew you were healed. And you were happy that you had one more day to play.

I have been teaching a class called Curanderismo Holistic Healing to college students for several years, which explores Latin American folk medicine. This could never have come about without my grandmothers' influence and guidance in my young life. They taught me about the sky, and the messages it sent. My grandmothers explained my dreams and told me not to fear them, but to accept them as messages. I have had many teachers along the way in my lifetime, but my two grandmothers were the closest and dearest to my heart, because they taught me how to speak from the heart, and how to have faith in the many gifts Mother Earth gives to us, like healing teas and food. They taught me the importance of prayer and fire. They taught me the collectiveness of the medicine. Their energies go with me when I prepare for every ceremony and limpia (cleansing) that I do. For me, they live in the direction of the North, and I can feel them guiding me with their whispers. They let me know that the good intentions of what we do are received.



## SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

# Concepción García Allen

(CONCHA)

Concha was born on a plantation in Acayucan, Veracruz, Mexico. Her father was from a small village in Oaxaca, Mexico, and her mother was born in Uruapan, Michoacan, Mexico. She experienced a traumatic childhood as an immigrant in the United States and later used her experiences to help others heal. She is the leader of a small Aztec Dance circle in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This group includes healers, students, grandmothers, social workers, and children who are dedicated to following a spiritual path.

Concha and her late partner Randolph Allen (who was of African-American and American Indian descent) and their four children have been long-time members of the Native American Church. Her familia maintains teepee grounds and a sweat lodge on their six acres of land for the use of their community. For many decades she has been a loving and caring curandera (herbal healer), massage therapist, Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, mother, grandmother, wife, dance leader, healer, and lover of the universe.

### PHILOSOPHY

My father, from a small village in Oaxaca, was a social and community-minded person. He saw the need for a social network for our native people. With others, he incorporated the Club Social de Oaxaca in Los Angeles during the turbulent '60s and '70s. There, I saw and learned about our native dress, foods, and culture. I learned skills of socialization. I remember those years clearly; my role models were the lovely, gracious, humble women of my father's people. We kept our traditions alive by weekly gatherings of sharing. Our home was a sanctuary, for our aunts and uncles from Oaxaca and elsewhere.

We are all related. By our breath, our need for food and shelter, by our need to feel validated as humans, by our need for love. Everyone experiences joy, pain, and suffering. Our capacity to love and our need for love are the same. We can all have compassion for another and pray for our relations. There is a universal language, and it is called Love. It is reflected back by countless people who speak the same language of Love and compassion.

I am validated by Mother Earth, Father Sky, the Sun, the Moon. I listen to my aunties and uncles, the clouds. They validate my life and breath and all that I am. They talk to me because I ask them every day. They know that I really try to listen. I feel blessed over the years to be able to share my touch with the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico and all my brothers and sisters that I work on. I listen to my relatives not only through touch, but all of my senses. The measurement of their bodies does not end with what I see or feel, but flows through their movement, their spirit, and thoughts, which are all connected and endless. My feet extend to the earth. My hands, my touch, my healing belong to my grandmothers. This is my life's work.

### CONCHA'S

## Life Quote

HOW DO I KNOW THE EARTH EATS? I KNOW BECAUSE I FEED HER EVERY DAY. BEFORE I TAKE A BITE, BEFORE I DRINK, I OFFER FIRST TO THE MOTHER EARTH.

—GUADALUPE DE LA CRUZ RIOS, A HUICHO MEDICINE WOMAN AND MY MENTOR





# Concha's Story

My parents met in Chiapas, Mexico. My father was working on a plantation when he spied my mother, fourteen years old and newly arrived. Instead of going to another camp, as scheduled, he stayed, saying he had seen his life. Although this sounds touching, my mother wanted nothing to do with him, so he kidnapped her against her will, a custom still going on in southern Mexico. She never got over the trauma and remained angry her whole life. I remember my mother very little, but in the last two years of her life, she finally let me feel her physical presence. I know I felt her spiritual presence my whole life, though.

Our journey to the United States is not atypical. I tell my Dine' brothers and sisters that it reminds me of the stories they tell of their Longest Walk.

It was hard, filled with danger, and took almost two years. We were five brothers and sisters in Mexico. But my older sister and I were the only ones to make the journey. I remember being left by my parents in an abandoned adobe while they looked for food and work. Since it was the rainy season, there was no flat or dry place to lie down. They were gone for days; this happened many times.

We entered the United States in the '50s, but being abandoned once too often, were placed in an orphanage. Much to my father's credit, he tried to spend as many Sundays as possible with us, although it was far from where he lived. He tried hard to let us know how much he loved us. When he reclaimed us five years later, newly married to a woman from Durango, Colorado. I learned English. Life took on some form of order, and I graduated from high school and moved out on my own.

I always felt deep unrest living in California. When I was sixteen, we traveled to Oaxaca. My grandfather, aunts, and uncles greeted us in my father's village. Although I was young, a profound awakening occurred. I realized my heart had been in a state of compression, frozen, fighting for my life.

My whole being felt at home, safe, alive, vibrant. The earth, trees, rivers, clouds reached out. They wept and I wept with the release of my homecoming. My heart opened. I walked in my ancestors' cornfields, their spirits shaking me to the core to listen to who they were, and who I was. This began my rebirth and path to Grandfather, Grandmother Fire, to learn the language of the powers that surround us, to walk in reciprocity on our mother Earth.

I had four great aunts, (tías) whose lives touched me. I've traveled many times to Mexico to learn from them. To me, they represented the four directions. Tía Lupe always wore black and was withdrawn and thin. She seemed to be the woman of the West, where the sun sets and the day ends. She taught me to allow myself to feel grief and change.

Tía Amelia was always surrounded by children and grandchildren. She was the wise, caring, nurturing teacher, the North. Tía Josefina saw the future and believed in you, in her children, in dreams; she represented the East. Tía Rosita, the youngest, was always vibrant, sweet and magical, representing the South. They came to me now from the Clouds, guiding me, admonishing me, loving me, and reminding me who my people are: the Cloud People, Bini Za. They have gone on to the spirit world, but continue to influence and guide me.

In 1971 I met Guadalupe de la Cruz Rios, a Huichol medicine woman. She demanded that I spend four days with her. This began the next part of my rebirth.

She was a respected Huichol elder, a cantadora (singer), devoted to maintaining the ways passed down to her by her ancestors. To learn from her, you had to live with her, be close to the land, sleep on the floor, eat the basic foods she did. She taught, not in a classroom, but in the classroom of life. She could call the spirits to heal. Guadalupe taught me to hear their

answers and understand the simplicity of life and its ways. I assisted her in traditional healing work to cleanse, bless, and heal clients with prayer, herbs, and song.

These are some of the women I look up to and have learned from. But first and foremost is my sister Eloise. If not for her, I would not be alive. Although she is only two years older, she has been my mother, father, sister, everything. Through all we endured in our childhood and the ordeal of being abandoned, she was always there. I know that without each other we would not have survived. She is determined, strong, the most generous person I know.

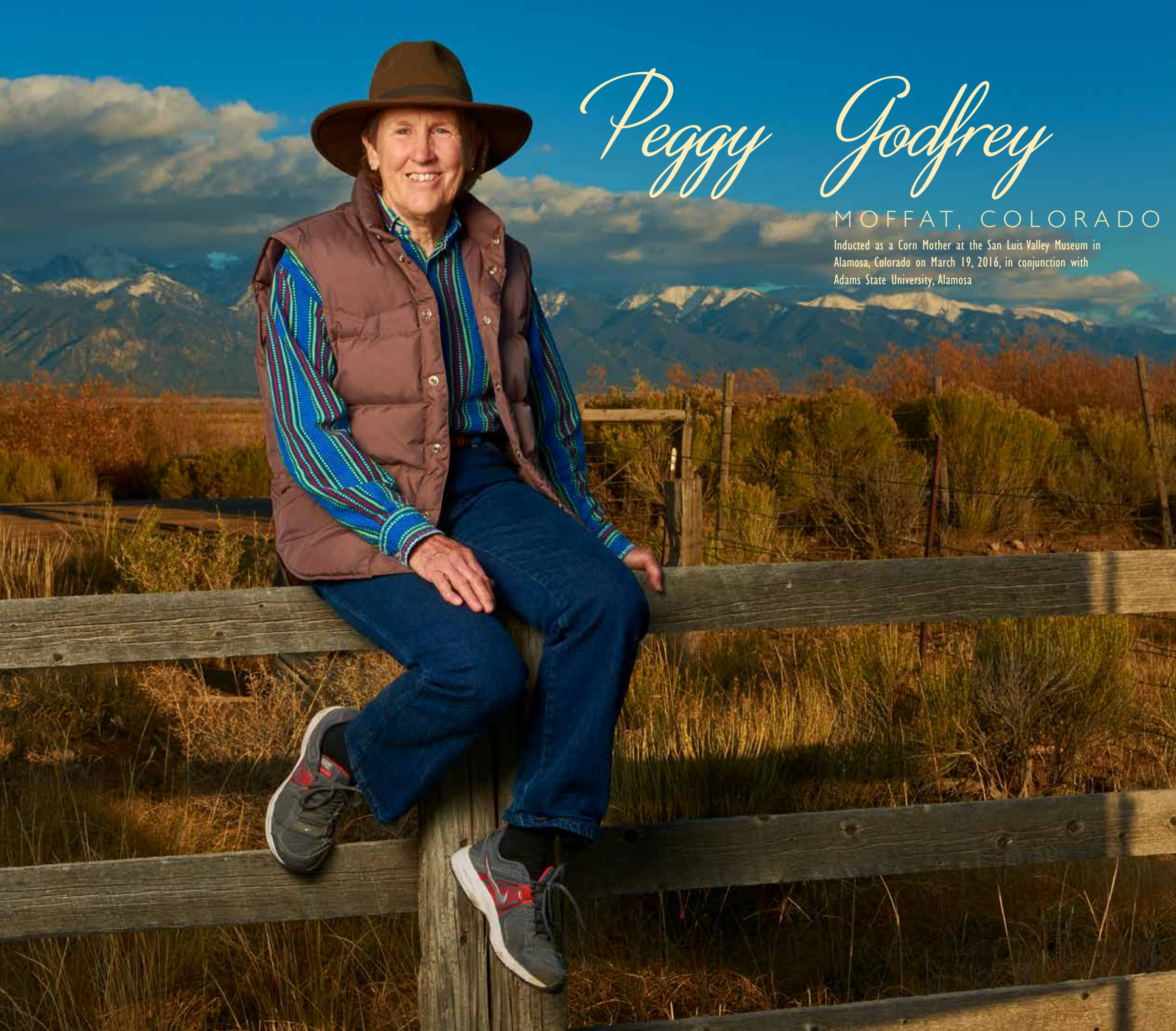
I remember when I was trying hard to be a true earth mother. Eloise came to visit me in New Mexico. On a hike, we saw a baby albino horny toad. Later on, an adult horny toad appeared. My sister for some reason wanted to unite them. She backtracked, found the albino toad, and put it with its the mother. I didn't know if it was the right thing to do, but I was in awe of my big sister. She didn't have to try being an earth mother; to me she was the epitome of someone at home on the land.

I follow three clear spiritual paths. I go to Teepee ceremonies of the Native American Church, am a Danzante (Dancer), and try to go every year on the Huichol traditional journey to Wirikuta with my Huichol familia. I am of the Zapotec Nation of Oaxaca through my father, and Tarascan native through my mother.

Over the years, I have developed a healing work that blends all my paths. It is a blend of western and traditional native healing ways. It is a conscious, instinctual, prayerful dance that I have learned from the women in my life.







# Peggy Godfrey

MOFFAT, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

Peggy Godfrey has been a “trail blazer” for women in the San Luis Valley in Southern Colorado. She was the first certified lifeguard in her hometown, the first woman rancher to be a member of the Taos County Grazing Association, and the first female member of Taos Search and Rescue. She has helped produce a video about ranching in Colorado. She is a storyteller and cowboy poet, and manages her own sheep. She has served on her local soil conservation district, participated in music festivals, and served on a water conservation board, as well as on a school board.

This powerhouse woman was born in New Orleans and grew up in Homer, Louisiana with her two brothers. After high school, she graduated from Baylor University in Waco, Texas with a B.S. in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. She married in 1968 and has two sons. She did research as technician at Baylor Hospital in Dallas, Texas. Peggy later relocated to Taos, New Mexico, where she began ranching. She moved to Moffat, Colorado in 1988, where she has raised both cattle and sheep.

## PHILOSOPHY

### **Real Wealth**

My neighbors don't live close to me,  
But we've each got our niche.  
Government says this area's poor,  
Our secret is: we're rich.  
My wealth won't buy insurance,  
It won't trade in for much,  
But “rich,” to me, is measured  
By things no one can touch.  
The hint of mint in native hay,  
Fresh, sweet mountain air,  
Owls perched high in cottonwoods,  
A golden eagle pair.  
Sheep that run toward my voice,  
Love in a little boy's eyes,  
The frying smell of just-caught trout,  
A winter when nobody dies.  
The pleasure of making a garden,  
Soft soothing drizzles of rain,  
One dazzling double rainbow,  
Good lessons that come without pain.  
Summers that age into autumns of gold,  
Wind humming songs like a choir,  
Sun shining bright on crystals of ice,  
That glitter like diamonds on fire,  
Courage to face the disasters.



# My Two “Grandmothers” — And the Story of Eve #2

BY PEGGY GODFREY

Growing up in a rural community in northwest Louisiana, I recognize that who I am today has grown from seeds planted by two godly women, a mother and daughter, who grandmothered me with love and taught me by their lives. Their large yard and garden property were an Eden to me: a large vegetable garden, strawberry patch, fig tree, peach tree, pomegranate tree, three huge pecan trees, and magnolia and crepe myrtle trees among the large oaks, azaleas, camellias, and other flowering shrubs and plants, and a birdbath. They played board games with me, we took naps, raked leaves, killed and prepared chickens they had raised, both for meals and to put in the freezer, and picked up pecans for weeks in the fall. The elder one’s husband cracked the pecans in his shop, where he worked as a carpenter all his life—he built their home, and many other structures in our town. The kitchen was the heart of their shared home, where I learned to prepare delicious foods, with joy, as they did.

The elder one painted china and glass lamps in her younger years, many of which adorned her home. The younger one was a gifted pianist and organist at our church. When sitting, they knitted or crocheted. I remember the small cotton thread they used to knit bandages for soldiers, which the elder had done for two world wars, Korea, and Vietnam. The son and brother of my “grandmothers” died in World War I. I am awed by

their devotion to injured soldiers and our country’s war effort, even after hand-knitted bandages became uncommon.

Love of country, love of community, and honoring God, who gave us life and the capacity to enjoy it so fully: what treasures they implanted in my life and soul.

As I grew older, attended school, married, and had a family, my husband and I moved to Taos. It was through my in-laws that I first heard the symphony of the stillness, the call of a cow for her calf, and began learning the very hard work ranching entails. My poetry began expressing the diverse experiences of ranching. I thought often of my “grandmothers” as I began ranching in the early 1970s, and of the inspiration and dedication to hard work they gave me.

Over these past forty-plus years, many valuable lessons and reminders have come through my cattle and sheep, inspiring poems and stories that I’ve shared locally, regionally, in several other states, and at the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, as well as storytelling festivals.

How wise and caring God has been to provide me with this lifelong succession of teachers, of which my “grandmothers” were so important. Here is a story that always reminds me of their inspiration and dedication.

## STORY OF EWE # 2

After I finished cutting alfalfa on one of my leases, I felt like “some days are just too busy for bad news!” I’d been gone two and a half days traveling and performing while the first few acres of cut hay lay drying. With beautiful haying weather, I was eager to finish. As I worked, I saw a tractor with a posthole auger enter the gate of one of my pasture leases. A Chevy Suburban followed, and I thought, “They have a lot of nerve making themselves at home on my lease—as if they owned the place.” Then I realized that the owner might have sold it, though he still had my lease check from three months

earlier and hadn’t given me notice of intent to sell, or to terminate my lease. Seeing these people and their equipment was a pretty clear message, but I had too much on my mind to panic. Earlier that spring, another of my leases was sold, and I had only two weeks to make alternate plans for three dozen head of cattle—again with no communication of intent to sell or warning of the impending loss.

After completing the hay cutting, I went to check on my sheep that were doing yard and weed work for a neighbor. I noticed one ewe who limped badly. Her right front leg was injured, and she couldn’t use it. On the quarter-mile walk home, she brought up the rear. The following morning, I herded the sheep another quarter mile to their day pasture and checked her ear tag. She was #2, yellow tag, indicating that she was five years old—my records showed she had triplets that year. She struggled to stay with the flock, and was clearly winded at the gate. Returning home that night, she struggled even more, so on Tuesday I held her back. Another ewe stayed with her, as did two lambs, one of which belonged to each ewe.

The following morning, the entire flock gathered at the gate, so I let her go with the group. I noticed that her three lambs stayed with her, rather than scattering among the others. But she was growing more adept on three legs.

As I took the flock out and brought them home each day, I thought how pleasing they all were in their good health and vigor; but I had grown to admire a limping lamb who didn’t lie down and quit, and this crippled ewe who wouldn’t give up the company of her peers. A deep appreciation for them overcame me as I admired the spirit and determination, which I know is not a given—some animals will give up, lie down, and die long before their time. I thought of myself and how willing I am to be gentle in urging, to be patient in my expectations for the creatures of admirable spirit.

So I looked at the enthusiasm and life force of this healthy little flock—a lively group to want to keep up with! By the end of the week, as I watched, I couldn’t pick out the crippled ewe, except that she lurched some, rather than trotting smoothly. When I spotted her, she was moving magnificently on three legs!

On Sunday morning, the flock poured out of the home gate, down the road to the open pasture gate. Instead of following, I watched. I thought of my week—the loss of two leases over the past two months meant an end to my twenty-four year stretch in the cattle business. After my summer and fall leases were grazed, I would take to market much of the pride and joy of my life.

I’d had a leg shot out from under me, and I lurched in pain. Phone calls for a summer artist-in-residency and other activities had drawn me away from my thoughts and anxieties. I, too, was feeling the pull to keep up with the dynamic of a community, to draw from its strength, its wisdom. Would I have the fortitude to stay in motion, to hold my place among those I love and admire? Had the timing of this injured ewe and my own unexpected losses come together as another wonder, another story to tell? Would I be able to meet this challenge with the same spirit as this five-year-old ewe? Only time would tell.

As I turned to walk back down the driveway, the facts of this parallel story had been my daily companions all week—in response to my question, “Will I?” I heard the cryptic message carried by the crippled ewe’s identification. Almost audibly I heard, “Peggy! EWE TWO!”

PEGGY’S

## Life Quote

“EXCELLENCE IS THE RESULT OF CARING MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS WISE, RISKING MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS SAFE, DREAMING MORE THAN OTHERS IS PRACTICAL, AND EXPECTING MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS POSSIBLE.”  
— AUTHOR UNKNOWN





# Carol Guerrero-Murphy

ALAMOSA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

Carol grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, where her poet mother embraced the gifts the land offered, such as blueberries and camping, and her storytelling father pioneered satellite education for village students. She left Alaska for higher education, and eventually earned her Ph.D. in creative writing. After she earned her doctorate, she continued to combine her love of the word and education and took a faculty position at Adams State University, choosing ASU for its diverse enrollment and public status. She taught there for twenty years and retired from teaching in 2015 to focus on increasing ASU's understanding of its role as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and to help remove the barriers to historically under served students. She is a proud mother, wife, sister, and auntie, close friend to a mustang and cats, hiker, and writer, and is at peace waiting to see what follows today.

CAROL'S

## Life Quote

"LEADERSHIP IS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT MATTERS TO YOU," WROTE JULIAN WEISSGLASS, AUTHOR OF *RIPPLES OF HOPE*. AND LALO DELGADO, AUTHOR OF THE POEM "STUPID AMERICA," SAID THAT ON THE ONE HAND, WE SHOULD STAY ENGAGED AND GIVE OUR BEST TO WHATEVER WE ARE CALLED TO, BUT THAT ON THE OTHER HAND, SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO RANT AND LAUGH AND CRY ALL AT ONCE.



# Life As a Picnic

## PHILOSOPHY

Her father's rural education work in Alaska led to ending the devastating boarding school programs that displaced village children from their homes. As a tutor for those students through high school, Carol saw firsthand the harm caused by colonialism and the know-it-all imperatives for Alaskan statehood that led to mandatory public schooling that conformed to the dominant culture. She remembers her own culture shock, which led to her complete loss of voice, and dropping out of college, when she first left Alaska for higher education. Journal writing, reading, and being a teacher's aide probably saved her life. Through what she witnessed, she increased her passion for promoting social justice through education reform, slowly regained her voice, and focused on writing and reading as a way for students of all ages to find and grow their own voices. She discovered that one of the central driving forces of her life is to seek and learn from difference, and to be grateful for those who showed their colors and allowed her to learn.

Carol found that writing and speaking create both empowerment and beauty, and that reading literature builds empathy and imagination and provides an endless trove of difference, as does learning from each of her thousands of students. Carol cofounded and led the community bilingual preschool, La Escuelita, in Gardner, Colorado, which has built bridges between the counter-culture newcomers and the people who had lived there for generations, bridges made of our love for our children. In her years at Adams State, through the training offered through the Title V Hispanic-Serving Institution grants, her ability to speak to power has gradually strengthened and clarified; she hopes to be an ally and advocate for others who are strengthening their voices now.

When I thought of choosing my mother for a tribute, or even more likely, my big sister (especially given her passion for native grass identification and painting grasses), I passed them by, to focus instead on the many women who have been my mentors over the last twenty years. Long after I thought my mother was able to do that; and after my sister and I had grown into mentors.

But today, as the month and season of my mother's December passing in 2008 draw near again, I notice vividly the lasting ways my mother Laura taught me as I grew up. By now, of course, I know how the little conflicts of years disappear over time, and that what remain are the images of the gifts she gave me through her own enthusiasm for everything beautiful and challenging. What remain are bright red berries in the wintertime, starflowers, the taste of boletus, the aurora borealis, piles of good books still to read, and hearty picnics whatever the weather. Picnics, we knew as we grew up, let us be at home wherever we went.

I remember first the California beach: My very, very young, lovely mother took us all to the beach by the time we could lie swaddled in a blanket under an umbrella, when we could toddle, when we could race away from tiny waves, when we could body surf, when we could go out beyond the breakers with our father. She seemed to worship the sun, and she let us worship it. I remember the scent of Sea and Ski sunscreen, SPF 6, and the bits of sand that got rubbed in along with it. She showed us how to listen to seashells, to hear the voice of the sea singing inside them. She nourished us with peanut butter and pickle sandwiches, grapes, fig bars, and thermoses of cold milk.

Picnic packing may seem like a minor skill in light of my mother's prodigious intelligence, her patient reading and rereading aloud to her children, her poetry writing, her elegance, her painful struggle to be a perfect 50's mom with perfect 50's children, her imagination, her playfulness, her piano playing.

FOR LAURA DARNELL MURPHY (1928-2008)

(I can hear Rondo a la Turco pounded out, amazingly, something I just took for granted, along with all the other graces of our home.) But picnic packing perhaps most embodies the spirit with which she embraced the world and brought us all into it. Why stay home under a roof when you can be out?

We moved to Alaska when I was young; it was dark a lot when we moved, November. It must have been shockingly lonely for my mother with her three little children, while her husband worked away much of the time supervising exploration in the Alaskan oil fields. I don't know how she fell in love with it. She became part of a phone tree to wake up neighbors if the aurora borealis lit up the northern sky (bundle up the little ones and stand in the bright cold, amazed); she got us all skates, and skis, and hockey sticks, and in the spring, we weren't scolded for running, fevered with spring, in our socks, through the icy puddles of Break Up.

In summer, we walked through black spruce forest paths while she named the star flowers, dogwood, columbine, shooting stars, devil's club, fairy ferns, sphagnum moss, and eventually mushrooms—which to avoid, which to fry up with a fresh-caught grayling. In late summer, we picked wild blueberries; I tried to learn how to touch them delicately so the tender white bloom wouldn't rub off. When we walked along the railroad track that ran along Turnagain Arm picking raspberries, we nibbled freely as we ate. I was teased a little for how mine seemed to turn to jam in my hands before I could add them to the family pail. I remember the smell of Labrador Tea, pungent, while I plopped myself into deep moss in the middle of a lingonberry patch and pulled hard, shiny, red berries off low, loaded bunches. As the days shortened, we made jam. I can see my little brother standing on a stool, stirring up lingonberries in a tiny real pot, making himself a little jam, my mother lit with pride in his domestic skill.

I learned that Laura's mother, my grandmother Ethel, a pioneer woman who had settled for a while in Cripple Creek, Colorado, where my mother was born, had

spent a winter pregnant with my Aunt Minnie in a tent at the Independence Mine in Alaska. From her, we got a concept called "genteel poverty," learning through my father's failed business that struggling financially didn't mean we couldn't share, learn, and believe in an abundant world. This grandmother of mine also favored the kinds of picnics we were taught to love: cold, windy, tundra picnics; rainy picnics where your sandwich bread gets soggy; northern beach picnics where you boiled fresh crab or grilled salmon on driftwood and cedar plank fires; sunny rock beach picnics on graveyards in Ireland and France; and finally, picnics on the family plot in Cripple Creek, on Mount Pisgah, where the aspen leaves shiver even in summer.

The Corn Mother reveals the abundance of the universe, and brings that abundance to us. My mother Laura approached the natural world, books, music, art, science, cooking, history, and spirituality—all with the same degree of intense curiosity and imagination, celebrating its abundance without exception. Whatever her demons were, and I think she had many, the love of what the universe gives us (including the human brain) sustained her. She taught us that the universe would sustain us, as well. We could count on joy intervening in even the most dire situations, as long as we could muck around in an algae-green pond, or swim across an arctic lake. I can't think of anything the natural world, science, or the arts offers us that she didn't celebrate.

Once we were grown, she became, with my father, a world traveler, and a widely published travel writer. Although they picnicked all over the world—and we met my father's death with a grand picnic on the Oregon coast where we had cast his ashes—as she aged, her suitcase became the symbol of her freedom and comfort in the world outside a home. Even during her last days, in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, when she saw her suitcase, she picked it up gaily and waved brightly to us all, ready as she was to meet the beauty and riches of whatever journey lay ahead, surely at home wherever she went.

I buried her ashes, mixed with a few of my father's, in a wicker picnic basket at Mount Pisgah.



## DENTON, TEXAS

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

# Ivette Guzman

Ivette Guzman is a plant biochemist with a life-long passion for plants and their healing, medicinal, and chemical properties. Born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, she emigrated to the U.S. with her family as a child. Yvette's appreciation and respect for the healing properties of plants originated from watching her grandmother, Angela Nevarez-Gonzalez, heal others, using traditional knowledge. Her grandmother was a Mexican yerbera (herbalist) and sobadora (traditional healer) in the mountains of Durango, Mexico. Growing up in the Texas panhandle, she developed a deep respect for farming and tilling the land for food.

Her research focused on understanding medicinal compounds in horticultural crops. She led interdisciplinary research projects investigating variations in medicinal plant compounds in fruits and vegetables by chemically and genetically studying their evolutionary path. She finished her B.S. in Biology at the University of Texas at San Antonio and her M.S. in Biology at Texas Women's University. She earned her Ph.D. from New Mexico State University in Plant and Environmental Sciences, where she focused on identifying metabolically diverse wild and domesticated pepper cultivars. Afterwards, she worked as a researcher at the Plants for Human Health Institute at North Carolina State University.

IVETTES'S

## Life Quote

YOU MUST BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD.

— MAHATMA GANDHI







## PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy in life is to always look forward, and never take one step back. Of course, you should always know your past. My past has directed me forward. My past shows the road(s) I took, and the future holds the remainder of my journey. This philosophy prevents me from judging my past and future actions as bad or good. My actions just are, and if my heart is open, they will teach me a great deal.

My journey started when I was a little girl hanging out with my mom, sisters, and grandmother. My passion, first of all, is plants and the plant world. I love to learn as much as possible about plants. This ranges from medicinal purposes to learning how they communicate with each other. My grandaunt was a yerbera (herbalist), and my grandmother is a sobadora (traditional healer). My sisters and mother were field workers in Texas in the '80s.

Therefore, I've always had a connection with plants. This is where my passion comes from. My driving purpose is to take everything I've seen, put it to use, and therefore keep it alive. I use my higher education as an outlet to my passion. Working with chili pepper research is very rewarding, because I'm looking for ways to help children and elders worldwide. When I was a child, my abuela (grandmother) used herbs to help people, and I have carried on a long family tradition.

My deepest desire is to one day give my mother, family, and community as much as my family, especially my mother, gave to me all my life. I'm determined to reach my goals once I set them. I'm humble, modest, always willing to learn, open minded, family-loving, loyal, and generous, but I can also be impulsive and sporadic with ideas.

# Herbs of Life

BY IVETTE GUZMAN

My mother and my grandmother, her mother, are two elder women in my life who have influenced the way I am and what I am becoming every day. They are the strongest, toughest, most resilient, most loving women I've ever known. They have given me so many memories and experiences which I will keep in my heart and reminisce about when I need courage. There was however, a time in my life when both women especially had to demonstrate extreme strength. It took place during winter, when I was about five years old.

This period in my life was very tough to begin with, since we were new immigrants to the U.S. My parents did not know the language, and while having three girls ages five to twelve, were experiencing economic difficulties. My father was working very hard in a meat packing plant, and my mother also began to work at a fast food restaurant. At the time, we were living in the north part of the Texas panhandle. The winters there are harsh. It is located on prairie land, so winters brought snow and heavy winds. The winter came, and my mother became very ill with a nasty bronchial infection. She was forced to quit her job. I remember that she was very sick, coughing, and becoming very thin. A doctor visit was out of the question, considering that there was no money.

My father was absent a lot of the time. I am not sure where he would go, but the relationship between him and my mother was not a good one. So here she was, sick, alone, with three children, and depressed. She decided to leave for the winter. My sisters and I went with her to my grandmother's home in Durango, Mexico. She borrowed some money from a girlfriend, and the four of us took off on the bus.

My grandmother was a widow, but she still lived in her ranch home in the Sierra Madre Mountains. My grandparents were cattle ranchers who produced local milk for the small town, Santa Mario del Oro. Although my grandfather had passed away a few years earlier, my grandmother kept up the cattle and made cheese from the milk.

After 24 hours on the bus, we arrived. My grandmother looked at my mother and was shocked to see her daughter so frail. She was very disappointed to know that my father was absent and my sick mother was looking for someone to help her get through this sickness and rough time in her marriage. I remember that it had just snowed in the mountains, and the ambience was gray and gloomy. When we entered my grandmother's home, though, it was very warm. We could smell her cooking and see her wood-burning stove radiating light from its fire. It felt so good, and I was so glad we were there.

She quickly put some herbs in some pots and boiled them over and over. She laid my mother down next to the wood-burning stove and prepared herself to massage (sobar) my mother. She put lard on her hands and massaged my mother's body. She also took some hot coals from the fire and put them in a little bowl. She warmed her hands over them before putting her hands on my mother's chest and back. She also placed a few small coals in her mouth and blew on my mother's face and chest.

After the herbs had boiled over, she soaked towels in the water and placed them on my mother. She did this routine several times a day. I don't remember my mother or grandmother saying much, but I remember the events as if it they just happened yesterday. I was so amazed and did not understand what was going on.

I specifically remember how intriguing it was to me to see my grandmother take red hot coals from the fire and use them on my mother.

While my grandmother was caring for my mother, she would cook yummy stuff for me and my sisters. We were so happy sitting around the kitchen table watching my grandmother make cheese in huge bowls. Of course, we test-tasted every bowl. We were so happy to be with my grandmother; we felt so protected, even if it was snowing outside, my father was nowhere to be found, and my mother was pale and weak due to the infection. After a few days of my grandmother's constant care, my mother was out of bed, sitting with us around the kitchen table, and eating again. She was okay now; we were all okay for now.

After twenty-three years, I still talk to my grandmother about this event. She is convinced that if we had not gone to Durango, my mother would not have made it. When I ask my grandmother what kind of remedy she used, she replies by saying that it was her love and intuition as a mother that gave her the knowledge.

I admire my mother for her courage and endurance to overcome this difficult time in her life. I am in awe of my grandmother. She showed so much emotional and physical strength, and her resilience helped her daughter and grandchildren back to health and happiness.

I am still very close to my mother and grandmother. They are not the type of women to give advice. Instead, they teach by being powerful role models, and have taught me a great deal about what being a woman is all about.





## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

# *Lois Harvey*

Lois Harvey was born in Beaver, Oklahoma to a family of teachers, farmers, and nursing folk. She was a product of her times: born in the fifties, a baby boomer. She has been active in many professional, political, social, and charitable groups, despite an essentially introverted nature. She is the founder of West Side Bookstore, a unique, independent shop that offers rare, collectible, and new books in the heart of Denver's historic Highland Square neighborhood. In the early 1900s, the book store, now renovated, was an auto dealership, and later, a garage. The shop has hosted many literary and musical events, in addition to its commercial function. As a book seller, Lois always endeavors to keep a finger on the literary background of her neighborhood, while also operating an online bookstore.



## PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy of life centers itself on worthwhile work, a positive, caring attitude, and strong ties to family and friends. My family upbringing stresses that all people are one, and that peaceful solutions exist to all conflicts. The spiritual basis of my life is the belief that the inner light of godhood exists in all.

Reading has been the single most important “outside” element in my life. Reading enlarges and enlightens my life, and has since I was very young. I’ve seen it do the same for many many people ... all ages. Even those coming to reading later in life have expressed this to me. I’ve found myself a niche from which to make reading accessible to many by offering used books of all kinds to people from all walks of life. I deeply enjoy interacting with people as they take joy in, and grow from, reading books. It is a humble place to be, but it’s healthy, soul-centered work, nonetheless.

My deepest desire is that some day, in some way, we will all see our connection and learn to act in ways that support life, rather than destroy it. I want to see the “power over” structure disappear and the “power with” structure become the precedent. There is a veritable plenty on the earth. If it is shared, none should suffer want.

The preceding statements make it obvious that I have an idealistic outlook, but I feel that my idealism is tempered with the pragmatism learned over time, and from the process of living. I am cheerful in spite of the evidence that we live in a less than perfect world.

## LOIS’S

### Life Quote

I EMBRACE THE WISE SAYINGS OF MY MOTHER: “LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE AND IT DOETH THE HEART GOOD.” PLUS, “YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.”

I SHOULD ALSO HOLD CLOSE THE QUOTE OF MY FRIEND AJ: “ASSUME POSITIVE INTENT.”

# A Circle of Mothers

BY LOIS HARVEY

I once dreamed about a circle of women standing around me, helping me give birth to a child...

My grandmother is my keystone memory figure: always available, loving, supportive, wise. That basic security and love probably define me and affect who I am.

I’m named for her. Lois Lenore Lindsay was born in 1895 in Missouri. She moved with her family in 1901 to the Oklahoma Panhandle, to homestead and find a healthier environment, after losing several children to influenza. She went to Friends Academy in Lawrence, Kansas, where she earned her teaching certificate and met and married J. A. “Fred” Harvey, a classmate. They farmed and taught in the county where her parents had homesteaded, and raised two children. Donald was the elder. Serving in a Conscientious Objector camp during World War II, he met and later married Ruth Larson. The younger Harvey’s also settled in the Panhandle. Don farmed and taught, and Ruth was the county’s Red Cross and Home Health nurse.

The families’ proximity made possible a close relationship between the two Lois’. Never was a grandmother more adored.

If it were only her delicious Sunday dinners, or her knack for sewing and crocheting clothing for me and my dolls, or her patience teaching me to play dominoes and work jigsaw puzzles, or her warm, encircling arms, it would have been just a normal granddaughter / grandmother relationship. But it was more. She just seemed to know me. She’d understand and gently chide me when I was “storying,” and she’d know when I just needed to be with her, helping her dust, sweep, or hang out clothes. She made work fun, and an expression of closeness.

Her ability that taught, nurtured, and impressed me most was the presence she always brought: her attention to me as if I fit naturally into her life, her day, her activities. Sometimes we’d drive to the farm to deliver lunches or mid-afternoon snacks. Sometimes we went to town for something for the farm. She always had time to stop at the dime store for paper dolls, and at the drug store for a cherry coke.

I loved watching her make “arrangements” for holidays or for the cemetery. Styrofoam base, some unlikely color, fake flowers and foliage, often glitter, a plastic animal figure, miniature church, or feathered bird. I thought everything she did was beautiful, and she seemed to think the same of me.

I hope each child in this world has this experience with an adult sometime. The memories of her love carry me through unpleasantness or drudgery, like a forgotten layer of my self.

She had good friends who came to her house, or we’d visit theirs; they’d laugh, talk, and tell stories while they worked together. She and two friends bought the town’s first washing machine together. It was a tabletop model with a wringer, a huge laborsaving advance. They carried it to one another’s homes to do the laundry, helping each other and having a good time. This was before I was born, but I know those friendships lived long after that machine was replaced. I remember her laughing with her friends until tears streamed from her eyes. My daughter shakes her head in amazement when I do the same thing: laugh until I cry. My grandmother taught me to have strong, close women friends, to treasure them and enjoy them.

My mother, too, taught me the value and pleasure of human relationships. All five of us would go with her on home visits to the sick and elderly, in town and in the country; we were always welcomed and entertained. She had a special place in her heart for older people, and we benefited from their ease with her. She never drove when we moved to the big city later, but in the Panhandle, she fearlessly took us everywhere.

With my mother, we danced to Strauss waltzes and had books read to us like a nest of hungry chicks:

more, always wanting more. She showed us the library that Ada Kerns kept for neighborhood children on her front porch. She let us roller skate inside on dreary days and turned us out to wander the lot behind our house in fair weather. The only odious times I remember were when she found me hidden away engrossed in a book when I was supposed to be doing chores. I’m not sure I ever quite learned my lesson and still find a day or so a month to play hooky and read all day or night.

My mother also cherished good friends. Nurse friends, her sisters, former classmates who came to visit or whom we visited. Women older than herself, with whom she’d formed a bond. The example she and my grandmother set of friendship and its value is immensely important. The constancy of friendships has been a sustaining factor in my life.

I have friends with whom I ski, discuss books, walk, or garden. The non-verbal aspects of friendship are maybe the most notable, though even on the slopes or on a vigorous walk, talk happens. Walking or hiking with Karen, I have a feeling of peace and contentment equal to any I’ve ever felt after church or therapy. My weekly yoga practice with my senior women’s yoga group is like that, too. It’s like church: spiritual oneness through the physical and communal.

Skiing with my high school friend Denise gives me that sense of freedom and oneness and bonds me to her. A productive work night with my friend Carol gives me happiness and contentment. If I’m honest, I could also say I’ve had those same experiences with men, but there’s something elementally different, equal, honest, unfettered, about the sisterhood of women.

I once dreamed about a circle of women standing around me, helping me give birth to a child... The significance wasn’t just the beautiful, holy child and all that is symbolized therein, but the circle of women giving naturally and unstintingly of their wisdom, knowledge, caring, and support. I palpably felt that in the dream and still feel it.

I’ve had a huge number of important and influential women in my life. To name and describe the friends, teachers, caregivers, elders, clients, customers, mentors, family members—and their friends—the list is too long, and I’m grateful that it is.



## WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

# Carrie Howell

Carrie is a Pawnee/Flandreau Santee Sioux Indian from Pawnee, Oklahoma. Her Native American name is Sti-Da-Soo, which means “Princess” or “Woman Chief” in Pawnee. She has lived in Colorado for over thirty years. She has three sisters, one brother, two daughters, and four grandchildren, who all practice traditional ways.

She was a Girl Scout leader and was a Prevention Services Specialist with the Denver Indian Family Resource Center, where she programmed and coordinated American Indian Nurturing Parenting classes. She also worked for the Program of American Indian Youth Leaders (PAIYL), which worked with at-risk native youth in the Denver Metro area. Her passion is to instill within our urban Native American youth a sense of belonging and connection to their traditional heritage. She also owned and managed the Seven Falls Indian Dance Troupe in Colorado Springs. Her family has performed competitive and social dances at Powwows throughout the country for many decades. She graduated from Metropolitan State University with a B.S. in Human Services, with an emphasis in Drug and Alcohol Counseling.

### CARRIE'S

## Life Quote

BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU ARE. BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN. BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU WILL BE.

— WAR CRY, PAWNEE ELDER

### PHILOSOPHY

We live in an extremely narrow-minded world, so we must demonstrate peace, harmony, and acceptance of every race to our youth. We must teach the traditional values, especially respect. Young people need direction in order to value and respect our elders' knowledge and experience. Our children practice the behaviors they observe in adults, so it is important that adults be responsible for the messages they are conveying to our children.

I have worked with young people for over thirty years, beginning with Native American youths when I was just eighteen years old. Later, I worked with deaf, blind, deaf/ blind, or severely profoundly mentally impaired youths; with juveniles who were involved with the courts; with youths who were incarcerated; with high-risk dropouts; and with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

These experiences made me realize that we are responsible for all our children—Indian and non-Indian. We need to provide guidance and direction. It is essential that we educate Indian children continuously on their American Indian history and individual tribal history, encouraging pride and self-esteem. Many young people complain that adults do not listen to them. We must continue to educate them about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. We as Indian people survived for a reason, because our ancestors fought for us to exist. We have responsibilities to our youth to continue teaching our culture, spirituality, traditions, dances, and music. I have the dual benefit and privilege of working with young people and performing with our family dance troupe. I wake up every day, thank the creator for my talents and gifts, and try to use them wisely.





# *My Sister Verla, My Corn Mother*

BY CARRIE HOWELL

I remember the summers in my hometown of Pawnee, Oklahoma. I appreciated visiting my favorite uncle, Albin Leadingfox. He entertained and educated us with stories of his childhood and history. I enjoy and participate in the annual Fourth of July Pawnee parade down Main Street. We stayed at different aunts' houses and went to the Pawnee Powwow during homecoming in the summer.

It was awe-inspiring listening to the drums and songs, and seeing the dancing at night under the sky, surrounded by my family and tribe. Being in Pawnee country gives me good feelings of peace and pride. These experiences made me realize that Pawnees are unique, proud people, in addition to having a rich culture that still thrives.

Sadly, however, I also grew up in an alcoholic home. My father was an alcoholic. I never wanted to be like him when I was young. He was a tortured man who never got over the trauma of war. At one time he was a very famous Pow Wow dancer, a proud man who tried hard to keep his traditions and take care of his family.

But addictions are a powerful force, and his addiction to alcohol pulled him away from our family. It left my mother in a terrible position. Her life was already hard, and having to raise a family alone made it even harder.

Even though I had the love of my Native family, I was still lost and angry about my father. At 16, I turned to smoking pot to escape from all the drama in my life. I was engaged to be married at 17, and when my boyfriend joined the Air Force so we could have some way to support ourselves, I felt abandoned. Being married so very young, while still in my teens, I ended up having two little babies only 11 months apart.

My one daughter lost her hearing at the age of two; this was very traumatic for me. I had worked with a young girl at the time who had a disease that eventually killed her. I could not cope with so much sadness and pain in my life at the time, so I returned to using pot again.

I divorced and remarried, but to a very abusive husband. My life went from bad to worse, and to escape, I also began drinking. I was still in my twenties and did not see a way out of this cycle, even though

I had many friends who told me to get help. Then one day, my sister Verla came to me. She was my life force, my connection to my past and my traditions. Even though I was not close to my mother at the time, I looked at my sister as someone who had always been there for me. We had grown up together. We shared a history with each other, both ancient and modern. We were of the same blood, and I knew I must listen to her.

She spoke to me with kindness and seriousness. She brought me to the Eagle Lodge, a rehabilitation center for Native people. I understood that many of our people had struggled with the same issues I was struggling with.

My sister was my biggest support. Verla not only helped me go through the process of recovering from drugs, but also to gain pride in who I was and who our people were meant to be. My spirituality became the basis of my sobriety. I received tremendous support from all my family to make this change in my life. I was determined to become a sober and productive person in society again.

My sister helped me participate in ceremonies, sweat lodges, and Talking Circles, and these made a difference in my treatment. It was at the lodge during one of the ceremonies that my spirituality returned to me. While I sat in the dark listening to the drum songs, something happened to me. After discussing this with my sister, she told me my spirit had been awakened again. Verla continued to encourage me to finish my education and keep up the support of my sobriety.

To this day I have dedicated my life to helping youth and community members who struggle with the issues that plagued me in my own youth. I have been sober many decades now, and I wake every day thanking the creator for a second chance.

My sister Verla, who witnessed my worst behavior and greatest victories, is forever in my heart. She was my mentor through college and helped me progress through my various employment positions, so that today I am a drug/alcohol counselor. She is a woman of strength and honesty and a superior role model for all women, and I am proud that she is my sister.







## TUCSON, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at Pima Community College (Pima Arizona), on April 24, 2013.

# Sylvia Lee

Born in 1958, Sylvia Lee is one of three generations of her family born in the Year of the Dog. Her mother Sofia was born in 1922, and daughter Brooke was born in 1994. The parallels that surround their lives are unique. Sylvia was raised as the only child of a single mother, and she raised her only child as a single mother. In addition, she and her mother both survived ovarian cancer in their 40's.

Although she was ready to drop out of college forever, Sylvia was given a second chance through the open door philosophy of Pima Community College, where she obtained an Associate's Degree. She continued her educational journey and earned a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Arizona, and a Ph.D. from Arizona State University. After a thirty-year career in higher education, she retired as president of one of Pima Community College's campuses. In 2012, she was elected to the Pima Community College Board of Governors to serve an unpaid, six-year term.

### PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy of life has been strongly influenced by my mother Sofia, who was born in 1922 in the Philippines and experienced World War II firsthand. My mom's family had to flee from the Japanese invasion and hide in the mountains for three years. They farmed corn and rice and relied on their large extended family for survival. Being the oldest sibling, she was the care taker who was strong, independent, and hard working. Even with war surrounding the family, they managed to love, laugh, and enjoy life to its fullest. She says that some of her best memories were from that time in her life.

I believe that is why I am strong, independent, and hard working. I live life seeing the glass as half full, not half empty. I am a loving care taker of my family and my community. The quote by Vivian Greene best describes my philosophy.



SOFIA (PIA) LEE -  
SYLVIA LEE'S MOTHER.

### SYLVIA'S

## Life Quote

"LIFE ISN'T ABOUT  
WAITING FOR THE STORM  
TO PASS, IT'S ABOUT  
LEARNING TO DANCE IN  
THE RAIN."  
— VIVIAN GREENE



# A Story of Inspiration

MY MOTHER - SOFIA (PIA) LEE

BY SYLVIA LEE

Hard work and perseverance are hallmarks of Pia's life. Born in Zamboanga, Philippines on September 30, 1922, Sofia (or Pia, as her family and friends call her), grew up experiencing the hardships of World War II. She was nineteen when the Japanese invaded the Philippines, forcing the family to flee for three years to the mountains, where they built their own home and grew rice and corn to survive.

Not only was Pia's independent spirit formed by her life experience, it was inherited from her grandmother on her father's side, Lai Ngan. Lai Ngan was one of the first pioneer Chinese women to come to southern Arizona through Mexico, by way of San Francisco and China. She was born in Guangdong Province in south China in 1873. When Lai Ngan was a child, she was smuggled into America by two performers in the Cantonese Opera troupe and settled in San Francisco, where she became an indentured servant. While still a teenager, she became the wife of Lee Kwong, who was 35 years her senior, in an arranged marriage. She was fourteen when she had her eldest child, Percy, in 1887.

Her husband Lee Kwong was an adventurer and gambler, but not a good provider, so Lai Ngan worked hard to support the family. She did whatever she could to make a living, such as operating a small grocery, a laundry, and a boarding house. Because her husband was always looking to strike it rich, he took Percy at age six with him to Mexico to mine for gold. After months of not hearing from them, Lai Ngan picked up the rest of the family and set out in search

of her husband and son. Sheer determination helped her find her son, especially since she did not know exactly where they were, did not know the language, and had little kids in tow. Eventually she found her son Percy, who was near death, suffering from malaria. After she nursed him back to health, she moved the family to Sonora, Mexico, then to Nogales, Arizona and finally settled in Tucson. When Percy grew up, he moved back to San Francisco and was eventually hired to operate a coconut oil business in Zamboanga, Philippines, because he was fluent in Spanish, which was one of the islands' dialects.

In 1920, Percy married Conception Ko. Conception was born in Japan and brought to the Philippines by her adventure-seeking father. Percy and Conception's first child was Sofia, the oldest of seven brothers and sisters. Pia would tell stories about the adversity of life during the war. One of the most terrifying times was when her father was captured by the Japanese, but later released because they discovered he was married to a Japanese woman. Although life was a constant struggle, they were happy because they had each other.

After the liberation of the Philippines, the family emigrated to the U.S. and settled in Tucson because of Percy's family ties there. Pia had already attended nursing school in the Philippines, but she also graduated from the University of Arizona to become a public health nurse. For 42 years Pia worked as a public health nurse, immunizing children and teaching well-baby care to new mothers in the barrios of

Tucson. Pia was able to build strong relationships with those she served because she spoke Spanish and because of her kindness and caring. She loved going to work every single day (she never missed a day of work due to illness) because she helped improve the lives of those in need. She is dearly loved by the many generations of families she helped over the years.

Racism was very evident in the 1950s. When Pia wanted to buy a home she was told no, because of her Chinese ethnicity. Being very frugal, she saved up enough money to pay cash and eventually was able to buy a house, which was very unusual for a woman, let alone a single, minority woman. Also at the time, interracial marriages were against the law in Arizona. So when Pia and LeRoy Reynolds decided to get married, they had to go across the state line to New Mexico. The marriage dissolved shortly after I, her only child, was born. Being a single parent at this time was very unusual, but she did it successfully.

I remember Pia telling me as a child that I could be whatever I wanted if I worked hard. She inspired me to obtain a Ph.D. and become a college president. Pia modeled hard work and perseverance every single day, with leisure and play having to take a back seat. She modeled loyalty to family by caring for her elderly parents until their death. She also cared for her granddaughter Brooke and picked her up from school for twelve years. I'm privileged to have Pia now living with me.

Pia died on January 20, 2018 at the age of 95. She continues to inspire with her memory. Her nickname, The Energizer Bunny, was given to her by beloved friends at the YMCA, where she participated in zumba and aerobics classes almost daily. She was never the center of attention at the YMCA, was loved by all, and was even featured in a commercial. We were so blessed to have had Pia on Earth for 95 years.



## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

# Arlette Lucero

Arlette Lucero earned a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Colorado State University in Fort Collins and completed two years of graphic arts studies at the Community College of Denver. She has taught art education for over fifteen years in Colorado and has been an active volunteer and member of the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council (CHAC) of Denver. She also has over thirty years of experience as a fine artist, professional graphic artist, children's book illustrator, and Chicana crafter. Arlette has been involved with a number of local nonprofits as a Mentor Teacher Artist, bringing her into many schools, libraries, and recreational facilities. These include ArtReach, ArtsStreet, Colorado Folk Arts, Journey through Our Heritage, Kidzart, Museo de las Americas, Mizel Center for Arts and Culture, Mizel Museum, and Voz y Corazón, as well as a variety of local neighborhood organizations. She has been an Art Teacher at Escuela de Guadalupe and continues to work with inner city youth on community art projects.





## PHILOSOPHY

As a youth, I became a Bible-beating Jesus Freak when my sibling and I discovered the Bible School and Church down the street from our home. I loved singing with the Pastor and his wife. I loved reading Bible stories, and then, just as now, I loved Jesus with all my heart. His words became my philosophies. As I grew up, I explored other religions, mythologies, and philosophies. I am curious about UFOs, conspiracy theories, alternative medicines, ancient and indigenous cultures, and later revelations. Anything interesting attracts my attention. With audio books and the Internet, I am discovering an endless resource of fascinating information.

Some of my favorite quotes are “Be the change you want to see in the world” (Mahatma Gandhi), “Imagination is more important than knowledge” (Albert Einstein), “Sí, Se Puede” (Cesar Chavez), “Doing the impossible just takes a little longer” (my Papa, Alex Salazar), the “Pennies make Nickels” song sung by my mother, Priscilla Salazar, and of course, the words of Jesus, “Love one another.” My favorite living Philosopher is my husband Stevon Lucero, who is also a brilliant artist. His philosophies are deep, and there are enough to fill a book. He has many written quotes on the walls of his studio.

I've worked hard, and I continue to strive to be a good mother, wife, and successful community member. I love to teach the many children I come in contact with about cultures and arts. I try to stay true to myself and share my knowledge with others.

## ARLETTE'S

### Life Quote

I LOVE FINDING MYSELF KNEE-DEEP IN PAINT ART SUPPLIES, AND RECYCLED MATERIALS, LISTENING TO THE LAUGHTER OF MANY CHILDREN AS THEY AND I GO ABOUT OUR BUSINESS OF CREATING THE ALCHEMY OF CHANGING ABSTRACT MIND IMAGINATION TO SOMETHING SOLID.

## My Mom,

“Pennies make nickels. Nickels make dimes. Dimes make quarters, and quarters make dollars.” My mom used to sing this to us, her children, when we were small, in her attempt to mold our young minds into becoming entrepreneurs. I do not have to reminisce to hear these words from her, because she is still singing this same song to her great-grandchildren, as she did to my children. There always seemed to be so many children in our home when I was growing up. Sometimes it was the neighbor kids, or cousins, foster kids, or the children of my parents' friends. I grew up with birthday parties, pajama parties, yard games, and indoor games. Children were always underfoot for my mother, who was called “Mom” by every child living in our home, and even by many who were not.

Fortunately, she was a stay-at-home mom for the first part of our growing up, while my Papa was making the bulk of the money. My mother would clean the house, feed our bellies, and nurse our ya yas. We felt protected, because my Mama was as fierce as a mother lion when it came to her cubs. She would busy herself around the house reciting an endless list of chores to be done. We children would fill our days playing pretend and dressing dolls, making plays and imaginary rock bands, making clothing, dancing and spinning, chasing, digging, reading books from the library, and cleaning areas for secret spaces. We laughed, cried, screamed, and bellyached, just like all well adjusted kids.

My siblings and I were still in elementary school when my parents became heavily involved with politics. Mom dragged us to protest marches to chant against the war in Vietnam. She had us stuff and lick envelopes containing Democratic publicity, and their stamps. We worked hard delivering our messages door to door. Mom attended the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968, but her candidate lost.

Later, the third party “La Raza Unida” was created, when local Chicanos realized that the Democratic

## Priscilla Salazar

party was not hearing their voices. Corky Gonzales became the party's candidate for President.

We were all caught up in a flurry of activity with La Raza, including going to a new bilingual escuela (school) where the young students played guitars and sang in Spanish, danced Mexican dances, learned about Aztec and Mayan culture, and made traditional crafts. We were also involved with poets, artists, explorers, ex-Nuns, and political people with radical ideas. Some would stay at our home overnight, or for extended periods of time. We decorated floats for Mexican festivals, listened to important speeches by political leaders, and enjoyed street plays. All this was so new and strange to me, because I had attended only white schools and a white church, and I never spoke Spanish. For that matter, I hadn't thought I was anything but white.

Mom, Priscilla Salazar, yearned to become an entrepreneur, so she helped birth Totinum Publishing Company, a pioneering publisher of bilingual books, with my Papa and her friend Jaime. Jaime ran the press, and her children collated the books. We were still very young and started with a wage of 50 cents an hour. But after a protest strike, we were given a raise of \$1.00 an hour to start, eventually working our way to a decent wage. One of the books we made was a Chicano Manifesto. Mom took us to the State Capital, where Chicanos were gathered for a rally. We took the books, walked up to strangers, and sold them for \$3.00 each. I personally loved the children's books we published, and as an adult I found myself illustrating children's books.

When the publishing company ran its course, Priscilla Salazar jumped right into becoming the sole owner and manager of one of the first Bilingual Bookstores in the nation. She named it the El Camino Real Bookstore. The Chicano community loved and respected her for this great achievement, especially the women. They remember her and respect her to this very day. The community at large rewarded her

## THE STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL CHICANA BUSINESS WOMAN BY ARLETTE LUCERO

with many public honors. Her family was extremely proud of her. She became my Hero as I looked back on her life. I worked at the bookstore from time to time, between my education, other jobs, and having a family.

I also worked at Priscilla's next and final business, which she owned with my sister Jolyn Ruybal, managing three retail stores at the old Stapleton Airport. They named it El Camino Enterprises, Inc. The business thrived at this fantastic location, and everybody made money. My mother became the very successful entrepreneur she always wanted to be. She and my sister enjoyed the success of their business for many years, until the larger Denver International Airport replaced Stapleton Airport.

My mom wanted all her children to own their own businesses. She also knew how difficult the road to this type of success is. We all knew. I watched as she struggled to balance the books to keep her businesses afloat. I saw all the extra, unpaid hours she put in. I watched as she poured all her heart and soul into her work. And I saw how tired she was after a hard day at the job. Even so, my mother, Priscilla Salazar, made a great difference in our community. Many followed in her footsteps to create their own businesses. She helped many authors and poets publish their books. She is a pioneer in the Denver Chicano community, which now boasts multiple Bilingual Escuelas and Libraries, many Chicano, Latino, and Hispanic organizations, Chicano art and cultural centers, Museos (Museums), Teatros (Theaters), and Indigenous Dance groups. We enjoy many Mexican holiday celebrations and fiestas, with traditional crafts and food.

I have personally benefited from her generosity, as I am an art teacher in a Bilingual Escuela, and an entrepreneur artist. I reach out to the community, teaching children their heritage, so that they can be proud of where they come from.





## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

*Lucy López Dussart Lucero*

Lucy was born in 1919 in Somerset, Colorado, on the Western Slope, the youngest of eight. Her father, a Belgian immigrant, worked the coal mines. Her mother was Mexican/Spanish/Indian. She raised her kids in a mining town where “the world comes together to make one big family who work hard together to survive.” From these humble beginnings, the woman who people on Galapago Street would call “Auntie Lucy” became everybody’s favorite Tía (Aunt) on the Westside of Denver.

This amazing, kind-hearted woman knew poverty, but never despair. She lost her three sons tragically, but not her sense of duty. She owned a restaurant and a tree cutting business and cooked for hundreds of hungry souls. She mended clothes for the needy and took dozens of “lost” children and adults into her home to feed, clothe and love. Her door was never closed, and her warm heart was never cold.

*Lucy Lucero was born Oct. 10, 1919 and passed away on Feb. 14, 2010.*

LUCY’S

### *Life Quote*

NEVER GIVE UP. NO MATTER WHAT COMES YOUR WAY, SOMEONE ELSE HAS BEEN THROUGH WORSE.

YOUR BUSINESS HERE IS NOT FINISHED UNTIL IT IS FINISHED. GOD WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN THAT IS, SOON ENOUGH.



## PHILOSOPHY

In 1927, when I was eight, my father got arrested for bootlegging. When he got out, he left for Missouri with his mother and left Mama and us kids behind. But she never cried or complained. She worked hard, and we worked hard. I could cut and fry a chicken when I was nine. When I was twelve, times were difficult. Lots of soup lines, and few jobs. Mama opened our home to anyone in need. She said we were lucky to have what we had.

In 1937 I married the love of my life, Avel Lucero. We had a wonderful life. Fridays after work, we'd pack up and go fishing. Later, we brought a carload of kids and friends. Those were good days. But you have to take the bad with the good. We lost one son, John, at 13. We lost our son Michael in a car accident when he was 12, and I was in a coma for almost a month. And we lost our last boy, Avel Jr., at 47.

But I never despaired. I still have my daughter Joanna and wonderful nieces and nephews to live for. Lots of kids came to my home to find some peace. Gay, homeless, or just kids who needed a break and a place to feel welcome. I never turned anyone away. I never judged them or belittled them. A little kindness goes a long way. The other day, a policeman came by. He must be about 65, but I recognized him. He remembered when I took him in after school and fed him cookies and cocoa. Imagine that!

No matter what, I've never given up. I wanted to see my kids grow, and prayed for that. I keep a pot of chili and beans on hand because I still have kids to see grow. That's how life is. You just have to keep on and be kind. We didn't just have good friends, we had great friends. And even with its sorrow, this life is a wondrous journey.

# Lavendar Dress

BY LUCY LÓPEZ DUSSART LUCERO

When I was around eight, we moved from Somerset, Colorado because there was not enough work at the coal mine. It was a few years before the Great Depression, but even then, things were getting hard for the workers.

My papa, a stout Belgian, and my mama, who was Mexican/Spanish/Indian, worked hard to raise us. I was the youngest, and my memories of the Western Slope, where I grew up, are good. I loved the mountain air, the clear running streams, the smell of the pines in the Elk Mountains, and playing with my friends. But Papa's work was dirty, and his lungs were filled with coal dust. Mama made do with the little we could afford. I loved picking choke cherries in the fall and waiting for the train in summer so the caboose man could throw oranges to us kids.

When I was eight, we moved to the plains of Northern Colorado, so Papa could make more money working at the sugar factory and could stop coughing all the time. It was an ugly, unfriendly place compared to my lovely mountain home.

One day, Papa was arrested for bootlegging. His mother stayed with us while he was in jail. She helped pay his fines and get him out. But she had never liked Mama and called us kids "half-breeds." When he got out, she talked him into going to Missouri with her. So Mama had to raise us younger kids (my older sisters, Josie and Mary, had moved to Denver). She never complained or said anything bad about my mean old grandmother. She just packed us up to Brighton, Colorado, to a farm owned by a Japanese man named Socorro. The oldest boys worked as farm hands, and we were able to stay together.

Life on the farm was pleasant after all we'd been through. My brothers George, Ralph, and Arthur worked the fields. We lived in a wooden house that

was shabby, but clean and warm. We looked out over acres of growing, living horizon. We had a dugout like the one in the Wizard of Oz. You could stand on the mound on top of it and see the whole country. We had potatoes, onions, carrots, and apples. We were never hungry there!

My older sister Esther helped Mama with house chores. My youngest brother Jake and I did what we could to help. That's when I learned to fry chicken and cook chili. Sometimes we'd run to the watermelon fields, break open a melon, and eat the heart out, like pirates. We thought it was great fun, but the farmer always scolded us.

One Sunday, Esther and I were walking to church, a few miles from our house. My brothers were out working the fields, even on Sunday. Mama stayed home to make tortillas for their lunch. I was wearing a beautiful lavender dress, which Josie made for me. I was proud and could hardly wait to get to mass to show it off. When I saw the church, I dashed into a field that we used as a shortcut. It would be a great day. I was sure I looked like a vision from heaven.

Suddenly, Esther yelled, "Slow down, Lucy, you're going to fall!" Sure enough, as I looked up, I ran smack into a barbed-wire fence. When I got up, I was caught. I had fallen face first into the wire, and my lip was stuck. I was bleeding all over my hands and dress. Esther was crying, and folks were rushing to help me.

After what seemed like forever, someone freed me. Esther pressed a handkerchief to my swollen, bloody lip. I knew we'd miss mass, since I needed stitches. We hobbled to the doctor's house and banged on his door. He was surprised to see two little girls, bloody and crying. But he fixed me up fast, even though Esther fainted in his office. We even laughed a little about that.

But I didn't laugh about what Mama would think. Because I had been careless, no one from our family was at the mass. That would be a shame, a vergüenza, for her. What would she do when she saw I had ruined my beautiful lavender dress? I longed to have her hold me and comfort me, but I dreaded what she might say.

I'll never forget what I saw as we approached the farm. Mama was on the top of the dugout, jumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box, scanning the road, crying and yelling for us. How could she know that something bad had happened? We were too poor to have a phone, so the doctor couldn't have called her. And no one had gone to tell her what had happened. But Mama had the gift of sight. Some say it was her Indian blood, but she always knew when trouble was happening. She ran and embraced me. She said, "I knew something had happened, I just knew it. I felt it when I was making tortillas!"

I started crying. I said I was sorry about ruining my dress and missing mass. She carried me inside and cleaned me up. When I stopped crying, she said: "Our people are from this land. We lived here before there were houses, farms, mines, or stores. We are forever tied to each other. Nothing in this world matters to us except family and community. Our family is our treasure. You and your brothers and sisters are everything to me. When you hurt, I hurt, when you are well, I am well. To have a good life, we just need to take care of each other."

In later years, I watched families torn apart by poverty, war, and anger, and remembered Mama's words. I opened my heart to all who came to my home. I loved my family and raised them to love. I have never worried about what we did not have and have always been grateful for what we did have.





## ALAMOSA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

# Oneyda L. Maestas

Oneyda Maestas was raised in the small town of Kim, Colorado, where she was taught to have a strong work ethic and family values, and a strong sense of language and culture. Although her father was punished as a child in school for speaking Spanish, she grew up in a bilingual home where language was encouraged and supported. Ironically, she attended a school where only English was allowed. At age five, she experienced her first language and identity crisis. This is why her educational background includes a Master's Degree in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations. As an English-language learning specialist, she taught on a Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and served as an international exchange teacher in Monterrey, Mexico; Badajoz, Spain; and Solola, Guatemala. She has traveled to nineteen countries in North America, Central America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean Islands.



In 2013 she became the director of CASA (Cultural Awareness and Student Achievement) House at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado. CASA is a resource center that fosters an environment that promotes learning, celebrates cultures, and develops leadership and student success, with a global perspective. She is deeply passionate about ethnographic studies; student assimilation, acculturation, and language preservation; identity frameworks; and global cuisine.

### PHILOSOPHY

Knowing where I come from (my roots), along with honor, integrity, compassion, selflessness, and being true to my word, are the foundation of my character. My mother taught me to always tell the truth. My father taught me that a strong tight-gripped handshake was as important as my signature on a legal document. It was a promise to follow through with my word. With these attributes I have earned the respect of others and have experienced much success personally and professionally.

Because we lived in isolation far from any city, my parents taught me to use what was available. I was taught to problem solve at an early age. My mother taught me how to alter recipes and substitute ingredients, creating versatile, flavorful meals. My father showed me how to fix things with what we had lying around the house, using skill and creativity.

Living in the country, we raised our own animals to provide meat for our table. I was raised to only consume what is needed and to never take in excess when gathering wild herbs and té de cota (Indian tea) from the campo (country). I was taught to keep plant roots intact so the herbs could continue growing and reproducing. My parents and grandmothers instilled in me the value of knowing and appreciating where food comes from.

My mother and grandmothers taught me the art of food preservation (drying food on an old screen door covered with sheer curtain, and freezing and canning). My mother still makes the best homemade jams, jellies, and syrups. My favorites include capulin (chokecherry), chachuaco (elderberry), tomato, and rhubarb. We had no written recipes, and rarely used measuring cups and spoons. Instead, I was taught to cook with my heart, my five senses, my instinct, and emotion.



# Tres Mujeres

BY ONEYDA L. MAESTAS

My life's purpose and existence are largely influenced by three naturally beautiful, wise, and courageous women, the Tres Mujeres: *mi mamá*, Teresa; *mi abuelita*, Adelaida (Lela); *mi abuelita*, Margaret (Margie). The gift within my story connects the symbology of the significant power of the number three with a metaphorical explanation of why I chose three strong women, the Tres Mujeres.

I purposefully chose three empowering women, because I believe that the number “3” has significant power and deep meaning. For example, the number “3” has been said to be:

- The first true number (according to the Pythagoreans)
- The number of harmony, wisdom, and understanding
- The first number to form a geometrical figure—the triangle
- The number of good fortune
- The Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- The number of Faith, Wisdom, Courage
- The number of time: Past, Present, Future

Metaphorically comparing and interpreting the symbolism of “3” with what I know to be true of the Tres Mujeres can tell us a lot about them. As three is said to be the first true number, so is the true role modeling of the Tres Mujeres in my life. My mother always taught me that telling the truth would result in deeper conversation and consequences for a lesson to be learned, while a lie would result in severe and perhaps prolonged punishment. My Grandma Lela taught me to be true to myself, and to respect my mind, body, and spirit at all times in a conservative way. My Grandma Margie taught me the truth of being beautiful inside and outside, the truth of following my heart's passions, the truth of dancing as if no one was watching, and most importantly, the truth that a woman should always wear red lipstick.

Because of their truthful teachings, each of these special women exuded harmony, wisdom, and understanding. They each taught me that when I live in truth, I am free; not bound or tortured by untruths leading me to be my own worst enemy.

Each of the Tres Mujeres was a role model of harmony, wisdom, and understanding in the way they stood strong, with a wide stance for a base, to keep them unfaltering, taking on the symbolic shape of an equilateral triangle. My mother and grandmothers represent the equilateral triangle—each one with both arms spread out by their side, in a wide stance—gathering the children, being care-takers, and having a strong base or foundation on which to stand to make the best daily decisions for the outcome of good fortune for their families.

My female role models persevered with undying faith. They all taught me how to pray the rosary. My first book was a vividly colorful, child-friendly version of the Bible. One of my favorite memories was reading about Noah's Ark and learning about all of the animal kingdom. My mother graduated from Holy Trinity Catholic School and taught me how to say

my prayers. Because we did not have Catholic Mass offerings in our small town, my mother was adamant about sending us to Christian and Baptist Bible School every summer, so we could learn more about the Bible. I remember my grandmothers praying so passionately before every meal. It was as if the prayer was the final “seasoning” for the food. I now have my own altar in my home. On it sits an old tattered leather case that contains my Grandma Lela's Bible, written in Spanish.

The undying faith of the Tres Mujeres, along with their wisdom and courage, continues to give me daily strength. My grandmothers used what was available to them and used remedios when ailments and illnesses needed curing. These remedies have been passed on to my mother, who now continues to pass on the healing traditions to me. The *papas* soaked in vinegar, then placed in a *pañuelo*, and then wrapped around my forehead to break a fever, are a significant memory. After a long nap, when my fever and headache were gone, I was told that the potato had taken the illness away, and that is why the potato turned black.

My other favorite memory was when I heard my Grandma Lela ask my dad to bring her back a bottle of whisky from town. I was confused, because I knew my grandmother didn't drink. When I confided to my mother that I thought grandma had started drinking, she giggled, and with a warm grin, let me know that Grandma used the whisky to make her cough medicine, which we called a “hot toddy,” made with lots of fresh-squeezed lemon, honey, and perhaps camphor. I now practice the traditions of using natural herbal medicine and essential oils. As I look back and reflect, I was truly influenced by women healers (unspoken *curanderas*) who had the faith of curing, the wisdom and “gut instinct” to prescribe and administer the best remedies, and the courage and patience to try various methods if the one tried first did not produce the desired results.

A cultural quotation by Eugene Garcia states, “If you have no roots, how can you withstand the tests of the environment that surely come?” Because the environment has tested my identity at various times in my life over the years, the one thing that keeps me grounded is always focusing strongly on my cultural

roots. The Tres Mujeres taught me to deeply honor, trust, and respect my cultural roots. They brilliantly had me participate in the kitchen and learn the art of cooking, to keep food traditions alive, like making tamales; real mincemeat *empanadas* made with *piloncillo*, *piñon*, *manzana*, *canela*; *pasas*; *sopa* with melted cheese and *leche de jarro*; *panocha*; *torta de huevo* in red chile; and *macaron tostado*, to name a few. An additional tradition that they modeled was that family always comes first, even at the sacrifice of oneself.

Because of the influence of the Tres Mujeres in my life, I am now passing on similar traditions to others, through teaching about the art of *horno* cooking, the art of healing with essential oils, and the art of practicing and radiating femininity.

I am committed to continuing these family traditions that have been passed down for centuries by tenacious women from my past, providing me with great enduring strength in my present, and offering a sustainable future filled with hope.

## GLOSSARY:

(mi) <i>abuelita</i>	(My) Grandma
<i>canela</i>	Cinnamon
<i>curandera(s)</i>	Herbal healer(s)
<i>empanadas</i>	Stuffed breads or pastries, either baked or fried
<i>horno</i>	Oven
<i>leche de jarro</i>	Canned milk
<i>macaron tostado</i>	Toasted or fried spaghetti in tomato sauce; also called fideos
<i>mamá</i>	Mother; or mommy
<i>manzana</i>	Apple
<i>panocha</i>	Gruel-like pudding made with sprouted wheat and piloncillo
<i>pañuelo</i>	Scarf, or handkerchief
<i>papas</i>	Potatoes
<i>pasas</i>	Raisins
<i>piloncillo</i>	Unrefined pure cane sugar, in the form of cones, or “brown sugar cones”
<i>piñon</i>	Pine nut
<i>remedios</i>	Home remedies
<i>sopa</i>	Bread pudding
<i>torta de huevo</i>	Small omelet puff bathed in red chile sauce

## ONEYDA'S

# Life Quote

IF YOU HAVE NO ROOTS, HOW CAN YOU WITHSTAND THE TESTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT THAT SURELY COME? FOR ME, AS AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A SET OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ROOTS, IF MY ROOTS WERE TO DIE AND I WAS TO BE STRIPPED OF THE INTEGRITY THAT LIES IN THOSE ROOTS, THEN I WOULD ALSO DISAPPEAR ALONG WITH ALL THAT IS IMPORTANT TO ME. SI NO TIENES RAÍCES, ¿CÓMO PUEDES TOLERAR LAS PRUEBAS DE LA NATURALEZA QUE SEGURAMENTE VENDRÁN? PARA MÍ, COMO UN INDIVIDUO CON UNA SERIE DE RAÍCES CULTURALES Y LINGÜÍSTICAS, SI MURIERAN MIS RAÍCES Y SI FUERA DESPOJADO DE TODA INTEGRIDAD QUE RADICA EN ESAS RAÍCES, ENTONCES TAMBIÉN YO DESAPARECERÍA JUNTO CON TODO LO QUE ME ES IMPORTANTE.

- EUGENE GARCIA  
- DR. JUAN GONZALES, SPANISH TRANSLATION





# Brenda Kay Manuelito

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

Brenda Kay Manuelito is Diné of the Towering House clan (Kí'yaa'aaníí) "born for" the Salt clan (Ashiihi). Her maternal grandparents are the Mud clan (Hasht'lishnii) and her paternal grandparents are the Weavers or Zia clan (Tlogi). Her family comes from Naschitti and Tohatchi, New Mexico, adjacent communities on the Navajo Nation.

Currently, she teaches native community members how to create 3–5 minute "mini-movies" that focus on the beauty and strength of their everyday lives. Along with her partner Carmella Rodriguez of nDigiDreams, LLC, her life work is to focus on the areas of health, education, policy, and cultural preservation of Native American peoples throughout the United States. They travel extensively to rural and under served communities across the nation.

Her passion and life's work is to combine age-old native storytelling ways with new modern technology to help Heal Our Communities One Story at a Time.™

## PHILOSOPHY

My great-great grandfather, Chief Manuelito, told his children to "climb the ladder of education" and bring resources back to Our People. As the youngest of six, I have always been insatiably interested in and curious about the people who surround me.

Give whatever you have in this world, and it will come back to you twofold. Give love, patience, and understanding. Give of your time and give away some of your money. It all comes from the Creator and will one day all go back, too. For the moments we have in this world together, we are just simply caretakers. Take care of each other and take care of our Mother Earth.

I am a Diné woman, cultural anthropologist, and native digital storyteller. As the cofounder and Education Director of nDigiDreams, LLC, I am sharing with others across Indian Country the knowledge and skills for them to make and use their everyday life stories to guide and teach others about our indigenous ways, history, and culture. The Creator has opened this new path that has taken me into the heart of families and communities, and I am grateful for the opportunity and privilege to be able to combine ancient storytelling techniques with modern tools and technology to help our people's stories and voices break through the sound barrier and become part of this nation's dialogue.

## BRENDA'S

### Life Quote

WHEN WE TAP INTO THE DEEPEST LEVELS OF OUR UNDERSTANDING THROUGH STORIES AND STORYTELLING, WE ARE ALL RELATED.



# We Are All Related

BY BRENDA KAY MANUELITO

When I was small girl growing up in a large family, we always opened our home to others in need, although we didn't have much ourselves. My parents raised us to be generous, kind, and loving people who help others and don't worry about if there are enough beds, enough food, or enough clothes to share with the people who one of us invariably brought home from work or school or simply met on the street or at the local bus station. Through our door, and into our home, the Creator brought people from all walks of life, and we always shared whatever we had.

My mother, Evelyn (Carol) Manuelito, went to the Tohatchi Boarding School as a young girl, and it was there she first met my father, Robert A. Manuelito. As the oldest daughter of thirteen children, she knew how to get by with very little, and most importantly, how to share with others. One of the best things that my mother shared with me was our wealth of family stories. My mother has the longest and most vibrant memory of anyone I know. She can recount dates, names, and events to a "t" about the family histories of both of my extended families. When we are driving in a car across the reservation, over mountaintops, or through small railroad towns, it seems like her memories and stories pop out of nowhere in rapid succession. She tells me about the everyday life stories of my parents, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents.

And she tells me stories about lives that flourished and lives that were kept from the brink of death. One story that I remember was about my masaní (maternal grandmother) Ethelyn Pine and how her mother was one of several sisters in one Navajo family. Their mother died while they were still young, so they went to live with their grandmother, who raised them until they became old enough to marry and move out. Due to unforeseen circumstances, over several generations, my maternal ancestors spread out from Kin'ya'a, a sacred landmark located thirty miles outside of Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, and the original birthplace of the Towering House clan. These Towering House siblings were weavers, ranchers, herbalists, and medicine women, who lived and raised their families near present-day Naschitti and Tohatchi, New Mexico, communities located on the eastern side of the Chuska Mountains on the Navajo Nation. My great-grandmothers were like ears of corn growing out of one main stalk. They connect me literally to hundreds of Navajo men and women across time and space.

Another story I remember Mom telling me was about the origin of the stones that created my nali's (paternal grandmother's) circular round hogan (tsé beehooghaní). My nali's hogan was built in the 1930s, layer by layer and stone by stone. One summer afternoon, while we were cooking outside on the open pit fire, Mom told me about how her father, my maternal grandfather, Nelson Pine, would ride his horse ten miles each way to help quarry the beautiful deep brown stones from a nearby hillside, shape them into blocks by hand, and mortar them into place with earthen clay mixed with sand and water. My grandfather and others like him were self-taught Navajo stone masons, and the land of my ancestors is dotted with their handiwork.

The most important thing my mother taught me, the youngest of seven children, was how to appreciate all that surrounds me, and to give thanks for everything, visible and invisible. She has been a spiritual teacher of mine, and through watching and listening to her actions and words through four decades of my life, I have come to know our Diné prayers, songs, and teachings. The most favorite times I have spent with my mother are sitting beside her in ceremonies and feeling deeply connected to my Creator, the Holy Beings of our Diné people, and all the beautiful women praying and singing next to me, including the spirits of my Towering House great-grandmothers. My mom gave birth to me and made me who I am today.

I am a Diné woman, cultural anthropologist, and native digital storyteller. As the cofounder and Education Director of nDigiDreams, LLC, I am sharing with others across Indian Country the knowledge and skills for them to make and use their everyday life stories to guide and teach others about our indigenous ways, history, and culture. The Creator has opened this new path that has taken me into the heart of families and communities, and I am grateful for the opportunity and privilege to be able to combine ancient storytelling techniques with modern tools and technology to help our people's stories and voices break through the sound barrier and become part of this nation's dialogue. When we tap into the deepest levels of our understanding through stories and storytelling, **We Are All Related.**





## CAPULIN, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

# Tori Vigil - Martinez

Tori grew up in the rural San Luis Valley of Colorado, in a family of all girls. She learned to tend to the animals on her family's farm, work in the fields, hunt, fish, fix cars, and build houses. Her father raised her to believe that girls could do anything boys could, and her mother was a model of feminine strength. Her family and culture helped shape the beliefs that inspired her to lead a community coalition, write a book, conduct research, write a weekly column for the local newspaper, and found a women's center. However, her legacy is far more than the things she has done. It is a lifetime of stories she heard through her rural and cultural research. She used these stories to give her community a voice, especially to empower women and minorities. She was Director of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area (SdCNHA) from 2017 to 2019 and went on to become Regional Associate at The Colorado Trust, a health equity foundation that provides resources for capacity

building, community state organizing, and collaboration at a local level. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Sociology, and Women's Studies from Adams State University (Alamosa, Colorado) in 2016, and a Master's Degree in Sociology from Arizona State University in 2018.

### PHILOSOPHY

For centuries my people have shared oral history through song and stories. My grandmother would gather the children around her and regale us with folktales that captured our attention and ignited our imagination. I have carried this tradition of storytelling into the work I do in my community. It influences my interactions with others, my research methods, and the content of my writing. Through my grandparents I learned the cultural skills of seeing beyond what is being said, reading body language, and honoring traditions.

We all have a story. What I have learned over the years is that the satisfaction we get out of life and the success we achieve are based on the story we tell ourselves about our own lives and the environment we live in. The most powerful thing I ever did was to change my story. When life is difficult, when poverty surrounds you, when resources are scarce, you can either play the role of the victim or make the best of what you've been given and become a survivor. I chose the latter.

After years of struggle, I am now in a place to help others change their stories as well. The work I do in my community, the research I conduct, and everything I write have an underlying purpose—to empower others to be the authors of their own lives. We may not be able to change the past, but we can change the meaning we give to it.

### TORI'S

## Life Quote

"BELIEFS HAVE THE POWER TO CREATE AND THE POWER TO DESTROY. HUMAN BEINGS HAVE THE AWESOME ABILITY TO TAKE ANY EXPERIENCE OF THEIR LIVES AND CREATE A MEANING THAT DISEMPOWERS THEM OR ONE THAT CAN LITERALLY SAVE THEIR LIVES."

– TONY ROBBINS



# My Grandmother

BY TORI VIGIL-MARTINEZ

My grandmother, Luisita DeHerrera, was the most influential person in my life. She was short in stature, only 4'8" tall. However, she made up for her shortness with her larger than life attitude. Her bubbly persona, non-stop humor, and love of life just drew people to her. To me, my grandmother was a strong, independent, funny, hardworking, and loving woman. Her home was never lonely. Her grandchildren flocked to her daily. We spent every possible moment we could with her. She always said it was her grandchildren that made her smile, and her smile was infectious. It still makes us laugh to think back about how she was in constant competition with her friends about who had the most grandchildren (upon passing, she had over fifty).

She taught me to pray, to cook, and to care for my family, and most of all, she showed me how to make the most of every day. Aside from my mother, she was the one woman I spent the most time with. I visited her almost every weekend and spent every summer with her. I remember her waking up at the crack of dawn to cook breakfast. Mornings in her home in San Luis, Colorado are ingrained in so many of my childhood memories. To this day, the smell of freshly cooked beans and tortillas evokes memories of my little grandmother in her handmade apron. She worked nonstop from the moment she awoke till the moment she went to bed. She had an amazing work ethic.

During my childhood, her work was typically housework. However, regardless of the type of work she did, she taught me that if you are going to do something, you have to do it to the best of your ability, whether that was sewing, cooking, cleaning, or childcare. My first attempt to sew a blanket required taking it apart several times, because she said it had to be perfect. Since then I've learned to do things right the first time. I still apply those same principles and work ethic to everything I do.

It is impossible to describe my grandmother without talking about her deeply held religious beliefs. She was a devoted Catholic, and I grew up watching her pray for every member of her family, every night. Needless to say, her prayer time for such a large family was hours long. She knew what each person needed, what they wanted, and what she wanted for them. Watching this part of her life instilled in me the habit of being consciously aware of other people's needs. She made me an active listener, and a better observer of life. Watching and listening come easily for an introvert like me. To know what others need and want, you have to listen to their stories. I learned that those stories reveal much more than the words people used to tell them. However, making a difference and changing lives takes action. My grandmother was fearless in every action she took.

My grandmother was not always healthy. She had several surgeries on her hips, knees, and elbows. She had diabetes, which required her to change

her diet. Yet through it all, her smile never faded. She never claimed diabetes as her disease—it was simply something to deal with, and she took it day by day. I used to ask her if she was in pain. Her response was that her body hurt every day. Her body wanted to tell a story of pain, but she never accepted that story. Her story was that life was short and she only had one life to live. She lived her life to the fullest every day. Her story of strength and perseverance has carried many of her children and grandchildren through some very tough times.

She also read her bible regularly, and often read it out loud to me. She made the stories about David and Goliath, Lydia, and the nativity story come to life. This regular ritual of ours truly instilled in me a lifelong love of reading. Today my personal library consists of hundreds of books, both print and digital. However, I find that printed books are far more enjoyable to read. There is nothing like holding a good book in your hands. Love of reading is something I also passed on to my children, who collect their favorite books for their own personal libraries.

Stories really are the fabric of our lives. I can't thank my grandmother enough for teaching me the importance of familial stories, cultural stories, religious stories, and personal stories. Whether written or spoken, stories have power. If someone takes away something from this story, I hope it is that they should preserve stories that need to be passed on to the next generation. Also, I want people to know that they have the power to give their own personal stories a new meaning.





# Rita J. Martinez

PUEBLO, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

For over 40 years, our comadre (friend and colleague) Rita was a cornerstone in movement building and community organizing, in her home community of Pueblo, and throughout Colorado. Rita had a reputation for bringing people together for direct action, fighting for justice, and building power within marginalized communities. She became politicized in the 1970s during the Chicano Movement, while organizing around local police brutality issues, working on the newspaper *La Cucaracha*, and working with the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers, as a staff person and board member. She was adamant that “el movimiento sigue” (“the movement continues”) and this was apparent in her continued leadership to ensure culturally relevant organizing. For years, Rita organized occasions and movements like Cinco de Mayo, Teatro de la Lucha, Abolish Columbus Day, and Día de la Raza. She was the impetus behind the formation of the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives at CSU-Pueblo. Rita ably included current issues in her continued documentation of the Chicano Movement in books and historic exhibits, ensuring that there are historically accurate accounts of a movement that continues to form and politicize generations of Chicanx people.

*Rita J. Martinez was born on October 28, 1955 and passed away on December 10, 2020.*

## RITA'S

### Life Quote

EPIGENETICS—WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE CORN, A DEEP SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL SYMBOL OF OUR GREATNESS THROUGHOUT TIME.

## PHILOSOPHY

“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.”

— Dolores Huerta

My organizing is rooted in relationships, forming new relationships, and actively maintaining long-term ones. I remember visiting with Cesar Chavez in the '80s. As we sat around the kitchen table, we talked about organizing among people who were the poorest and most marginalized. We talked about how important it is to ask people to contribute to their own liberation, whether it's time, money, or other resources. I learned this over time, and today, I have no problem asking people to donate, come to a meeting, or volunteer for an event.

People want to participate and give to their community, but often, they are not invited, or no opportunity is provided. As an organizer, I help the community recognize, amass, and flex their power. People sometimes seek to give me personal recognition for my leadership, but I am nothing without the power of community. I spent my early years leading from behind—I was a support person, never front and center. Back then, the movement had mostly male spokespeople, but they did not often provide the central leadership. The core leadership was highly collaborative and drew on the models of our ancestors—women and men working as a team to support the work of the Chicanx community. Only out of necessity have I occasionally ended up in front of the microphone or giving a speech, but leading from behind is where I'm most comfortable. It is our collective knowledge and passion that moves us forward, and we are sustained by one another to continue the fight over the long haul.





# Community

BY RITA J. MARTINEZ

and the slimy salamanders they saw in mud puddles. Occasionally she and her sister courageously fought off “rattlers,” which gave her a life-long fear of snakes. My favorite story is about dusting her new shoes off with a hanky when she got to school, so they’d shine again. This illustrates how she lived her life. She was proud of her appearance and saw the value in looking your best at all times.

My grandfather was an intelligent man, who could read and write in English and Spanish. He was appointed to the local Board of Education. He was concerned with the distance his kids had to walk to school, so he rented a room in Gardner and moved my mother and the other kids into it. She also took care of her siblings there. She fed them, dressed and bathed them, put them to sleep, and woke them up for school. She helped them with homework and then did her own. Because of her hard work and dedication, she was the only sibling to attend high school and graduate, as Salutatorian.

My grandmother taught her many *remedios*, to keep the kids healthy. My mother made sure I knew them, as well. Sliced potatoes, soaked in vinegar, wrapped in cloth, and placed on your forehead and feet would draw out fevers. She used *manzanilla* for colic or upset stomach. My grandmother showed her how to soak in a bathtub with marijuana to relieve arthritic pain. My mother taught me that wild plants might look like weeds but can be used for *remedios*, or for food. Two plants that grew in our yard were *quelites* and *yerba buena*. We would gather the *quelites*, clean and either boil or fry them, then add diced onion and *pequin*, and we boiled the *yerba buena* for tea.

The cultural and religious traditions my mother passed on to us remain important in our family. She ensured that we observed holidays and knew the importance of prayers. Because she wanted a good education for us, she combined her faith and her earnings as a psychiatric technician to pay for all five of us to attend Catholic school.

# Activism and Inspiration

After my father passed, she became immersed in church work. She found her niche with the Legion of Mary, a lay Catholic organization that fosters the spiritual and social welfare of its members and their parish. She helped organize a *praesidium* (the basic local unit) in her parish. She held office, recruited members, and inspired so many people, including incarcerated women. She did that work for nearly forty years.

As I reflect, I know that my own community work is a parallel to my mother’s religious work. Her diligence was infectious and has carried over into my own dedication. She’d occasionally ask me why I worked so hard for free, and why I stressed so much over the work. I’d laugh and tell her that in my own social justice work, I was just copying what she did with the Legion and for the community at large.

I moved in with my mother for the last seven years of her life to care for her. It was a great and difficult time, for both of us. During those years she often repeated all the family stories. I’m so fortunate to have had that time with her. As her appetite would change, I would serve her a favorite dinner, and she’d say, “This reminds me of home.” When I’d ask my mother what to make for dinner, she’d say, “*Papas, frijoles y tortillas, jita*.” She passed at 93 in the spring of 2019.

My other Corn Mother is Delfina Garcia, a long-time Chicano/a activist who has worked tirelessly for justice for over forty years. She has been an inspiration for me in the social justice work we were both involved in. I met her when I was in college doing community work in Pueblo to fight water pollution in the Salt Creek neighborhood. She spearheaded efforts to clean up the Bessemer ditch, which was polluted by slag from the local CC&I (Colorado Coal & Iron) steel mill. It was contaminating our water source, and we felt the high cancer rate in our neighborhood was because of this.

I felt an immediate connection to her. I’m the same age as one of her daughters and went to Pueblo Central

High School with her kids. I was amazed at the work for justice her entire family was involved in, and how they supported each other. She was the matriarch of a family of community leaders. Her whole family fought to clean up Salt Creek and to improve conditions for farm workers in Pueblo. Her husband was vice president of the Farm Workers Union, and a tireless spokesman against police brutality.

Delfina never worked up front, but was the gentle person behind the scenes—cooking, organizing, planning, and supporting the community’s fight for justice. She never sought the limelight; she was sweet and gentle and guided our efforts from the background.

As I began having my own children, I modeled my family’s involvement on what I saw in Delfina’s family. She had major life hurdles to overcome, but always remained steadfast. Her many impressive accomplishments included running a family business, running for state office, and being a lead plaintiff in a class action suit against Colorado’s English Only law. She has been a major inspiration for me and continued to be an effective community activist well past her eighties.

## GLOSSARY

<i>manzanilla</i>	Chamomile
<i>Papas, frijoles y tortillas, jita</i>	Potatoes, beans, and tortillas, my daughter
<i>pequin</i>	A hot chili pepper used as a spice
<i>quelites</i>	“Wild spinach”—a spinach-like green used in New Mexico and Southern Colorado cooking
<i>remedios</i>	Home remedies
<i>yerba buena (hierba buena)</i>	A type of mint, usually spearmint, and the tea made from it



DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

B. Afeni  
McNeely Cobham

B. Afeni McNeely Cobham, a native of Brooklyn, is the creator-curator of the Sankofa Lecture Series, an annual conference that explores the significance of Hip Hop in relationship to cultural literacy, identity formation, and as a tool for innovative and effective teaching practices. She was formerly assistant professor in the Department of African and African American Studies at Metropolitan State University of Denver. She taught the first course dedicated to Hip-Hop culture at Denver University and Metro State. Her work has been published in the New Directions for Student Services book, Responding to the Realities of Race on Campus (2007), and in the book Multiculturalism on Campus: Theory, Models, and Practices for Understanding Diversity and Creating Inclusion (1996). She earned a B.A. in Mass Communication from Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. She later obtained a Master of Education in Student Personnel and Higher Education from the University of Georgia, and in 2003, earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Indiana University.

B. AFENI'S

Life Quote

LET NOT WOES OF OLD ENSLAVE YOU ANEW.\*  
— NYDIA ECURY, CURAÇAON POET

\*A PORTION OF A QUOTE WRITTEN ON A WALL AT THE MUSEUM OF KURÁ HOLANDA, IN MEMORY OF THE SLAVE TRADE OF AFRICANS AT THE SLAVE-HOLDING YARD IN THE OTRABANDA DISTRICT OF THE VURAÇAON CAPITAL OF WILLEMSTAD.







## PHILOSOPHY

I knew early in life that I wanted a career that gave people the power of knowledge. This was fueled by the nurturing experiences I had growing up in Brooklyn with a solid nuclear and extended family. Those experiences shaped me into the God-conscious, insightful, brilliant, tenacious, beautiful, unapologetic ALPHA female that I am.

During my first year of teaching college students, I was stringent about sticking to a teaching model in which I assigned readings and gave lectures, and the students simply regurgitated the information on the exam. This was completely boring for them, and even more so for me. I needed to adopt a pedagogical approach that resonated with the students and appealed to my deeply entrenched urban social skills. I turned to what I knew best—Hip-Hop. As in my college experience, course lectures and assignments reviewed and dissected, sometimes ad nauseam, had to relate somehow to my understanding of the world for me to move to a point of critical analysis. Tapping in to current events in society helped me understand, unpack, and in some cases, explain historical events that I had to demonstrate knowledge of.

This “light bulb” moment changed the dynamic of my teaching, research, and student engagement. In short, educators must develop culturally diverse, academically rigorous teaching tools to reach students. When I developed the curriculum for the Hip-Hop course, I linked a myriad of issues on oppression with historic and current elements of Hip-Hop culture. For instance, a discussion about urban renewal in poverty-stricken communities in the Bronx (birthplace of Hip-Hop) pushes students to examine acts of environmental violence and racism that occur in many communities where social and political capital is non-existent.

My renewed teaching practice was in congruence with my life philosophy. The blueprint for this curriculum fosters the importance of shaping epistemology from lived experiences. The power of using knowledge to help others is how we can alter oppression, one injustice at a time.

## B. AFENI'S STORY

It is difficult to pay homage to just one woman who shaped and influenced my life. While my mother certainly holds a prominent place, I have been blessed to have a circle of women who were living examples of trials and triumphs. This circle of Queen Warriors passed their knowledge and legacy from one generation to the next.

My maternal great-great-grandmother, born in the institution of slavery, was released from physical bondage at the age of twelve. Like so many children during this time, she had scattered memories of her mother's touch, because her mother died too soon. My great-grandmother, a sharecropper, carried the burden of teaching her twelve children self-worth in a society that continually reinforced the idea that the mere existence of Black people was abhorrent, and that they were of little value.

Most of her children, including my grandmother and grand aunts, headed North during the Second Great Migration from the South, with nothing more than a home-cooked meal, a few dollars, and impenetrable hope. Brooklyn, New York was the destination. Southern dialect, traditions, and faith merged well with fast-paced urban sensibility. The women in my family embarked on careers as domestic maids; social workers; as community organizers and activists; as military, city, and state employees; and as housewives.

My grandmother (I called her Nana) provided domestic service for White families living in affluent neighborhoods. Her encounters with them were often an assault on her dignity. They assumed her children were uneducated and poverty stricken, and that because of this, they would not accomplish much. Although they saw little value in the work ethic and strength of a Black domestic worker, to her daughters, and later to her granddaughters, she was regal, and in her community she was revered.

### SUNDAY DINNER

The tradition of coming together is important to my family. I remember from an early age going to Nana's house every Sunday for dinner. I thought it was an opportunity for “play dates” with my cousins, but as I grew older it became much more.

I can honestly say that I rarely saw canned goods in her kitchen cabinets. Nana cooked “from scratch,” as her children would proudly exclaim, measuring perfect dashes

of this and pinches of that with strong, yet tired hands. Preparing the food was an illustration of her love. She couldn't give money or buy gifts for all her children and grandchildren, but she could provide the gift of love and appreciation, through the “sweat equity” of arduous cooking. She would begin on Friday evening, after a long day of cleaning homes. She delegated tasks with gentle requests. If anyone got out of line, she'd sternly say, “You wanna eat, then you betta help.” In response, there would be laughter and overtones of “That's right,” or “Tell 'em, Ma!”

Somehow I managed to skirt duties, but when slipping away wasn't possible, I joined the assembly line, cleaning collard greens, cabbage, and rice. Other jobs included peeling potatoes, cutting cooked potatoes in chunks for the potato salad, or stirring the ingredients in a bowl that was bigger than my hands, but smelled like heaven.

In this scared space, the women in my family shared themselves by offering memories of their childhood, updates on mutual friends, and trials and triumphs at work or home. Nana spoke candidly about the power of knowledge, particularly through education. She understood that education was a gateway to independence, better opportunities, and a tool to help others. Her daughters took this to heart and became educators, community organizers, and activists, counselors, social workers, and agents for change in their communities.

In her essay, “The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen,” Paule Marshall credits her mother and women in the community with being her most important teachers. As with my own childhood experience, she says she listened intently to the conversations of women gathered around the kitchen table. It was there that I also learned instinctual survival skills. I knew that my mother knew I was in the room. Though I waited for her directive to leave, it never came.

In hindsight, I understand that there were some lessons she wanted me to learn indirectly. As a result, I was given tacit knowledge from the women in my family of the complexities of being a Black woman in a historically racist, predominately White, patriarchal society. I learned from these women that my mere existence would be put to the test in major aspects of my life, and that through faith, persistence, and love I could weather storms.

A key aspect of our family manifesto was not to allow life's challenges to circumvent confidence or goals. From these roots, the next two generations of women have responded to this manifesto with clarity and purpose for our lives.

I know from whence I've come. My enslaved great-great-grandmother and ancestors endured atrocities beyond my comprehension and survived. My great-grandmother faced adversity with a slightly arched back, tired hands and feet, and a rigid, tall posture. My grandmother navigated unconcealed racism and sexism while she scrubbed floors, because she intuitively knew that the generational stigma of illiteracy and poverty would end with her children.

### PLANTING SEEDS FOR SUCCESS

My mother worked during the day at a community school for mentally challenged teens. After work she would come home to cook, clean, and help my sibling and me with our homework. What she may not have known was that on many nights after 11 p.m., I would sneak out of bed to see why the lights in the front of the apartment were still on. I'd would sit in a dark section of the living room and watch as she sat at the kitchen table, reading and writing.

One night I went over and asked if I could help, so she could go to bed too. She giggled. “Okay, help me with my calculus,” she said. “What's that?” I replied, and she said, “Math.” My eyes grew with excitement because I was in second grade and good at doing math problems. She moved the textbook in my direction, and I just stared at the formulas in front of me. This made her erupt in laughter. She took out some paper and wrote about five second-grade math problems. She put it in front of me, and we began to do what I thought was calculus together.

Many years later, I would come to understand that Mother was planting a seed that would further grow my curiosity for knowledge, and my educational tenacity. Although there would be tough times in my academic career, I always genuinely enjoyed being in school and learning. That hasn't changed, and never will.

I know from whence I've come. I am the flame inside of a circle of Queen Warriors. Throughout the generations we have refused to surrender to excuses and challenges. We are God-conscious, insightful, brilliant, tenacious, beautiful, unapologetic ALPHA females.





# Carolina “Carrie” Mejía

BERNAL, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Carolina “Carrie” Sandoval Mejía was born, at home, in Bernal, New Mexico in 1922, when parteras and curanderas were the community’s medical practitioners. Even at 87 years old, she had a treasure chest of memories about rural life. She remembered when corridos told stories of valiant men and women struggling to reach their destiny as a people.

She grew up with her two sisters and three brothers. Her father, Pantaleón Sandoval, participated in the Tecolote Land Grant. Her sister Sally continues as caretaker of this tierra sagrada with a long history of struggle. Carrie remembered being picked up from her ranchito in a covered wagon to go to school, as the wheels rumbled noisily down dusty roads. There were no fancy cars there; just simple people of the earth trying to carve out an existence. She passed down her New Mexican customs and traditions to her 15 grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren, so that the family tree would continue to grow and prosper.

*Carolina Mejía was born Sept. 17, 1922  
and passed away on Dec. 26, 2009*

## PHILOSOPHY

I believe that love and understanding are potent and healing forces. The *familia* is the core of Mexican culture. Family members should take care of each other, share in their goodness, and be there to support each other during trying times. Human beings should respect how others feel and think. Respect builds healthy relationships with others. The traditional values of self-respect, respect for others, and respect for *los ancianos* is being lost in modern society.

Spirituality, prayer, and faith are tools that we need to survive. I have always prayed to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and to Santa Rita for protection and guidance. When my brothers were in Europe fighting in World War II, I prayed to these two spiritual icons to intercede and ask God to protect my brothers.

I cried many times. I also prayed and cried for my sons when they were fighting in Vietnam. The power of prayer was all that I had. My faith sustained me during those challenging times as I wondered if my brothers and sons would return home. Those journeys were painful.

We should always help people who need help. Giving and sharing what little one has with others helps sustain life. When we give to others, we are living out God’s mission in life. My father’s grocery store temporarily failed because he gave credit to those who had nothing, especially during the Depression.

One should never be afraid of hard work. It builds character. It prepares you for your life as you struggle to make ends meet. I have been blessed with those values.



CARRIE’S STORY
AS TOLD TO DR. RAMÓN DEL CASTILLO, HER SON-IN-LAW

The color pink reminds me of the wonderful times I had as a child on the ranchito with my brothers and sisters. It was a time when our familia spent time together laughing and crying, sometimes at the kitchen table, sometimes on the living room floor, telling stories about life’s struggles. Because my father, Panteleón, was on the Board of Education, he spent much time in meetings and visiting schools. He was a very responsible father and a kind and loving man.

He was cultivating a life for future generations of Sandovals that he believed would continue to live on el ranchito. He raised and raced horses. He was a vaquero from New Mexico. I remember a corrido entitled “Corrido del Caballo Negro,” about my father’s horse, that had become famous. It was a time when corridos were used to spread the news in the surrounding communities.

Table with 2 columns: Spanish phrase, English translation. Rows include: El dueño de ese caballo, Es don Andrés Sandoval, El acabado de partir, A servicio militar, Como a las dos de la tarde, Empezaron la carrera, Pegó dos brincos el Prieto, Les ganó la carrera.

The image of my mother, Mary Trujillo Sandoval, remains imprinted in my heart. She was an inspirational person who affected my life tremendously. Her image appears whenever I get into binds that require courage, bravery, and imagination. She taught me the power of prayer, and to keep my faith.

She used her God-given talents to make something out of nothing, so that we could survive. She was a corn woman, never complaining about what needed to get done, just doing it. Other values of hard work and the importance of giving to others from the heart also remain implanted in the essence of my being.

She had been born with a very a creative spirit. I remember the time she yearned for a new living room couch, but there was no money. She found springs from an old car seat, embroidered a fancy couch cover, and using her carpentry skills, created a beautiful couch. This was done at a time when carpentry was performed only by men. She transformed the mold established for females. With her fiery spirit, she demonstrated confidence and wasn’t afraid to express herself. If she were alive today, she would stand up for women’s rights. That resourcefulness has come in handy as I’ve raised my seven children.

I remember learning how to cook from my mother. This would became an entrepreneurial skill that I would use later in life. She also taught me to embroider. She could look at a fancy magazine and make any dress in it. She passed on to me the courage to survive even when things seemed insurmountable.

Our family suffered emotionally while my brothers were fighting in World War II. It was a trying time; communication was a lot different than today. Their letters were responses to the many rosaries and masses recited for their return, at home and in the community. I learned how the power of prayer could make miracles happen, like how God protected my brothers during the war.

I left the ranchito after I got married. Things didn’t turn out as we had planned, especially after our divorce. I had five sons and a daughter to care for. I remarried and had another daughter. We ended up on welfare. The values, skills, and lessons of life that I learned from my mother were invaluable. I was forced to make them come alive.

We lived in the projects. But we had family and love that helped us through those tough times. I worked hard to provide for my children. They never did without the basic necessities of life. They always had food, shelter, and clothing. I could make delicious meals from nothing. As for clothes, sometimes we bought ropa from la segunda. But they were always mended, clean, and neatly pressed.

Life in the projects was not easy. I met women in the same predicament. They were also Corn Mothers. We became an extended family. Our children played together. We shared a lot, and did without a lot. But we were full of life and struggle, values my children internalized and use to survive today.

The values that my mother instilled in me, and the skills that I learned at an early age, became my saving grace during my second marriage. I created a sense of independence for myself. The smell of frijoles filled my culinary space. I can still remember the wonderful feeling of waking up to the smell of a pot of frijoles. I’d make a batch of tortillas, sometimes as many as four dozen, the old-fashioned way, with fresh frijoles and an old bolillo that I used to roll out the tortillas. By 4 a.m. the burritos would ready for sale at my husband’s job. His co-workers, who must have been missing cultural nourishment, used to send orders home. My kitchen became my business. Yes, I was successful; but never arrogant, just a woman making sure my family survived.

Today, I sit and wonder what life has meant to me. I continue to pray to Santa Rita and La Virgen de Guadalupe, knowing that although family members struggle, they will survive, and God will take care of them. I have a retablo of Santa Rita that my daughter recently gave me. It’s near and dear to my heart. It reminds me that I should always have faith and trust in the goodness of God.

GLOSSARY table with 2 columns: Spanish term, English translation. Rows include: ancianos, azucena, bolillo, corrido(s), Corrido del Caballo Negro, cuando las flores, curandera(s), familia, (los) files, frijoles, (la) gran flor, La Rosa, (el) jardín de las flores, partera(s), (el) ranchito, retablo, ropa, (la) segunda, tierra sagrada, vaquero, La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Carrie’s flowers
BY DR. RAMÓN DEL CASTILLO
HER SON-IN-LAW

There’s Carrie surrounded by the many flowers in her life. To her left is a Bird of Paradise listening to stories of times she tilled the soil with years of toil carrying water for miles during dry seasons when the scorching sun beat down her back unwilling to provide shade to those suffering from the melancholia of the times. She’s reminded of the many times her tears also watered flowers for long hours during turbulent passageways cuando las flores were distant from each other; poisoned from insecticides. She remembers rainy seasons and the dozen reasons the many times she leaned over to pull weeds straightening up reeds meeting many needs of flowers lost in despair.

There’s the lily, the azucena, of los files with its perfume reminding Carrie about happiness that flowers bring in the springtime as they sing. There’s a beautiful red thistle protecting itself with its sharpened thorns that sting like horns whose center is really fragile.

There’s the girasol, a wild sun flower; ready at any given hour to stand tall providing Carrie shade from the scorching sun.

Monk hoods are here with heads bowed sometimes in respect, sometimes in shame asking forgiveness for those awful times when respect had been lost and pain was present.

Many young snap dragons are awake reminding Carrie that life in its never ending cycles reproduces itself.

Mums are here very quiet but ready to scream about unmet dreams melted in the sun. It’s time to pray in el jardín de las flores, giving thanks to la gran flor, La Rosa, a rose with its beautiful aura teaching familia at every given hour.



## TUCSON, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

# Raven Winston Mercado

Raven was born in Pennsylvania in 1970. Her parents built a house in the woods, where she and her two siblings grew up, surrounded by nature.

At 18, Raven traveled to India and Mexico, where she encountered the Huichol people. She admired the beauty and simplicity of their traditional lifestyle, and the vibrancy of their disappearing culture. These experiences inspired a path of self-education that included anthropology, botanical medicine, organic gardening, ethnobotany, and art. She moved to Arizona in 1991, where she has continued to seek knowledge and inspiration from traditional Native American teachers.

Raven plays the role of Corn Mother quite literally, by growing food for her family and community. With respect to the seeds borrowed from ancient peoples, she uses modern means to sustainably produce pure food. She enjoys sharing both the food and the knowledge of how to grow it, and encouraging others to do the same.

### PHILOSOPHY

I have always felt at home in nature. I believe that my early years of running barefoot through fields and forests have enabled me to feel an affinity for the natural world that gives me strength to this day. From a young age I was encouraged by my mother to find my own answers to life's persistent questions, a practice that I continue to apply. To me, nature is the physical manifestation of the divine. The natural world is perfectly balanced, something I aspire to in my own life.

Together with my husband, I have participated in the creation of many gardens, as well as two beautiful children, for which I am most grateful. Being a mother requires optimism, compassion, and lots of hard work.

We must teach our children to be caretakers of the earth and all the elements, especially the water, which is the source of all life. When we revere the elements as sacred, we are connected to the natural world in a meaningful way. Then we can learn from it and gain strength from it. When we are conscious of the effects of our actions, we can achieve sustainable abundance, a natural state of plenty where nothing is wasted and resources are shared fairly among all living things. The earth provides the gift of plants to sustain all creatures. Nurturing plants that provide food and medicine is a vital activity that leads us to a balanced and harmonious, healthy way of life.

### RAVEN'S

## Life Quote

"LOVE WHAT IS."





# A Close-Knit Family

BY RAVEN WINSTON MERCADO

My mother's name is Ann Hessler Winston. My grandmother's name was Dorothy Carpenter Joynes. She grew up in Delaware and had five children, including my mother. My mother spent part of her childhood in Delaware and part in California, where my grandmother lived for most of the time I was growing up. My parents both went to college in Pennsylvania, which is where they decided to settle and raise their children. I only saw my grandmother a few times while I was growing up.

The first time I remember seeing my grandmother was when she was on a trip to New York City. My mother and I went to see her there, and I remember being very impressed with her hotel's large, black doors and fancy wallpaper. Granny was a kind, intelligent, and graceful woman who was both fascinating and absolutely delightful.

My grandmother was an excellent knitter. She somehow found the time to knit sweaters for every member of our family, and each one was perfectly made. Her mother before her was also very skilled in the womanly arts of knitting, crochet, and embroidery. She created beautiful needlework pictures, some of which my mother still has in her home. As a child, my mother learned how to knit from my grandmother, and she later taught me, several times. I finally mastered it a few years back, which gives me more of a feeling of connection to my female ancestors.

Engaging in the same activity as my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother is like a thread that winds through each of us. As a young adult, my mother chose a lifestyle that was quite different from the one enjoyed by her parents. She turned

down invitations to formal teas, disenchanted with the superficiality they required. After college, she chose to start a family rather than a career, and she courageously dedicated herself to reinventing motherhood as part of a natural, holistic lifestyle. She was truly a pioneer in the areas of natural childbirth, health foods, and alternative education, embracing all things healthy and natural long before it was either fashionable or convenient to do so. One of her favorite sayings was "A little dirt never hurt anybody," a simple truism that reflects her faith in the healthy body's ability to fight off infection. She didn't take her family's health lightly. I remember going to the dairy with her to get the raw milk that she would use to make her own butter, a treat that would later be spread on delicious homemade bread.

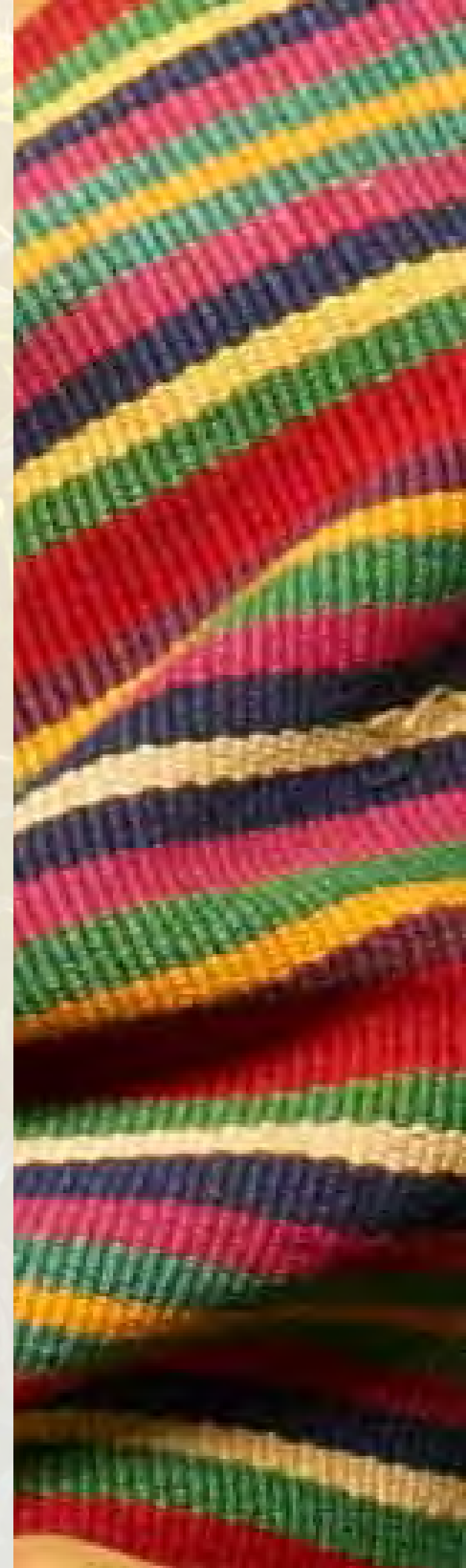
She also liked to sew, and she made a lot of clothes for us when we were small. My sister and I looked so cute in our matching jump suits. I find it interesting that regardless of how her ideals diverged from those of her mother, they ended up doing a lot of the same things. The setting will change, but the art of mothering, including the creation of simple, useful, and beautiful items, continues and connects women through the generations. Mom took it in stride when we grew older and finally refused to wear anything but regular clothes from the store, like everybody else. She understood and didn't take it personally. I still remember the last dress she ever made for me. I wore it proudly at a violin recital in sixth grade.

When my brother, sister, and I were school age, our mother spared nothing to make sure we received the best education possible. When the school she picked out for us was an hour's drive from our rural home,

she didn't hesitate to make the drive. She started volunteering at the school and eventually got hired as a teacher, which launched her into the profession she continues to practice to this day. Being a teacher is a natural fit for my mom. She has an infectious love of learning and an ability to relate to just about anyone that makes her not just a great teacher, but also a mentor and an inspiration to many.

A few years back I decided that I needed to know how to knit. I love the practicality of knitting, the way the stitches join a simple strand of yarn into soft, warm, beautiful creations. I asked my mother to teach me while we were on a trip to the beach in Mexico. I had learned as a child but needed to be taught once again, as the knowledge had slipped through my fingers. My first project was a simple washcloth, a small square. Patiently, my mother showed me the basic stitch. Repeatedly, I would make a tangle, drop a stitch, or otherwise get it all wrong. Mom would shake off the sand, pull out my mistakes, and restart the row correctly. It took longer than I thought it should have to finally get it right, but before we went home I was able to not only knit, but also to purl, and to switch between the two to make a variety of interesting patterns. My first washcloth had a hole or two from dropped stitches, but my mother received it graciously when I presented it to her as a gift, my first attempt at knitting.

My mother is an inspiration to me, and I have tried to emulate her in many ways. She has taught me to be independent, self-reliant, and resourceful, and to always hope for the best. I am grateful for her life and the life she gave to me.







## NIWOT, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010

# Judy Newland

Judy was born in Lake City, Iowa in the north central part of the state, where she peered out from the cornfields on the family farm into a wider world. She taught for the University of Colorado at Boulder as a lecturer, and ran the Cloth Conspiracy textile company. She served as a faculty associate and as director of the Museum of Anthropology at Arizona State University, until retiring in 2014. She worked in the museum field for over twelve years at a variety of university museums. She has taught many graduate seminars, including Exhibit Design and Development, Museums and Communities, Museums and Popular Culture, and Material Culture. Over the past decade, these classroom experiences have engaged and challenged students, while instilling in them a deeper understanding of world cultures through textiles.

Judy received advanced degrees from the University of Colorado (M.S. in Museum Studies/ Anthropology, 2000) and the University of Nebraska (M.A. Textile History, 2007). She is a practicing tapestry weaver, with archaeological textile fieldwork experience in Peru, and is experienced in indigo dye processes and cultural practices from around the world. She has also specialized in Southwestern style weaving.

### PHILOSOPHY

Textiles connect all cultures through time and space. The thread stretches back into time, and ahead of us into the future, linking the textile culture bearers—usually women. Cloth carries memories and history within the web to share with others, and it is my privilege to find ways to unite people by studying and sharing culture through textiles.

It begins for me by traveling the world, and my international experiences over the past ten years have completely reshaped the way I think about our global environment. The exhilarating experience of being thrown into the unpredictable whirlwind of a world market—be it the plaka, the souk, or the plaza—will change a person. And everywhere in these world markets, there are textiles, dye plants, and the stories and memories of women.

Much of my travel has focused on the cultural study of textiles, both ancient artifacts and contemporary cloth. I use textiles as interdisciplinary teaching tools in the classroom, and my global perspective continually inspires me to develop future courses that connect history, geography, and culture through the study of textiles. I hope this inspired enthusiasm will open my students' eyes to the multiplicity of cultures available to travelers, to them.

By passing on the techniques of creating cloth and sharing the stories of women through classes and exhibitions, I offer a bridge to understanding textiles and their place in our lives. Textiles aren't just beautiful objects or fashion plates, but woven histories that can promote understanding of culture, reveal bits of society, and unravel a continuing story through the structures, patterns, and colors in cloth.

### JUDY'S

## Life Quote

"PASSION—THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT WILL CATCH YOUR EYE, BUT ONLY A FEW WILL CATCH YOUR HEART . . . PURSUE THOSE."

— ANONYMOUS



# *From Loving Hands* BY JUDY NEWLAND

Born of corn on a farm in Iowa, that is my beginning. I often think of a photograph of a little girl standing at the edge of a cornfield, staring out at the larger world. And I have seen a portion of that world and traveled far from my first home. I have met many along the way who have influenced my love of cloth and creativity. My mother taught me to sew on the old treadle sewing machine when I was nine. My aunts and my maternal grandmother created quilts and clothing for their families, plain and fancy. They all planted seeds in my field of textile dreams, but one special woman caught me in her fiber web and held me fast.

Her name was Edith Marsh, and she was a mentor to many and generous to all. I was in my early twenties when I met her through my local weaving guild. I had taken a few weaving lessons and was exploring the many paths that weaving opens up, and one path led to Edith, who taught me how to spin and dye. She gave me fleece and loaned me her spindles until I could manage a yarn that held together, even though lumpy and uneven. Then she loaned me one of her spinning wheels until I could buy one of my own.

Edith taught me about fleeces, and how to recognize different types and qualities of sheep fleece. To be a spinner, she felt we all must start at the very

beginning with the sheep and learn the entire process, from shearing to final product. She gave me fleece from various breeds to try, along with a book about sheep breeds of the world. I learned how to clean a fleece without disturbing the lock formation, so that when you finally became an accomplished spinner, you won't need to card the wool, which is very time consuming, but can spin directly from the lock. Of course, I learned to card wool too, because carding was part of a spinner's tool kit.

Wool was just one of the fibers that flowed from her fingers. She loved spinning silk in different forms, including right off the cocoon. I can still picture the day we all gathered round her as she managed to get the single filament from a dozen cocoons meshed into one fiber for reeling. Silk reeling has been practiced for thousands of years in Asia, and she could do it too. The long history of yarn and cloth production stretched right to our doorstep.

Dyeing was Edith's special talent. She grew dye plants like madder in her garden and knew the places in the region to find special lichens. She crushed cochineal insects so we could see the red of history emerge before our eyes. She mastered the magic of indigo and passed it on. The natural world was her oyster, and she shared it all with us.

I think of Edith as a person with loving hands. Hands that created beautiful woven textiles and knitted sweaters made of colorful hand-dyed, hand-spun yarns. But from those loving hands also flowed a generosity of spirit and enthusiastic sharing with anyone who showed an interest in textiles. She still inspires me to pass on all that I have learned about weaving, spinning, dyeing, and textile history to others. This is how we honor women across cultures and throughout time, especially the unknown women who have passed on valuable knowledge of cloth making without any thought of reward or fame. We honor them by continuing to share.

I pass on what I know by being a mentor, teaching classes, and giving exhibitions. I spent years working in classrooms as my three sons grew. I always found that textiles were a perfect way to reach children, whether it was a first grade class studying basic needs like clothing and shelter, a third grade studying the Colonial period, or sixth graders studying the Industrial Revolution. Always, textiles could be used to engage, excite, and inspire.

My university students learn about cultures by exploring textile history and techniques. They learn to spin cotton on a tiny spindle, as Gandhi taught

an entire nation. With their hands, they begin to understand what this man accomplished. They learn the rug knots used to make Middle Eastern rugs and appreciate the time and skills required to create a textile masterpiece.

When organizing an exhibition of Navajo textiles, I thought about the makers who wove textiles for special occasions, to clothe their family, to trade, or sell. They retained their own cultural aesthetic while adopting ideas and visual motifs from the world around them. I thought about my Navajo friends and teachers and their gifts of sharing a part of their culture with me through dyeing and weaving. I can't speak for my Navajo sisters, but I can put their textiles on view, old and new, and hope that one more person will relate to their story.

I think of Edith's legacy and try to pass on some of what she knew, as well as her story. She influenced many with her humor and creativity. The best way to thank her is to keep sharing a love of textiles—to continue spinning the story within the thread—the story that flows from loving hands.



Cynthia was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on July 7, 1953. Her parents were young and energetic and spent a lot of their time celebrating their youth dancing in competitions on the boardwalks along the Jersey Shore, including the Bandstand in Atlantic City. Her grandmother was a seamstress from Scotland, and her grandfather came from Ireland and settled in Philadelphia. In 2018, after 23 years, Cynthia retired from her job as an art teacher at one of the best charter schools in Pueblo. She is currently writing and documenting the history of the murals of the Pueblo Levee Murals Project, which she has coordinated and has painted murals for the past 26 years. Cynthia has been an artist, teacher, mentor, and community supporter, using the arts as a vehicle to bring people together from all walks of life. She has spent most of her life following her passion for being creative and finding self-expression as a teacher, parent, leader, and learner.

CYNTHIA'S  
*Life Quote*

“WHEN CHALLENGES PRESENT THEMSELVES, CREATE, RATHER THAN JUST REACTING.” IN THE FACE OF OBSTACLES AND THE UNKNOWN IN MY PATH, MY GRANDMOTHER TAUGHT ME THAT IF YOU CAN ALWAYS WORK WITH WHAT YOU HAVE, YOU WILL GET WHAT YOU NEED.



*Cynthia Ramu*

PUEBLO, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019





## My Creative Life Mentor—

The most significant woman in my life was my grandmother Wanita, on my father's side. She took my mother in at seventeen, because my mother had a very hard life with her birth family. She was malnourished, lived in an unhealthy environment, and only had her Catholic school uniform to wear. My grandmother mentored her to be proud of herself and gave her the direction that helped her be a mother who loved and supported her family. She was a great role model for my mom, and a hard worker, with her own beauty shop business. She helped my mother get on her feet and treated her like her own daughter.

My parents married in their early twenties, and I was their first of five children. I was very close to my mother and grandmother, who both inspired me. My mother overcame the struggles of being impoverished. She evolved into a fine young woman, who broke the cycle she had grown up in. She played the radio each morning, dancing, singing, laughing, and joking with us. I rarely saw her unhappy, even when faced with conflicts or struggles (and there were many). Because she worked, she put me in charge of my siblings when I was eight years old. Each morning, I found a note on the kitchen table with all the directions: feed everyone breakfast, make lunch, get them to school and back, and start dinner.

Mom helped us enjoy our childhood and feel connected to the world. She was always hip to the latest fashions. She modeled new styles and had us dress the same. Our home was full of music: the top ten hits were the soundtrack of my childhood. She was the glue and guiding light that kept us all going. And she helped me learn to be responsible, organized, and motivated to be independent.

But it was my grandmother who became my mentor and creative life guide, who taught me to connect to my creative self. She lived in New Jersey, and I lived in Texas. But my sister and I spent every other summer as teens with my grandparents. I loved it. Their house overlooked a beautiful lake where my father had spent most of his childhood. We canoed, swam, played with friends, went to dances, and fished, which my grandmother taught me to do. She dug up worms and set up our hooks on those lazy summer afternoons. We also ice skated on the lake in winter.

Each evening, I sat with her as she knitted, quilted, and shared stories about her childhood, and where she always

## Wanita Urbach

BY CYNTHIA RAMU

found inspiration for her next project. Each morning, we sat in her enclosed glass porch with cups of tea. She shared the quote she had chosen for that day. She taught me to enjoy the peace of the morning, watching the birds, observing nature, and looking at the lake. To this day I find solitude on my porch with a cup of tea, listening to the birds—I live by a river, and this is my meditation with nature.

My grandmother always had grace and style and kept a project or two in the works. She made clothes for my grandfather and herself, and taught me at a young age to sew, knit, and quilt. This was useful, because in my teens I was short and small framed, and always had to alter or custom make my own clothes. I made most of my clothes and prom dresses from scratch.

I remember going with her to the mill outlet fabric stores, where I helped her choose color combinations and designs for new quilting patterns or a special outfit. My grandparents took many cruises to different countries, and she studied different types of hand sewing and quilting techniques from around the world. She was a master quilter, from a long line of quilters. There is even a museum in the cabin of my grandmother's great aunt Nancy, with many quilts from the early 1900s.

My grandmother Wanita had many layers to her life as a beautician, business owner, artist, quilter, gardener, ceramicist, and much more. My grandparents were Masons and were engaged members of the Order of the Eastern Star. They were active civic leaders. I have always made sure that no matter where I live, I get involved by working jobs at popular venues so I can get to know the community better. I work with restaurants and galleries, partner with artists and musicians, and volunteer on projects that need creative support. In Denver and Pueblo, I volunteered with youth groups that mentor teens, and helped non-profits by holding fundraisers. Sometimes I feel that my grandmother is walking beside me; she was always proud of my passion to be involved in the community. I have never been afraid to take on a challenge that can help others and myself learn and grow. I am a natural at promoting projects and getting the word out through media and word of mouth through the local grapevine.

When I moved to study art at the Colorado Institute of Art in Denver, I became friends with many artists and creative people. Soon, I became a theater producer in

Arvada, working with an amazing group of performers to produce the play Amadeus. I had never done anything like this, but I was ready for a new challenge, running a theater company. It was an opportunity to grow by making sure we had the best production, advertising, and media coverage. We used a very old theater in Old Town Arvada, with leaks in the ceiling. Often, we had to brush snow off our costumes before going on stage. One of our actresses became ill and I had to take her place, another growth experience.

Still, our production often ran like a dream. We sold out almost every show, extended the run, and won many awards. We did so well that this was the first time most of the actors had ever been paid. After that, I went on to produce for a handful of other theater companies.

A year later, I left Denver to focus on myself in a quieter pace. Just like my grandmother taught me, I wanted to stop and be with nature and myself, to get back in touch with my creative side. It was time to regroup and simplify my focus, to explore, discover, create, and inspire. I moved to Pueblo, where things were slower.

The quiet space along the river offered endless possibilities for artwork on the concrete levee wall. I spent many mornings and afternoons at the top of it, with Pikes Peak at my back and the rushing river below my feet. Here, I found my inspiration to be a painter on a very large scale. I became the coordinator of the Pueblo Levee Murals Project, with a mission to paint as much of the wall as possible, engaging painters and students around the state to help break the world record for the Largest Mural.

We broke that record in 1995. Our mural covered 178,200 square feet, and was eventually over three miles long. I learned to paint on the giant wall, 65 feet tall, at a 45-degree angle that overlooked the rushing Arkansas River below. One of my main challenges was to overcome my fear of heights, which took about a month. I invented my own strategies to keep from falling in the river. I have now painted over 30 murals on this wall and have taught hundreds of people to create their own murals on it.

I still walk to the river before I start each day, taking in the energy and peace. And I thank my grandmother for the courage and inspiration to find my path and live it each day.

### PHILOSOPHY

Explore, discover, create, and inspire. One of my oldest memories is when I was about three years old, when my parents moved to Spokane, Washington. We lived in a small secluded cabin at the edge of the woods. I noticed how the moonlight would travel across the floor of my bedroom every night, and how peaceful it made me feel. My sister and I shared a bunk bed. Often, I would crawl out of bed and set up a special place on the floor to sleep in the moonlight, absorbing its energy. Light is a major spirit in my life. I loved chasing fireflies and gathering them to be my friends for the night.

My philosophy has always been to follow what inspires me in nature and keep myself connected to the natural elements: air, earth, light, and water.

As an art teacher I have always tried to support my students' experience of finding self-expression, for which I've created a relaxing environment by keeping lights low, or even by having an outdoor classroom whenever I could. I love offering studies in nature for drawing, photography, painting, and poetry, and even working in the garden.

I also try to use the seven directions in my life and teaching to offer new perspectives on observing the world around us and within ourselves. The directions are above, within, and below us, along with the four compass directions. I want to live a 360-degrees of life, as much as I can, and to inspire others to come play along with me.



# Sara Ransom

## DURANGO, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Sara was born to Celtic (Welsh, Irish, English) parents in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1946. As a child, she performed with her father and his handmade puppets and marionettes. Her first solo performance was in sixth grade, and she continued through junior high school, as a “one-woman theater.”

After graduate school and traveling the world, she read a story she HAD to share. She rented a hall, put up posters, and began her professional storytelling career. While acting in “Hansel and Gretel,” Sara became the “other mother” to two young actors playing lost children. This loving bond continues today. (Amy and Lee are both over 35 years old now.) Sara earned a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology from Beloit (Wisconsin) college, including fieldwork in Taiwan. She has a Masters of Education in Expressive Therapies from Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sara lives with her husband in Durango, Colorado. She describes her career as “Storyteller” and “Keeper of the Myths,” because of her deep love of the ancient wisdom tales.

### PHILOSOPHY

As a young adult traveling the world on inner guidance and a shoestring, I wrote home—from an uninhabited island off Key West, from a northern California commune, from the foothills of the Himalayas—describing my wanderings as musical themes in the symphony of my life, strands in my life’s tapestry. Now, in my 60’s, I’m still creating musical themes and weaving colorful strands, but I can stand back and hear that symphony, see that tapestry. It’s a symphony of wholeness, inclusion, acceptance. It’s a tapestry of recognition and delight in the intricacies and differences of this mystery called Life.

As a storyteller, the myths, legends, and stories that move me, the histories I choose to enliven, the people I emulate, all illustrate those themes. Performing them, I feel privileged to have that wisdom pass through me, so I let the story do the talking. Afterward, I step aside and direct applause to the empty stage, where the spirit of the story took place. In my mid 20’s and early 30’s, I experimented with the very building blocks of life. In India, I read ancient scriptures, sat with very evolved beings, and took fierce vows of renunciation.

I gave up possessions (except a toothbrush, hairbrush, blanket—and bamboo flute!). I wore the traditional garb of a renunciate (sadhu, in Hindi) and walked—barefoot and penniless—vowing to ask for nothing, not food, not housing, not even for directions or destinations. I called it a “crash course on faith in God,” and so it was. The Presence that surrounded me as I walked was almost palpable, and though my body sometimes suffered from cold and hunger and pain, my soul was singing with Love.

So I was surprised when the walking ended. It took me awhile to understand that the essence of renunciation lies within, in the more challenging form of selfless service. I’m still working on that. To my delight, it includes singing and dancing.

### SARA’S

## Life Quote

“LET WHAT WE LOVE BE WHAT WE DO! THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF WAYS TO KNEEL AND KISS THE GROUND.”  
—RUMI





# Two Simple Questions

BY SARA RANSOM

Could it be that the person who affected the most permanent turning point in my life was my youthful seventh grade English teacher? It's not that she and I formed a deep bond that led to a lifelong friendship, nor even that she was my mentor privately outside of class. But she was a very inspiring, creative teacher who startled us into thinking beyond simply learning the basics of the English language.

She was probably only 26 at the time, full of fresh ideas, and eager to try them out. And, although it truly was irrelevant to our experience of her, she happened to be a black woman, in a subtly segregated society, teaching in a white school on the rich side of town. And she was beautiful. The year was 1958-9, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Of the many creative writing exercises that she assigned (and I recall many of them), the one that awakened me to myself came about in this way... We had all just piled into the classroom from the chaos of the hallways, and Miss Evans sat quietly at her desk, just watching us till we settled down. Only then did she stand up from her desk. She smiled that smile that we knew meant she was up to something good.

She walked over to her stool in front of our desks and draped herself languorously on it. We waited in silence, our attention riveted on her. I remember the sparkle in her eyes—this was going to be fun. In her soft, subtly Southern accent, she began: "Take out a sheet of paper, and pick up your pencils. I am going to pose two questions." And she waited in silence till we had done so and were once again absolutely focused on her.

She began:

"First: If you could be anyone, anywhere, at any time, who would you be? Second: If you could be anywhere, at any time, where would you be?"

I took those questions very seriously, to the depth of my heart, as if the answers I wrote would determine the course of my life. I trusted her that much. This exercise echoed one she had set before us earlier. In that one, she asked us to write a motto that would serve to guide us for the rest of our lives... Just a simple motto, not even a sentence. I thought long and hard about that, discussed it with my parents, disagreed with my mother's corrections, and stuck with my first choice. Because Miss Evans had taught us how cool it is to use alliteration in writing, I strove for alliteration in my motto: "To live, to love, to relieve." There it was. I foresaw for myself a life of service that doesn't preclude adventure.

But now to the task at hand. Miss Evans remained quietly on her stool and let us concentrate. I doubt I would have heard her if she HAD said something.

And so, to the first question, this seventh generation Unitarian child—raised with a strong social conscience but an as-yet-underdeveloped feminist awareness—wrote: "The wife of someone like Albert Schweitzer or Mahatma Gandhi." These two men were my heroes. I had written school book reports on them, studied them in church, and wondered how I could get to Lambaréné, where Schweitzer had worked, and how soon... I didn't yet know I could go on my own, without a husband.

To the second question, this seventh generation Unitarian child (product of a congregation which—though strongly compassionate in its teachings was also decidedly atheist—wrote: "Bethlehem. At the time of the birth of Jesus." The reason I gave was that I wanted to know if that really happened—if God really did take the form of a human being—if He really could... I mean, if there IS a God, then seeing Him as a human baby would prove it to me. And if it did happen, then I wanted to be in on the celebration.

I don't remember if we shared our answers with the class. If we did, I know that I was deeply absorbed in being sure I meant what I wrote, and wouldn't have been listening.

I must have meant them. All my traveling and adventures were predicated on that very search—if there IS a God, then I wanted to be in on the celebration. My upbringing, and my life's experiences, have been too universal to say that I have become a follower of any one religion. To me, the different faiths and practices are all radiantly true in their own way, and point to... what? For want of a better term, they point to a Universal Love that permeates all. It's all One.

A Note:

As a storyteller, I tell stories about some famous people, such as Sojourner Truth and Billy the Kid. But one of the poems Miss Evans had us read was about one of the forgotten type of people—Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man," about an old farmhand who felt he was a failure and returned as an old man to the farm where he had worked.

It has the beautiful lines "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in." Many years after I left Des Moines, I wrote this to Miss Evans:

Now, my husband and I are living this story.

You can call the man Silas, though that's not his name. He's been staying in a motor home (which we bought for him) in our front yard every summer for some ten years now. A cantankerous fellow, he's been burned out, or beat up and thrown out, from most everywhere else he's lived. We know how to get along with him... and so he helps around our property—lord knows we need the help. But of course, he does things the way he wants them done, and we could get really mad at him for that, but why bother. It wouldn't change him. We could send him packing, but he has nowhere else to go. His father and brother, his sons—no, he can't go there. They wouldn't take him in.

Each winter, all these years, he's gone to South Padre Island, Texas—to fish, to tool around in a boat, to keep warm... However, when he came back this spring—and he came back early—he said he'd never go there again. It's over, he said.

We knew what he meant. The massive heart attack that he barely survived convinced him of that. "You have no idea how lonely it is, to lie there on that gurney," he told us that first day back, "with a doctor and nurses staring down at you—and you dying before their eyes... They were nice and all, but I just wanted to be home."





## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

# Ella Maria Ray

Ella Maria Ray is a daughter of Denver's dust, rooted in African American southern tradition. She is an associate professor of African American Studies and cultural and visual anthropology, a student of the Jamaican Rastafarian movement, and a visionary creator of material culture. She creates a relationship between ethnographic data and visual art as a tool for understanding our human experience.

Ray earned a B.A. from Colorado College, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from Johns Hopkins University. She has studied figurative and conceptual ceramic sculpture independently with Arthur González and has taken sculpture classes from Jean Van Keuren, Arnold Zimmerman, and Barry Rose and Gayla Lemke.

Ray's ceramic sculpture and academic inquiry emerge from a commitment to acknowledge the ways in which continental and African diaspora share cultural commonalities, while simultaneously expressing cultural distinctions. As an anthropologist and visual artist, she strives to understand the complex vision that African diaspora are creating and contributing to humanity in the twenty-first century.

### PHILOSOPHY

The world consists of what we see and what we are incapable of seeing. I believe that as individuals, and collectively, we must have a rigorous understanding of our history and culture to embrace our identity. To do this, we must acknowledge our ancestors' timeless contribution. They are the ones who dwell with the Unseen, and who have left us a legacy that requires that we treat each other and the planet with authentic respect, compassion, and delight. If we take our stewardship seriously, the ancestors firmly hold our hand while we give birth to our true selves.

They ensure that we emerge from life's thorny thickets with our dignity intact. They compel us to explore and marvel at life's vast vistas. To truly benefit from our ancestral legacy, we must live committed to making a transformative contribution to humanity. More importantly, I believe, we must hear the ancestral voices and be able to read the encoded messages our ancestors send us through the creative process and products, the arts.

At a soul level, I have always felt that to be a whole person, I needed to merge my intellect and my creativity. To segregate the two neither honors all the sacrifices my ancestors have made, nor acknowledges the blessings that Mother Father God has generously bestowed on me. One of my deepest beliefs is that I must use my art to empower students in honing their intellect, to support the growth of a conscious citizenry, and to dismantle aesthetic illiteracy.

### ELLA'S

## Life Quote

DO YOUR BEST TO TREAT EVERYONE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT, BECAUSE WHETHER WE ARE AWARE OF IT OR NOT, WE ARE ALL MAGNIFICENT AND CONNECTED.



# *I Want You to Travel*

BY ELLA MARIA RAY

Louise Delores Foley Ray, my mother, was a courageous woman who had a deep passion for two things in life: being a nurse, and being my mother. After Mama achieved her goal of becoming a registered nurse, life guided to her to Pueblo, Colorado, and ultimately to Denver. Here, I grew up watching her move courageously as a social, cultural, and spiritual “faith walker” at the times when life’s burdens threatened to wear her down. Her deep commitment to mothering me from the inside out, and her devotion to Spirit, served as her beacon.

While my grandparents were still a young couple, they and my great grandparents had to abandon our family land in Mayersville, Mississippi and settle up north, in East Saint Louis, Illinois. There, my mother was born. She was the third oldest of twelve surviving children. Mama was the kind of person who never wanted children. She had watched her mother struggle with her father to raise twelve children. She wanted something else. She was hungry to travel.

Coming to Colorado meant an opportunity to teach nursing, practice her profession, and perhaps find a portal through which to see the world she was so eager to explore. When she met and married my father, she shifted her focus and nested in Denver. Although my parents lived and died in Colorado, and I was born and raised in Denver, they always thought of themselves as immigrants. Mama, in particular, had always called East Saint Louis her home. As a child, I remember Mama preparing every year for our exodus. She would find one of her best shoeboxes

and pack it full of our favorite foods so we would have meals while we traveled on the train that would take us back home. For me, Denver would not become a place I truly considered home until Mama had been an ancestor for five years.

My mother never wanted children, but when she gave birth to me, she devoted her life to the art and science of parenting. Beyond the music lessons and the ballet and African dance lessons, Mama demanded that I do my very best in school. When I needed help beyond the classroom, she found tutors. She knew I was bright even when I wasn’t so sure, and she did everything she could to ensure that I fulfilled my full potential. Mama was always tired from working hard to give me everything I needed, and most of what I wanted. In Langston Hughes’ poem “The Negro Mother” there is a line that reads “I was the seed of the coming free,” and for my mother I was just that. All her time and energy went into offering humanity a child whom she expected to empower and contribute in some way to our community. Beyond supporting Black people, Mama also insisted that I always recognize that everybody is a human being with a free will and an intellect. “Girl, treat everyone right,” she said.

On the day she died, I was braiding her hair. While cancer invaded and colonized her pancreas, seized her liver, and laid claim to other parts of her once-graceful and strong body, for forty-seven days Mama stood toe-to-toe with, and fought, her invader. As I divided her thick hair into sections, I shared my plans to

defer enrolling in Johns Hopkins University’s graduate school. Right before she went into the hospital we had received a letter from the Department of Anthropology offering me a scholarship and an opportunity to earn a graduate degree. Mama was filled with pride at this.

As I planted the comb in her hair so I could focus on one section at a time, I assured Mama that I would go to graduate school, but I intended to wait until she got better. I just knew that Spirit and my ancestors would send a miracle. If anyone could lick pancreatic cancer, mother could. I had seen her defy illnesses too many times in the past to expect anything different. Anyway, what did the doctors really know? While my fingers wove thick sections of hair into neat cornrows that gathered at the nape of her neck, I whispered in Mama’s ear, “Don’t worry. As soon as you get better and come home, I’ll go to graduate school. I’ve already talked to the head of the anthropology department about deferring for a year.”

As soon as the words left my lips, Mama pulled herself from her coma, snapped open her eyes, looked up, took a deep breath, and exhaled herself out of her body and into our ancestors’ arms. She would not tolerate any excuse that would keep me from completing my education. This was a woman who deeply believed that the only way that people of African ancestry would ever have true freedom in this country was through education. “Child, you better get

all you can from school while you can,” she’d say at those moments when the last thing I wanted to do was homework. “Too many people have made sacrifices for you.” Some times when she thought she was alone doing dishes, I’d hear her say “Lord, just let me get this child through college.”

Mama died two weeks before I graduated from Colorado College with honors in anthropology. My godmother, Jean Jackson Emery, had been in close dialogue with Mama before she died. When the graduation ceremony was over and we were back at her house, she gave me a package wrapped in a green ribbon. When I opened it, inside was a Samsonite duffel bag. “Your mother wanted you to have this. Before she died, she told me she wanted you to travel.”

Honestly, I am awash with gratitude to my mother when I reflect on how she made sacrifices so I could move through life with starch in my back and grace in my step. This woman held a vision for me to become a thriving and self-expressive person, no matter where life leads me or what challenges emerge.





# Alfiria Casaus (Alfie) Salazar

PUEBLO, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

Alfie Salazar was born in 1935 in Monte Vista, Colorado, but lived most of her childhood in the Salt Creek community in Pueblo. After leaving Pueblo Central High School, she later completed her GED. She drove a school bus, worked in a hospital dietary department, and was a Cub Scout den mother for many years. She received the Dr. Frist Humanitarian award from Parkview Medical Hospital in 1988, was named an outstanding woman of 1995 for Women's History month, and received an Up With Reading Community Award in 2000.

She has been a volunteer at the Pueblo City-County Library District since 1993 and a member of the Fray Angelico Chavez Chapter of the Genealogical Society of Hispanic America for almost 30 years, and has received many awards for her accomplishments and volunteer work. She also belongs to two genealogical groups in New Mexico.

Alfie and a neighbor founded the La Salle Road Ladies Club in 1964. Along with her late husband, Alfred, she started an annual Halloween Party for family, friends, and children in 1984, which is still ongoing. Alfie and Alfred were married for 61 years. They had three children—Larry (deceased), Andrew and Philip, seven grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. She describes herself as a people person and loves to hug. Alfie is still very active, and one of her paintings won placement at the Colorado State Fine Arts contest for 2018. She has published the books *Volando Como el Viento (Flying Like the Wind)*, and *Memories from the Salt Creek Neighborhood*.

## ALFIE'S

### Life Quote

DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU  
WOULD LIKE FOR THEM TO DO  
UNTO YOU.

## PHILOSOPHY

While growing up, we lived on a farm with my maternal grandparents. There were always a lot of people, and laughter as they shared stories while they butchered animals, plastered the house, or did other work together. It was a time when everyone helped each other.

I myself like to share love, hugs, stories, and anything else. I believe that everyone, good and bad, has something good to offer.

I was nine when we moved to Salt Creek, a poor barrio in Pueblo, Colorado. Being the oldest, I helped take care of my eleven siblings. This taught me responsibility, love, and patience.

I quit school in the twelfth grade, eloped, and got married. But I always wanted to be more than a mother and wife. I wanted to learn, to be something more than a homemaker. My husband encouraged me to do and try different things. I earned my GED, joined clubs, and learned crafts and art, but my passion was writing. Years later, I took a class in creative writing and my professor opened the door that I needed to fulfill my passion. Since then, I have written and published two books, several articles, and poems galore.

I believe that everyone has the ability to learn if they only take the time to do it, and that they should never be discouraged. You will run into people in life who are negative, but you should just rise above the negativity and believe in yourself and never give up. Everyone has something to offer. They have dreams they should follow and should always be try to be positive.



# How I Became a Writer

BY ALFIE SALAZAR

When I was a senior in high school, I applied for a job in the school office, because I wanted to be a secretary. My counselor told me it could never be. I didn't have the right clothes, and besides I was a "Mexican," so instead of encouraging me to become a secretary, she gave me a small job cleaning her house and another teacher's house.

I never told my parents what the counselor had said and kept it to myself, although they were happy she had given me a job. But her words affected me more than I realized, and I think that is why I quit school a few months before I was to graduate and got married shortly after—I thought that was my destiny.

Throughout the years, I always had a yearning to write. I would write stories, or write my thoughts on paper then tear them up. I continued to clean houses and babysit for several people until my boys were in the Cub Scouts, and I was their den mother, in the 1970s. It was then that I began writing skits for my sons to perform, which I did for nine years.

When my sons were older, I went to work in Parkview Hospital's dietary department. I wrote a skit for children about eating healthy food. I convinced my superintendent, my boss, and the head dietician to have my skits performed at schools, in which we would dress as fruits and vegetables. My superintendent played the guitar as we sang our skit to the tune of the song "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." After I retired, I still wanted to write. In 1996 I saw an article in the newspaper calling for grandparents to register at Pueblo Community College to tell their stories. I was hesitant and believed I couldn't compete with college graduates, because I had not graduated from high school. I didn't think I had good vocabulary.

I finally decided to try it, because night classes were available, and my husband encouraged me to do it. I was really scared and nervous. At the first class, the professor, Betsy Morgan, made introductions and told us the class expectations. I started to feel better, because there were other grandparents my age there.

Our first assignment was to write our thoughts on paper for a few minutes without raising our pencils and just concentrate on what we were writing about. When we were done, each person had to read what they wrote. It was amazing to listen to what some of the students had written.

# (with Help from Betsy Morgan)

When it was my turn, I was shocked at what I had written. As I was reading, I burst out crying, because I had written all my frustrations with what my counselor had told me many years ago. I hadn't realized that for over forty years I had carried that resentment, and it still really hurt. I realized how mad I was at myself that instead of proving my counselor wrong, I just took her word for it that I could never become a secretary.

I apologized to the class and teacher for my outburst. Afterward, Betsy (as she chose to be called) told me she was proud of me for showing emotions to the rest of the class, which would actually help them to write from their hearts. She told me that I didn't have to be a genius or use big words, and that I could write in Spanglish if I wanted to, just like the best Chicano author, Rudolfo Anaya, did.

Betsy not only believed in me, but encouraged me in many ways. I learned so much from her and my classmates in those few weeks, I felt fortunate. Although I couldn't continue taking the classes, I continued writing. In 2003, I joined a poetry group called Las Compañeras (The Companions), and my dear colleagues encouraged me more.

I started writing poetry and wrote a poem I called "Shattered Dreams," about my high school counselor and the experience that almost shattered my life. The group continued to encourage me and I felt very comfortable writing poetry, although I also started

writing short stories. After a while, I had a big enough collection of poems and stories to publish a book, which I did in 2007. I called it *Volando Como el Viento* (*Flying Like the Wind*). I even had my son design the cover. I have sold over 500 copies, and it is almost out of print. My second book, *Memories of the Salt Creek Neighborhood*, about the neighborhood where I grew up, is scheduled to be published in 2019.

All this would not have happened without the encouragement of Betsy Morgan. She was one of the greatest influences in my life and gave me back my self-worth, which had been taken away from me as a young girl. She didn't care what nationality I was, or if I used fancy words; she helped me believe in myself and inspired me to write. Never in my life would I have thought I would have two published books.

Of course, I had other women in my life as I was growing up who taught me values and the importance of hard work, and about life in general. But I feel that I always did what was expected of me, such as marry, raise a family, enjoy my grandchildren, and live a respectable life. I love those women who taught me cooking, sewing, ways with herbal medicines, religion, and other things. But it was Betsy Morgan who made me feel that I could have dreams and achieve them. She inspired me to be more than ordinary, and to heal the hurt I had in my heart for so many years. Thank you, Betsy!



# Lisa Saldaña

DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

Lisa Saldaña was born in Seattle to a family with roots in Colorado and New Mexico. She grew up on the North side of Denver, and in Southern California. After completing sixth grade, Lisa dropped out of school. At age twenty, she returned to complete her GED. Later, she earned her B.A. degree in Psychology with Emphasis on Parent Education from Loretto Heights College, and her M.A. degree in Nonprofit Management from Regis University.

For over forty years, Lisa has enjoyed working bilingually in Denver with families in education and health. Currently, she works independently as a parent educator, doula, certified Neurosculpting® facilitator, and as a counselor offering consejos (advice) for spiritual growth, grief and loss, and for enhancing family relationships. Additionally, she works with Indigenous Collaboration, Inc. helping Native/Indian communities with the facilitation of consensus building. She is also involved in the curriculum development for the prevention and healing of early childhood sexual abuse in Native/Indian communities.

LISA'S

## Life Quote

TOO OFTEN WE UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A TOUCH, A SMILE, A KIND WORD, A LISTENING EAR, AN HONEST COMPLIMENT, OR THE SMALLEST ACT OF CARING, ALL OF WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TURN A LIFE AROUND.

CON DEMASIADA FRECUENCIA SUBESTIMAMOS EL PODER DE UN TOQUE, UNA SONRISA, UNA PALABRA AMABLE, UN OÍDO ATENTO, UN CUMPLIDO HONESTO, O EL ACTO MÁS PEQUEÑO DE CARÍÑO, TODOS LOS CUALES TIENEN EL POTENCIAL PARA CAMBIAR UNA VIDA.

— LEO BUSCAGLIA

## PHILOSOPHY

I believe everyone is capable of healing themselves emotionally. During my years as a counselor, I discovered that I am not the healer, I am only a guide. People often begin the process of healing by seeking help outside themselves, but what they are really seeking is guidance to heal themselves from within. Although I am there to listen and to offer kindness, empathy, suggestions, and encouragement, the real healing work is done when my clients go out and take often-difficult actions toward making a positive change in their lives, whether starting a difficult conversation with someone who has hurt them, or pausing during a moment of frustration to take a deep breath before reacting. They are the ones who do the real work!

In order for someone to heal, their heart must be open to the process. Often, the first goal is to work on accepting and taking responsibility, by allowing the heart to open. To guide another person through healing, the guide must have their heart full of love, with the intention to transmit that love, either silently or in their words and actions. Healing is a process that everyone is entitled to. No matter what crime someone may have committed, they still deserve the opportunity to heal. Beneath their pain and anger lies a broken heart. The mere act of guiding someone through their healing process is an act of love.





# *My Mother Luciana,*

BY LISA SALDAÑA

In the heart of Southern and Central Mexico some 7,000 years ago, an ancient grass known as teosinte (the predecessor to maize, or corn) was grown. Eventually, its cultivation would spread through all of North, South, and Central America. This grain changed the course of history for many indigenous people. Numerous stories, legends, and myths about corn women and maidens are recounted symbolically, representing the sacrifice and toil it took to sustain a people. In thinking about my own Corn Mother, my mother Luciana Nuñez, I am reminded of my own tumultuous beginnings and my mother's struggles.

In a perfect world, all children are born into loving, nurturing homes, where they thrive in an environment free of strife. They live in a place where food, clean water, education, medical care, and the simplest of needs are abundant. They grow up with compassion, kindness, respect, and security.

But the world is not perfect. All over the world, children are born into circumstances where their very existence is struggle. But within this struggle, there are those who understand the monumental effort it takes to overcome adversity—those who, despite the odds, can and do prevail.

My mother, Luciana, was born in 1938 in Raton, New Mexico. Picking onions and sugar beets since the age of 5, she had known many years of back-breaking work by the time I was born in 1956. At 18, she left her family behind in Colorado and New Mexico to follow her boyfriend to Washington state in hopes of having found true love. She soon discovered she was pregnant with me, but unfortunately, she didn't find the love she was hoping for.

I never knew who my father was; I just knew that life was very difficult for my mother. When I was about 6 months old, we moved back to Colorado and lived near the railroad tracks in Brighton. A few years later, my mother met someone new and we moved to a farm together.

My memories there are traumatic. I recall being stung by several bees, catching my arm in a wringer washing machine, watching my rooster get shot, being called names and yelled at by my mother's soon-to-be husband, and visiting my mother's alcoholic family. The world was a confusing place, for both my mother and me.

After my sister Rose was born in 1962, my mother suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. My stepfather was given custody of my sister and me and moved us to California. He spent the next five years moving us from one city to another to keep my mother from finding us. I can only imagine her anguish as she searched in vain.

At seven years old, I took care of my baby sister as a mother would. Since we were often left alone for days, I cooked, cleaned, ironed, and changed diapers. My life was filled with loneliness and apprehension. We did not have the privilege to know the nurturing care of a mother's love during this time. We didn't get to enjoy toys, books, pets, new clothes, or shoes that fit, and rarely had outside contact with others.

# *My Corn Mother*

When I was in fifth grade, a young teacher, Miss Gustafson, wrote me a letter trying to offer comfort. She was probably aware that something was wrong at home due to our shabby clothes and appearance. I was so embarrassed that I tore the letter into small pieces in front of her. Shortly afterward, I ran away from home and dropped out of school. Eventually, I was reunited with my mother in Colorado but ended up moving to Mexico and marrying at 13 years old. I returned to the states after six months, and shortly after, separated from my husband. That marriage lasted only a year, but I quickly married again and gave birth to my first son, Joe, at age 16.

At age 19, I became a widow, and this experience prompted me to get in touch with my sister Rose. I had promised I would go back for her after I ran away, and she never held it against me that it took nine years. When I was 22, she was having her first baby, and I was there to support her during her labor. This was the beginning of my journey to offer comfort and hope to other women.

Eventually, I earned a B.A. and M.A. degree. I married Rick, my husband of 37 years. We adopted two children from Mexico and then had four others. Our home has been filled with love, laughter, art, and music. We open our hearts and home to those who are in need, and we support each other during stressful times with compassion and commitment—things my mother did not have.

My mother's struggle was my struggle. Because of this, I have the capacity to understand what others face. Thus, the child who knew the harshness of life became the woman who can offer consejos to others who know the sting of life; the 7-year-old who cooked, cleaned, and ironed to care for her baby sister became the woman who cares for seven of her own children; the child who turned away the kindness of a well-meaning teacher can empathize with those who cannot engage readily; the girl who once slept in a phone booth became the woman who takes in those in need of shelter; the sister who helped with the birth of her nephew would later help hundreds of women bring their children into the world; the mother who grieved the loss of her firstborn can console others who have lost their children.

It was from the depths of despair that I was formed. My mother gave me life, and her ability to hold on to what little hope she had at times was a feat. Like the sparse kernels of the earliest form of maize, I was transformed by struggle. My mother's legacies to this world are my dear sister Rose, myself, and our children. We are the new seeds of grains that she planted. Even if she was not able to completely nurture us, we have thrived. The hardships we endured have made us resilient and strong.

It is my hope that by reading this story, others will be encouraged and motivated to honor their mothers' struggles and the sacrifices that were made for them—no matter how small.



# Cherie Karo Schwartz

## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Cherie is Jewish, from a Polish, Russian, Hungarian, English, Spanish, and Israeli background. She is likely a descendant of the illustrious Rabbi Yosef Karo, who was born in Spain in 1488 and exiled in 1492 in the Inquisition, went to Greece, and later settled in Israel, where his synagogue is still in use. Rabbi Karo said that he had an angel who sat on his shoulder and whispered stories to him. And he was the author of the Shulchan Arukh, an authoritative work on Jewish law that is still consulted today. Although Cherie was born in Miami, her family has had roots in Colorado since 1919. She was married to Larry Schwartz for 36 beautiful, wondrous years until his passing in 2015.

### CHERIE'S

## Life Quote

"OUR JOB IS TO MAKE THE OLD  
NEW AND THE NEW HOLY."

— RABBI ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK,  
FIRST ASHKENAZI CHIEF RABBI  
OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

This quote has been an essential part of my life for decades, since I first read it. Treasuring each moment for what it offers and opens to us, and bringing it forward in a sacred way... this is the essence of who and what we can be at our best. In all of my Storytelling, teaching, writing, and life, I try to keep this forever before me to remember. As a Storyteller, I take what is on the page and lift it up in a new way each time that I tell the story. In my teaching, every time is a new experience of even the same basic material because the students are new, and I have evolved, too. Remembering that the stories are holy—each one of them from throughout the world and all time—is essential. Being open of heart, mind and spirit allows me to enter each experience with new eyes and gratitude. I am thankful for each story that has come to me, and each person I share the stories with is a blessing.

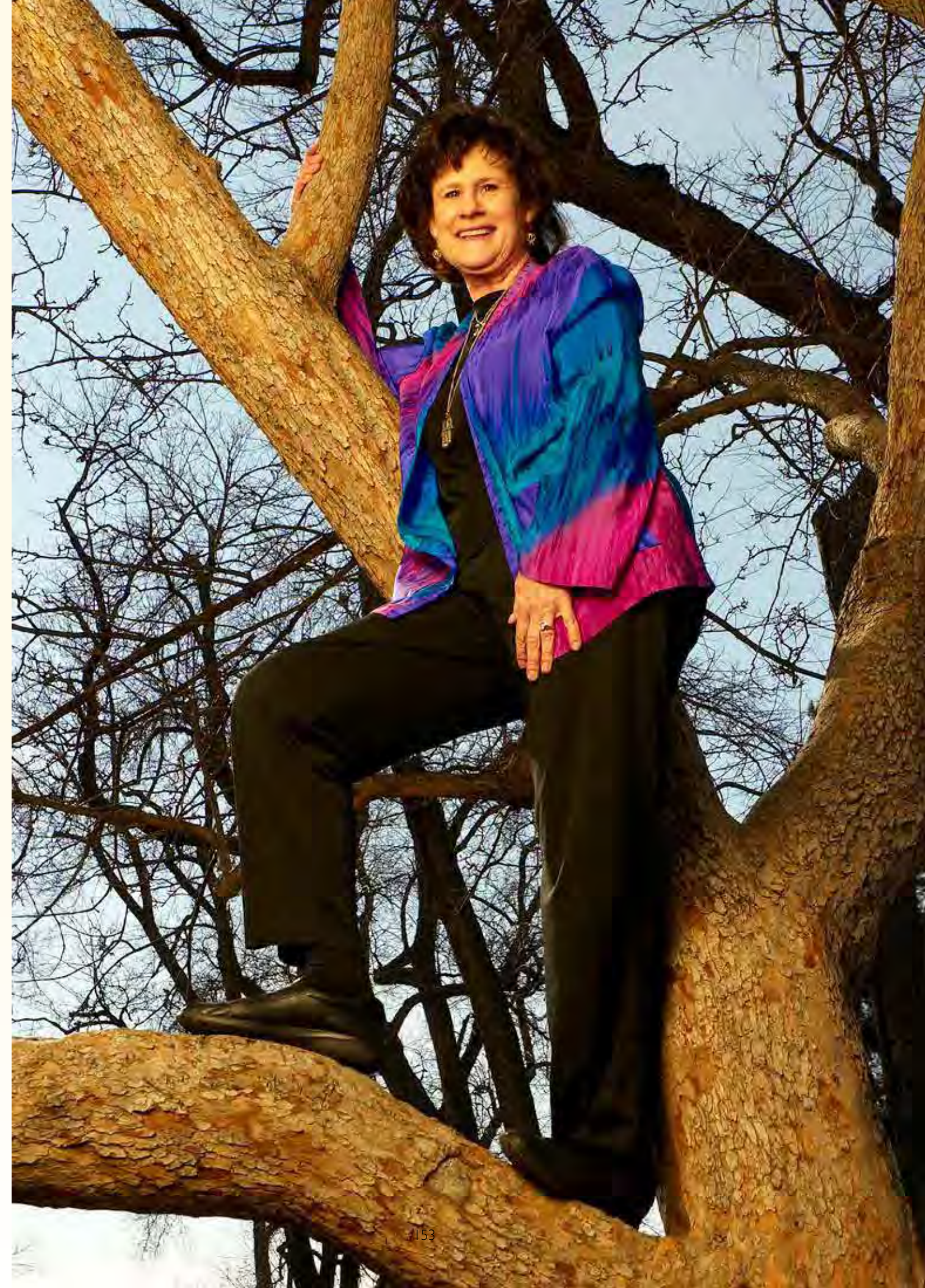
### PHILOSOPHY

Our stories are the mirror and memory of who we are, individually and collectively. Sharing stories is the highest form of connection. By honoring stories, we create peace. If you know someone's story, how can there be hate? All life is sacred; our holy task is to nurture, soothe, protect, repair, and enlighten the world.

I have a passion to be, experience, and live in a way that can help repair it, and me. When sharing a story, I feel the echoes of all who have told it before. When hearing a story (formally, talking, or overhearing), I feel the blessing of its spirit reverberating and echoing within. I can continue its life by taking it into my heart and letting it rest with me awhile. Perhaps it may find new life in the retelling of another tale. Someone else may need to hear an echo of it. Though this may not always be possible, it is a worthy and treasured vision.

I pray for shalom ("peace") and shalym ("coming full circle, wholeness") among all. As a dear friend says, "May there be shalom in the heart, shalom in the home, shalom in the world." We must remember the power of silence, stillness, hearing our own heartbeats, and finding a point of peace and balance. From that still place, may we remember we are humans, created in God's image, as the Torah teaches. From there, may we listen deeply and hear each other's stories: joy, pain, connectedness, the diversity of life; and find peace in ourselves and our collective selves.

May we share tears of laughter and loss with equal understanding. I am poetic, given to metaphor and story. I am one who has insight and knowing, an ability to bring together ideas and people. I am empathetic and sense what is happening beneath the surface of situation. I help weave and interweave levels of understanding, and I love creativity and imagination, wit, and harmony.







# The Story of the Tree

BY CHERIE KARO SCHWARTZ

My Mom, Dorothy Olesh Karo, known as Dotty, was a life-loving, creative, giving, kind, strong, vulnerable, loving, forever-young elder in my life, who created and sewed and cooked and enjoyed life to the fullest, and who saw the good. She was a constant source of support and strength for me. Through her, and her personal memory of climbing high in trees, I continue to learn the power of my own roots, trunk, and branches.

There is a story I tell that continues to be a touch point of heart for me on many levels. It is of women in the two generations before me. My Mom grew up in Denver, in a quiet and traditional neighborhood. Mom was the middle of three children, and was neither really quiet nor traditional! And she loved to climb. In fact, she says she may have been the first Jewish girl in Denver to wear blue jeans: shocking! She spent her free time in her back yard, climbing the rain gutters onto the roof of the garage, up to the roof of the beige brick duplex where she lived, jumping from rooftop to rooftop. My maternal grandmother of blessed memory, Rae Olesh, had an apple tree in the back yard, which Mom especially loved to climb. From high in the branches, Mom was queen of all she surveyed. What strength to climb so high; what courage to climb as a girl in the 1930s!

My tiny Bubbeh (grandmother) was strong in her own way, too, and yet she was a proper English lady. What she must have thought of her younger daughter! She would go out into the back yard, look at Mom high up in the branches and cry out, "It is a shanda! (Yiddish for embarrassment), a shame for the neighbors! You are a monkey, and someday you will grow up and get married and have children, and they will be monkeys!"

Time and time passed. My mom did not give up her perch high in the trees, with its far vision. And she did not break her neck falling. She continued to grow and thrive, and did indeed grow up, and she did have children: me and then my sister Donna two and a half years later.

Donna started climbing on the swing set before her first birthday. I watched and learned from her. Before long, we had our sights set on the trees. We had a beautiful, big, strong, wide-branched Live Oak tree in our back yard. There was a large trunk, a first branch starting around five feet off the ground, then a whole display of magnificent branches going off in several directions, filled with possibilities for play.

Donna and I discovered those sheltering branches. We each found our own space on different ones. We didn't have much in common. Donna was far more athletic, and I was,

and am, the poet and dreamer. Yet, in the tree, even with our own far-apart branches, we found common ground high in the air.

We practically lived in that tree. My place was in the highest part, up above the telephone wires. My back was supported by a branch beneath my neck, and my legs were cradled by the branch coming around below. The rest of me hung perfectly balanced in thin air. I remember falling asleep in the dappled sunshine that crept between the branches and the symbiotic Spanish moss, perfectly content. This was my safe place, my haven, my home. I could look out and embrace my world from above, hidden in the branches, swaying in the breeze.

Occasionally, Mom would come into our sweeping back yard and see us resting and playing high in our tree. We could see her far below us, from our tall perches. She would stand and gaze up, lost in thought. Most times, she would just look up and then go back inside, or gently remind us about dinner or darkness of night coming. But, once, she looked at us as her mother had looked at her, and she called out, "You... You are my daughters, and you can be anything that you want!"

Mom knew how much we loved our tree, and she knew just what to add to our abode.

She had us put a rope around a high strong branch, and then she attached a big silver bucket to one end. That way, she could send up nourishing loving sustenance to us! There was chocolate milk in a cowboy-shaped plastic pitcher; peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and homemade cookies, delicious love sent from her on the ground to us in the air. We stayed in the trees for hours and hours and hours, dreaming away.

One fine autumn afternoon, as we rested in our high home, we saw Mom looking up at us wistfully from the ground, shading her eyes from the dappled sunlight. She didn't say anything, but her look spoke the story. We two sisters, so different from each other and yet both our mother's daughters, looked at each other in understanding. Mom was the one who had climbed the branches before us, and now she felt her age, earthbound. We came down from our high perches to stand beside her. Then, with all of us laughing, and with our "tush pushes" to help her, Mom struggled onto the lowest branch, which held her strongly. She held on tightly, smiling, giddy with the height. She had helped us climb high, and now she knew: she could still climb, too. From her place in the tree's secure hold, surveying our world with us, yet lost in memory, Mom and we smiled in remembrance, breathing deeply with the tree.





Barbara was raised in New Orleans in a well-educated family, amid social unrest, segregation, and the poverty of other black families. Following her family's religious convictions and civil rights commitment, she became an activist early on. She has a B.A. from the University of Wyoming and an M.Ed. in Education and Energy Administration from Antioch College.

She has a burning desire to help those who are voiceless. She worked for the city of Aurora, Colorado for twenty-five years and was the Chief of Community Relations. Here she advocated for and supported residents by providing access to services, information, resources, and scholarship aid. She also planned events celebrating Aurora's diverse community and provided cultural awareness training to city employees and residents.

Barbara founded and directed Aurora's first non-profit performing arts organization, Grand Design, Inc., and is the choir director of its multi-cultural chorale. She and her husband Gaurdie have been married over forty years and have two grown children, both of whom received a Ph.D.

## AURORA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

*Barbara  
Shannon-  
Bannister*





## PHILOSOPHY

Growing up in the South, my early education was substandard, because of segregation. My mother was a teacher and my father was a businessman. They knew the importance of reading, and of following current events. We had opportunities that others did not. We had a comfort zone materially, and a duty to give back. This lesson has stayed with me all my life. I have been highly favored by the Lord. He has given me much, and He requires much. All I have comes from Him.

I have had a blessed life. Each day is full of expectation, especially because I can be an advocate and resource for those in need. My husband and I are blessed to have two accomplished, successful, beautiful children, who reflect our passion for life.

I've seen people suffer. I've been blessed with the ability to alleviate some of it. My driving purpose is to make a difference. I want to help those who can't help themselves or don't know how to get help. I'm passionate about discrimination. I know what it's like to be treated as if you don't matter because of your skin color or culture. I've been given great energy. I rarely say "no" to those in need, which sometimes stretches me.... But God always provides and sustains me.

My grandmother used to recite a poem to my younger sister and me, about a little girl getting into a snuff box. The lesson was, "Don't touch things that aren't yours without permission." It was a great story, told by a loving, caring woman who I admire to this day.

A turning point in my life was my mentors at the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament school, especially Sr. Marie Cecelia. She loved me and encouraged me to try choir directing for our glee club. I've directed choirs and music groups all my life. I believe my music has helped shape my attitude and altitude. My light shines through every note and every chord.

# My Grandmother

My maternal grandmother was Sarah Beechman Perry, born in 1879 in Gramercy, Louisiana, one of five children. The Emancipation Proclamation had occurred in 1863, so my grandmother's mother and father had been slaves most of their adult life.

My grandmother, though a freeman, still grew up on the plantation, as it was the only life her parents had known. When I was a little girl growing up in New Orleans, Grandmother told me and my sisters about Ma Bell (her mother) and how they all worked so hard for Massa, cutting wood, picking cotton, and washing clothes. She had only gone to grade school because she was needed to help with chores. I remember that as she told these stories, there was never any bitterness in her voice. It was just the way things were back then, she always told us.

My grandmother was very religious and was known around New Orleans as a healer. Folks came from all around to have her lay hands on them. They all called her "Aunt Sarah." I remember her using Irish potatoes to cure a fever, and believe it or not, a few drops of turpentine on a sugar cube to cut a cold.

My best memory of my grandmother was when I was about 11. My sister, who was five years younger, and I always went to visit her on the weekends. On the drive over, my father always stopped and bought fresh, hot donuts. I can still taste the warm, sweet stickiness and see myself and my sister sitting on grandmother's porch, eating.

Grandmother was always working, ironing clothes, cooking, gathering eggs. I never saw her sit around doing nothing. When you grow up on a plantation and your life is work from sunup until past sundown, things are different. Your time is precious, and the free time you have is even more valuable. If you can, imagine what it would be like to grow up and not be able to watch TV, read a book, or go to a movie when you felt like it. When grandmother was a girl, her time was strictly regimented. She had little time to herself for anything except work.

BY BARBARA SHANNON-BANNISTER

Going to church was a pleasure, and I think it is why she was so devoted to God and doing God's work, because she knew how valuable every moment of a day was. She was a gentle, kind woman. I never heard her raise her voice or say anything unkind. Watching her doing chores was almost like praying, because she did it so peacefully. It was comforting to know she had everything under control and did it with great care and cheer.

On Saturday nights we would choose a chicken from the yard (even in the city of New Orleans, folks kept chickens) and butcher it for dinner. I know this sounds unusual to most folks today, but I am actually grateful that grandma made us think about where our food came from. We all realized that so we could eat meat or chickens, some animal had to give up its life. This is a lesson I will never forget! I also learned from my grandma that putting vegetables and greens on the table was hard work. Everything we ate had to be butchered, grown or harvested—so eating was hard work!

When we sat down for our Saturday meal of stewed chicken, bread pudding, and greens, it was delicious. My mouth still waters to think about the feast my grandma made. Funny thing is, I never knew my grandma was not a rich woman. To me and to my family, her food was food fit for kings and queens. And that is just what she made us feel like. We were blessed by the Lord to be able to partake of wonderful meals with our family. The two most memorable dishes she cooked were her sweet potatoes and corn bread. The sweet potatoes were baked whole in grandmother's coal stove by putting them in the ashes. When they were done, we peeled them like apples and ate them whole, yum yum!

For a special treat we would get glasses of buttermilk, rich and thick and oh sooo good, and pour a bit over my grandma's secret corn bread recipe. This is what heaven tasted like, I was sure!

My grandmother used to recite a little poem to us when we visited. It was in an odd, archaic language (Old English), but my sister and I begged for it every time. It was about a little girl who was told over and over not to touch other people's things, out of respect. She didn't listen, and one day, she got into her grandmother's snuff box. The result was disastrous—we all know that snuff up your nose and in your eyes is not a pleasant experience. We laughed when we heard this poem, but it was actually a lesson about God's love for us. Sometimes we have to let go of our ego and have faith. We have to let go of our own desire and follow a higher path. It is about being humble and walking with the Lord.

When my grandmother was on her dying bed, I was a grown woman living with my husband and children in Wyoming. I received a call from my auntie. She said, "Mama said to come home now, and put some action into it." It was Thanksgiving time, and I got on the plane and went home to be with her. I did not cry or panic. I remember thinking my grandma needed me to be strong and to make it home to see her before she went home to the Lord. This soft spoken-woman who never raised her voice in anger had lived her whole life in glory to God. I learned so much about life from her. Among the gifts she bestowed on me are everlasting, faith, love, compassion, devotion, and thankfulness. I am confident that if I live as good life as she did, I will see her again one day.

BARBARA'S

## Life Quote

FROM EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN GIVEN MUCH, MUCH WILL BE DEMANDED; AND FROM THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH MUCH, MUCH MORE WILL BE ASKED.  
— LUKE 12:48



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue poncho with yellow and white circular patterns and a red beaded necklace, holds a large feathered staff in her right hand. She is standing in a grassy field with a rocky mountain in the background. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Metropolitan State University Center  
for Visual Art, Denver, Colorado, on September 20, 2012

*Christina  
Maxine Sigala*





I was born in Denver, Colorado on August 13, 1953 to my parents, Theresa and Max Sigala, and grew up at 7th and Water Street in Denver, which is now home to Ocean Journey, near Metropolitan State University. My lineage is Mexicana and Native American. I have two other sisters, Gloria Sigala and Anita Martinez, and two brothers, Max Sigala and Charlie Borrego. I have two sons that I am proud of, Davi Maximilliano Sigala and Jevon Santiago Francisco Vargas, who have given me three grandchildren: Aysia Marie Flowering Robe Sigala, Davi Peaceful Hawk Sigala, and Rhian Jae Shining Morning Star Vargas. My grandchildren's mothers are very important and respected. I have completed two master's degrees, one in religion and the other in social work. She is currently studying for a Doctorate of Education (Ed.D) in Leadership for Educational Equity - Latin@ Learners and Communities Concentration at the University of Colorado, Denver. I have worked on the Auraria campus at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU) as a visiting professor, student academic advisor, and as Interim Associate Director of Women's Studies and Services since 2002.

## CHRISTINA'S

### Life Quote

"LOOK AT YOUR WOMEN. THEY ARE STRONG, YOU CAN FEEL IT. THEY ARE ROCKS WHICH WE REALLY BUILD."  
—DOLORES HUERTA, CHICANA CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

## PHILOSOPHY

My life philosophy is simple, yet complex; live life to its fullest every day, with respect to self and to everyone on our path, and be grateful for what Tunkashila (Great Grandfather Spirit) gave us today, while understanding fully that we are not promised tonight. I follow the Lakota philosophy of Mitakuye Oyasmin, which means "We Are All Related," or "All My Relations." Lakotas believe that everything and everyone has a soul and spirit. I walk on the Red Road, which means giving respect to everything and everyone without judgment. Be kind, and be a warrior when you need to. I humbly ask Tunkashila and Tonantzin for health, happiness, and healing to those that need it.

I walk and live in a peaceful and positive way, and welcome life challenges and turn them into learning opportunities, both for personal and professional growth. The best gift that Tunkashila (Great Grandfather Spirit) and Tonantzin (Our Lady of Guadalupe) have allowed me is to be a Grandma. Part of this work of being a Grandma is helping to prepare our children and tiyospaye (Lakota - extended family) for the next seven generations. At this most sacred time in my life, I am blessed to be a Sundancer, and have been called a Curandera (Herbal healer), someone who helps people in a good way, with God's help. I call myself a Helper to the people and humbly strive to co-create healing environments.

My teaching philosophy is student centered, focusing on co-creating learning experiences that are productive and positive. I welcome the life experiences of all students and value their individual and unique perspectives.

## CHRISTINA'S STORY

My mother, Theresa Rodriguez-Sigala, was the most important woman in my life. Understanding how difficult it is to be an indigenous woman in a western world is complex and challenging. Walking both with her ethnic culture and with western culture and religion is a life-long experience that I saw my mom try to do, to the best of her ability.

My mother was a single mom for all of my life, as my father passed to the spirit world when I was 7 years old. In those days, she would not allow us to speak Spanish, because the Denver Public Schools would not allow children to speak Spanish. How times have changed, since the norm today has become to have dual-language (Spanish) K-12 schools. Not allowing Mexican people to speak Spanish was a part of the Americanization process of this country. My elementary school principal, and my teacher, Mrs. Humphrey, would say "You Mexicans cannot speak Spanish, only English." I did not understand racism, but I felt hurt, and I felt shame for speaking Spanish a child. I had picked up a little Spanish, but my mom did not speak Spanish to us, to protect us. She said that was so we could learn proper English without an accent. My mom wanted us to get a "good education." My mother demonstrated respect and kindness to all people, regardless of the color of their skin; she was a visionary spiritual leader.

Ever since I can remember, I have always thought creatively about what ideas resemble those of a visionary leader, thinker, and spiritual advisor who works to create harmony. My earliest childhood recollections of leadership began in the second grade at Smedley Elementary School in North Denver. I was a member of the Student Council, Safety Guard, Color Guard, and Girl Scouts until the 6th grade.

My mom strongly supported all four activities. She impressed upon me the importance of community involvement, even though she did not define it as such. My mother told me that "It is important to learn new things at school, so you can get a good education, and graduate." I would bring my mom the notices for all of my extracurricular activities, and she would help me in any way she could, either by buying a big poster board so I could begin my campaign to run for Student Council

or by taking me to the Girl Scouts meetings every week and bringing cookies. She would sit quietly in most of the meetings. My mom only had a second-grade education, but she is still one of the most brilliant and wisest women that I have met and loved. My mom was a peaceful and positive person, even through all the hardship she endured. Her mom, my grandmother, Sophia Vasquez, taught her to be prayerful and grateful. While I was in undergraduate and graduate school, I would remember my mom and grandma; both were the keepers of our religious traditions and cultural healing practices. Both Mom and Grandma told me to be respectful to all people, and to say "I'm sorry" when I was wrong.

My childhood was also a fertile ground for me to learn the morals and values of the Native American religious ceremonies and Catholic religious beliefs. My childhood was a time of my spiritual development, with knowledge acquired from my mom and grand mom. Mom and Grandma were always praying to the Santos (Saints) to help us with our health and anything else we needed. We had a Curandera (Herbal healer) named San Juana who lived next door to us, who was always helping Mom with remedios (home remedies), so that her children could be well and safe. Our house had altars of candles, saints, rosaries, Holy Water, and flowers. I remember the healing rituals my mom and grandma performed, such as using salt to clear energy and protect us from bad weather. I am very grateful for my family as role models for my spiritual leadership development. As the years have passed, I have had other spiritual leaders on my life path, which I am thankful for as I walk the Red Road.

Now, I am considered a Sundance Elder, as I enter my sixty-sixth year of life. One of my most important roles as an elder was to prepare for our Sundance Ceremony on the Reservation in South Dakota with my relatives in the summer of 2012. I am always preparing my most precious grandchildren, Ayisa, Davi Jr., and Rhian Jae, to understand the importance of the belief in prayer, and having a positive attitude on their life path, as well as learning, and loving themselves with the highest respect. The best job that Tunkashila and Tonantzin have allowed me to have is being a grandma. Con Cariño y Paz (With Love and Peace).

Ahhheee!  
Ometeol! Mitakuye Oyasmin! Strong Life Ways Woman.



# Patricia Sigala

## SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Patricia Sigala, a Denver Native, was hired as the Outreach Educator at the Museum of International Folk Art in 2000. Prior to that, she held positions as a Cultural Art Educator / Gallery Interpreter / Community Volunteer Assistant with the Denver Art Museum, and as Director of Education for the Museo de las Americas.

In addition, she was cofounder and Program Administrator for Grupo Tlaloc, a traditional Mexika-Aztec Denver-based dance group, for 20 years. In Santa Fe, she works as a Museum Educator. She continues to dance, practices Hatha Yoga, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Monte del Sol Charter School. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Non-Profit Community Service Administration from Metropolitan State University, and an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado at Denver.

PATRICIA'S

## Life Quote

YOU HAVE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THE NOTION THAT UNDERSTANDING THE UNIVERSE IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, BECAUSE THE ONLY UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNIVERSE THAT WILL BE USEFUL TO YOU IS YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING.

### PHILOSOPHY

Joseph Campbell, the noted comparative mythology and religion scholar, wrote, "If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path." Today, as I walk and dance my path, I create and try to manifest mindfully open heartedness to the teachings of the universe in the lifelong pursuit of self knowledge. I am grateful—Tlazokamati, Namaste.

Reflecting on my life work and journey, I recognize the choices I have made to cultivate and nurture the multicolored thread of my interest in cultures and traditions. Starting with my own, which were being assimilated into mainstream America, where I lived with my parents and four brothers in a Denver suburb. In elementary school, I melted a box of crayons with my father to demonstrate the melting-pot metaphor of cultural assimilation for a Social Studies project. The crayons lost their individual brilliance and distinction, melting into a dull mass. I often reflect on this. In college in Denver, I was finally able to pursue connection with my indigenous ancestry from Mexico—Danza Azteca-Mexika. From my years of commitment to danza, I've been able to live and transmit this spiritual cultural identity to my children and the Denver / Santa Fe community. Now, in New Mexico, I dance this path in a more subdued way, having integrated a universal perspective and appreciation of world cultures.

May we all act with heart. I have felt both sides of racism. As a child, I saw adults who act out of pain, classmates who were patterned by their parents, and responded as a young adult to a world community full of anger and confusion. I longed for, and continue to pray for, cultural understanding, peace, compassion, and tolerance. Treat others as you would like to be treated. Be willing to reach out to others with an open heart.





# *A Flavor of Love* BY PATRICIA SIGALA

My mother, Helen Andrea Sigala, was instrumental in coloring and sustaining my world with food. She was born in Manzanola, Colorado, in the Arkansas Valley. She lived there until she was 16 years old. She moved to Denver to live with a Jewish family until she graduated from East High School. It was in their home that she nurtured and cultivated her love for cooking, something she never participated in growing up, because she was helping with other household chores for her very large family of ten siblings.

When I was growing up, she and I spent a lot of time together in our neatly organized, tidy kitchen, which was built into part of our one-car garage, to accommodate our growing family. The bright floral wallpaper surrounding the wall on three sides of the table where we ate was very pleasing to me; I feel like I absorbed the pattern through my senses. We made and decorated holiday cookies and prepared Mexican food, as well as food from diverse cultures—she gleaned many of those recipes from people she worked for as I was growing up.

She had the uncanny ability to make a meal out of next to nothing; living in a large family while growing up, and their socioeconomic conditions, necessitated this. She never wore colorful aprons, like my father's mother from Central Mexico, who wore an apron most of day. My mother prepared food wearing what she had on that day, and that suited her fine. I would have to say that my mother was most centered when she prepared food. I loved being around her in the kitchen. It was a sacred bond to me, especially since I was the only girl in our family.

One of my most cherished memories is making flour tortillas by hand with her. My part was blending the dry ingredients by hand, first mixing, then adding water. Motion by motion, the dry

turned to moist, to sticky, to spongy, then to a springy ball of masa, or dough. I remember the sound of her rolling pin, which was cut from the top part of a broom handle, as it hit the table with each rolling in/out and each rotation of the masa. Watching her do this, I could see and hear the strength in her arms and upper body. I rarely cooked the tortillas on the cast iron comal (tortilla cooking plate) because it was hot and I would burn the tops of my fingers. She spoke often of her mother and her grandmother while we were cooking.... "Back then, we didn't have a lot, but it went far." She had a mastery that I aspired to have one day. Not to mention the perfect round shape and flavor of the tortillas.

Unfortunately, as with many cultural traditions, since the introduction of store-bought flour tortillas, she only infrequently makes them by hand today. Looking back, she never made corn tortillas by hand, as my grandmother did in Mexico, where corn tortillas are a diet staple. My mother's parents were from Northern New Mexico, and wheat was the predominant ingredient in breads, cookies, and of course, tortillas. I have observed that the further north you go in Mexico, the more you see flour tortillas in the people's diet.

Of all the foods my mother prepared, my favorite was cheese enchiladas with red chili (ground and cooked from pods), Spanish rice, pinto beans, and corn. This was, and is, comfort food for me, especially now that I am a vegetarian. Back then, when we had extended family gatherings, everyone would rave about her food. I felt proud that she was my mother and sustained our family with her love for cooking. This was one of the many ways she showed her love for us. My mother is a self-taught master cook of world cultures. I loved how she would always tell us where she got each recipe from, or what type of food it was.

Another wonderful aspect of my mother shined in her determination to collect dolls for me from different parts of the world. They came from places I only dreamed of then, but they were real. I could touch and see them and know there was life outside of Denver. I had relatives who would bring back dolls from countries like China, Spain, Japan, and Mexico. We kept them in a small black brass-plated antique-looking chest in my closet.

I could access my growing collection at any time, but I didn't play with them like I did with my blonde Barbie dolls, who had a full line of clothing and furniture accessories to be imaginative and creative with. My mother also bought me a kid-sized version of Raggedy Ann, which I idolized and cared for like a sister, the sister I longed for in a family of four brothers. She remembers my thrill and excitement when she brought that Raggedy Ann home. Back then, I would talk to her, fix her yarn-red hair, share secrets with her, and sleep with her.

Though I didn't know it at the time, I began my collection of folk art dolls at a young age because of my mother's love and appreciation for dolls. I still have this collection and have added more. While working in New Mexico, I recently came across a black-haired, bronze-skinned Barbie doll, dressed in Aztec regalia. I was thrilled! Finally, there was a doll that reflected my cultural ancestry. Today, she sits in my office, along with my East Indian Sari-dressed doll and a Guatemalan doll.

I feel blessed to work for a museum that attracts people from all over the world who share a love for dolls, which bonds us together, and that I have the opportunity to impact their lives in my work. My mother, Helen Andrea Sigala, lives in my heart and is my Corn Mother, because of how she fed my physical, emotional, and spiritual being with her flavor of love.







# Charlene Garcia Simms

## GARCIA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Pueblo City-County Library District Central Library, Rawlings Branch, Pueblo, Colorado, on October 4, 2019

Charlene Garcia Simms is a life-long learner and teacher. Her profession of being a librarian and genealogist feels like destiny. Since sixth grade she has been teaching others to read, because she discovered the magic of reading at the age of four. She believes people should know where they came from, so they can know where they are going. Each day, she teaches people to find their genealogical roots. Her activism and advocacy to help marginalized people find opportunities to better themselves has been a lifetime labor of love. Art is one example of her community involvement. With her husband Ed, she has organized at least twenty public art shows that focus on Hispanic artists. They knew that these artists had created masterpieces, but were hiding them because they did not have the confidence or encouragement, or a place, to showcase them. Governments come and go, but the humanities, art, literature, dance, music, and theater last forever. This is what she tries to preserve, in her life and work.

### PHILOSOPHY

I was four when my father taught me to read. It was magical to see T-H-E become a word before my eyes. I grew up in Garcia, Colorado, and there wasn't much to do in the summers. When I turned eight, he took me to the Alamosa library, 45 miles away, and signed me up for a library card. I could check out up to ten books for two weeks and was so excited! Our house had indentations on the roof. I would climb up and nestle in one under a huge cottonwood tree, and that was my personal library. I haven't stopped reading or learning since. I love teaching, because knowledge empowers people. One of my favorite sayings is "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

As a librarian I can spot people who need information but are afraid to ask. I love to engage them in conversation so they can say what information they need. I like to make them feel that any question they have is important. Sometimes these answers can be life-changing. No matter where you are in life, economically, socially, or otherwise, I feel that education and knowledge are the keys to success and the path to a better quality of life.

### CHARLENE'S

## Life Quote

PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID. PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID. BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.  
—MAYA ANGELOU

ONCE YOU LEARN TO READ YOU WILL BE FREE FOREVER.  
—FREDERICK DOUGLAS



# My Two Mothers

BY CHARLENE GARCIA SIMMS

In my lifetime, two women have inspired me to be who I am today, my two mothers. One is my birth mother, Pauline Manchego. The other is the woman who raised me, Irma Manchego Garcia, my paternal aunt. There is a strong custom in Hispanic culture of giving children to relatives who can't have any. They are called *criados* or *gift children*.

I was a gift child to my aunt Irma, the sister of my father Carlos, Pauline's husband. The story goes that when I was nine months old and living in Pueblo, Colorado with Carlos and Pauline and my siblings, I couldn't bear the heat. I was becoming dehydrated and losing weight, so Aunt Irma took me with her to the San Luis Valley, and I flourished with her and her husband Gilbert.

I always felt different because I was an only child, and people talked about that. I also heard whispers that I was adopted and belonged to another couple, who I called tío (uncle) and tía (aunt). My adopted dad was gone a lot, so I had Irma to myself. She always smelled good, and when she wasn't sick she was so beautiful. I remember getting a bad earache one cold, snowy day. She took care of it with an old remedy, and I felt better soon. This happened time after time.

I remember her playing the piano, and I learned to appreciate music. We lived on a ranch with no neighbors, by the highway. One day we saw a man approaching our house from the highway. She locked the doors, and I could feel her heart beating. Fortunately, a friend drove up and must have scared the stranger off, because when we looked out, he was back on the highway. I felt my mother's sigh of relief and was glad she was there to protect me.

When she had bouts of illness and went to the hospital, I missed her so much my heart ached. If it wasn't phlebitis, it was colitis or pneumonia. I tried to shake the feeling of doom every time my father told me things didn't look very good, but somehow she always pulled through.

As I got older, I realized the truth about my birth parents and sisters and brothers. Somehow, I easily accepted it. My adopted dad was also adopted, a gift child, so I had such a large extended family by blood or association that it still makes my head spin.

If I have any kindness, it's because of Irma. If I have any self-esteem, it's because she always made me feel special and loved and would constantly praise me when I did things well. She was there for my formative years, through heartaches and disappointments and moments of happiness, including the birth of her three grandchildren, my children Lisa, Stephen, and Kris, who she loved limitlessly. If I can love unconditionally, it's because of her. She died when I was 37 and she was 63, still so young, but I was lucky to have had her as long as I did.

With my tía Pauline (my birth mother), I had an in-between feeling that I couldn't define. I know I loved her more than an aunt, but not quite like my mom, Irma. I knew she was a good cook and that she sold Avon products for many years, but as a child I was not allowed to form a bond with her. I wasn't kept away forcefully, I just was never alone with her much. When she separated from my tío it didn't affect me much, although I knew the pain it brought to my tío and siblings.

At one point I didn't see her for two years, then at Christmas time she bought me a gift. I was so happy that she remembered me. Later, after I grew up, she became the caretaker of my children. They called her auntie, although my younger son called her nana, and one day I heard him call her gramma. Their favorite memories are coming home from school to a house that smelled with the fresh-baked bread she had just made for them to devour with butter.

My first lasting memory of my tía is going to visit her at age nine. I had seen her a lot when she and my tío lived in my gramma's house, but there were always so many people around that I never really felt her presence. One day I rode my bike to her new house and I vividly remember going in the kitchen and seeing her put a pan of old bread in the oven of the wooden stove to toast to make bread pudding.

She said she needed some water and asked me to take a pail to the Seguras' house, have them fill it halfway, then bring it back. I skipped along and couldn't find anyone, so I tied the pail to a rope and put it down the well. But when I pulled the rope back up, the pail was gone. I didn't know what to do. I was scared, because just recently someone had fallen into a well and drowned. I ran back in tears and I think into my tía's waiting arms. She comforted me and told me it was okay. When the bread pudding was done we ate some with a glass of cold goat's milk. But later, all I felt was warmth as I rode my bike back home and wished I had stayed longer.

Pauline, this woman who I called my tía, who gave me birth, was in and out of my life as a child. But as an adult I had her with me for over thirty years. She watched over my children during their school years, so I never had to worry about them being safe while I worked. When my mom died and we were having some drama with other family members, she told me, "Don't you worry, you have me and your sisters." It comforted me in my grief for my beloved mom.

If I know anything about money and saving and stretching a dollar, I learned it from Pauline. If I have a generous bone in my body, I got it from her, because she gave to everyone. With her small pension, she always tipped at restaurants, bought items from neighborhood children for school fundraisers, and bought everyone Christmas presents. If I'm an avid reader, it's because of our shared DNA. She read books galore, and all of the daily paper, and told me what was happening in the world. She had many sad times, but I heard her cry only once, when she told me about her nine-month baby boy dying in her arms from pneumonia.

She was very proud of having been a welder in California during World War II, and she wished the family had stayed there. She taught us all at least one of her specialties. She taught me to make award-winning red chili, with her secret ingredient. She died on 12-12-12 at 12 noon.

I miss my two mothers very much and think of them every day. They will always inspire me and be my corn mothers.



ISLETA PUEBLO, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History,  
Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

*Stella Teller*







Stella Teller was born on the Isleta Pueblo in 1929. She began working with clay at eight, helping her mother slip and polish small pots. This is how many families in the Pueblo were able to sustain themselves. By the time Stella reached high school, pottery making on the Pueblo had begun to wane. She took up pottery again when she was grown and had her own children.

By 1959, as the granddaughter of the famous Isleta potter Emilia Carpio (who had demonstrated pottery making at the St. Louis World Fair in 1904), Stella took her place among a long line of master Isleta potters. Her love of the craft and her expertise at creating figurines and pottery vessels have made her one of America's most collected Native potters. Her pieces are part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. She is also represented in museums and galleries nationwide. Her daughters Robin, Christine, Ramona, and Lynette are also well known potters in their own right.

## PHILOSOPHY

When I was a child, everyone in my family—my mother, grandmother, and other relations—sold things to tourists to make a living. It could have been weaving, or jewelry, or in our case, pottery. Our art was directly tied to how we were able to survive. It also was our heritage and our culture.

My job was to help sand and burnish the pots. Then I'd go to the train station in Albuquerque with my mother to meet people getting off the train. But the tourist trains stopped coming, and eventually we had to find other ways to make a living. For a long time, pottery was not made on the Pueblo. I grew up, had children, and did many different things, including hairdressing. But I was always doing art, crocheting, painting ceramic sand, and making jewelry.

Then, one day, I remembered clay. Today I make my own. I have a special arroyo where I go to get it. It must be refined, washed, and cleaned. Then I dig the volcanic ash, tuffa, which must be mixed with the clay to make pottery. Everyone finds their own special digging spot for clay. We all learn from each other, even as we develop our own special talents. Everyone has their own recipe for clay and their own way to form figurines and vessels. It is a learning process passed down from generation to generation, but also an individual journey.

Life is like making pottery. You must have a great passion for what you do, to do it well. You must put your heart into it. We know that all things, and all beings, are sacred. When you look at life this way, it changes how you see things. We take care of each other and our world because it is a gift to be able to do so. I am happy that the art will now continue on with my daughters.

## STELLA'S

### Life Quote

BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER  
AND BE THERE FOR YOUR  
FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

BE MINDFUL AND PRESENT  
IN THE MOMENT, AND THE  
FUTURE WILL UNFOLD AS  
IT SHOULD.

## Stella's Story

I was born in 1929 on the Isleta Pueblo. We all lived very close to each other in those days. I lived close to the center of the Pueblo, and a short walk away by the railroad tracks lived my great-grandmother on my father's side.

Her name was Marcelina Abeita; she died in 1949 at the age of 90. It has been many years since she passed on, but I can still remember her just like it was yesterday. You see, by the time I was born, my great grandfather had already died, so my great grandma lived alone. But all the grandchildren and great grandchildren were expected to help her and be with her. In our family, she had a great place of honor.

She and I were very close. Even though I myself am now 90 years old, in my mind I am still part of the little girl who used to spend time with my great-grandmother. She was a short, small woman who wore the traditional clothes of our women. This included a blouse with a jumper-type double skirted dress and a woven belt she had made herself. She always wore white buckskin moccasins and single strand of coral jewelry, with silver bracelets and simple silver earrings. At special occasions or ceremonial times, she would wear a big silver necklace and turquoise. She was very meticulous in how she dressed and took great pride in how she looked.

My great-grandmother was always busy working in the house and yard. In those days, and today also, men were responsible for the dances, gathering the wood, hunting, and things like that. But we are a matriarchal society, and all things pass from mothers to daughters, so the women control and are responsible for all things within the home. My great-grandmother's house was very simple and had few furnishings, but she took great pride in it. Every year the men would bring white clay from the hills. Then, my great-grandmother would grind it and mix it with straw. They used the mixture to whiten the adobe house she lived in. It was a lot of work, but it made the house look so beautiful. She was always working in the yard, too. The other great-grandchildren and I who went to be with her every day always loved to help her do her things around the house.

In the fall, she dried chili peppers, peaches, quince, apples, apricots, and squash. Venison was dried from the clothesline. Putting away food for the winter was serious business, and we all helped. I remember that we used to make fry bread outside over a fire in a big pot. When it was time for feast days or ceremonies, we helped bake bread in the horno, the outdoor oven. We made many things because they were shared with others; that is the Pueblo way. We cooked tortillas on the wood burning stove in the house, and my great-grandmother tasted. She also cooked great Indian stews; these were made with what was on hand—potatoes, dried meat, tomatoes, squash, or whatever vegetables we had. And her biscuits were the best. It's hard to believe, but she also made the cooking bowls that we used. She was a potter, but she only made things that had utilitarian use.

We did not have a television or any video games back then to entertain ourselves while we visited our great-grandmother. We were very happy just to be with her. She was a sweetheart and made us feel like we were part of something bigger than ourselves. For relaxation, she had set up a very unusual loom on the kitchen table. It was a metal stake with some wooden parts; to this day, I have never seen anything like it. She used it to weave beautiful belts, which we wore with our dresses. They took her months and months of work. I remember watching her and being mesmerized by her patience.

Back then, people did not say "I love you" like they do today, but I knew how very much she loved us. It was an unconditional love. Just to sit with her was comforting. We knew we belonged with her and she belonged to us. We did not even have to talk about anything; we just knew love.

Today as I sit with my own children and grandchildren, I take my place in this immense circle of life. It may seem odd that I seem to have more patience with my grandchildren than I did with my children, but that is the way it grows. I am the grandmother now. I am the one that the small children sit with and watch as I make pottery or food or clean up the yard. I am the one who pulls all them together and gathers them up in my ancient family. One day I will pass on, as my grandmothers passed on before me. But I will have also have passed on all I knew about passion, caring, sharing, fairness, and love.

And then there will be those I nurtured and loved, who will pass on these things to another generation. This is the Pueblo way of life; it is a good journey.



# Jessica (JESSA) Tumposky

## SILVER CITY, NEW MEXICO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Jessa lives in Silver City, New Mexico with her sons, Axan Ocelotl, Julian Atocani, and Ellis Dylan Atom. She grew up in Montclair, New Jersey, but the Southwest feels like home to her. Her multi-cultural background includes Russian-Jewish, French, Irish, English, Czech, Austrian, and German roots.

Jessa cares deeply about supporting our Mother Earth and honoring traditional and indigenous ways and their evolutions. She is a passionate creative who acts, dances, and writes for herself and her community. She received a B.A. in Individualized Study from the Gallatin School at New York University, with a concentration in language, performing arts, and anthropology. She has done communications work with many arts, education, and healthcare nonprofit organizations, and has also worked as a doula and apprentice midwife. Jessa is in the process of getting her Masters in Social Work, to support her vision of doing counseling that integrates the arts and healing practices. She brings her interest in indigenous ways and peace-making in relationships to her mothering, creative life, and work, and is extremely grateful to have these wise footsteps to follow.

### JESSA'S

## Life Quote

"WHATEVER YOU CAN DO, OR  
DREAM YOU CAN, BEGIN IT.  
BOLDNESS HAS GENIUS, POWER,  
AND MAGIC IN IT. BEGIN IT  
NOW."

— JOHANN VON GOETHE







## PHILOSOPHY

I want to respectfully take my place among the next generation of “earth mothers” who balance tradition with modern technology. I believe life is a gift, and a great mystery not to be solved, but to surrender to. The experience of giving and receiving unconditional love reminds me of what life is all about, both in big ways and small ways. I know I must strive to be both humble and wise. Being a mother has taught me how to grow, be present, and have a sense of humor.

My passion in life is to grow and create in collaboration with the world around me. Through dance, tipi ceremonies, poetry, jewelry making, reiki, and apprenticing with a midwife, I strive to find harmony between the natural environment and the world of humankind.

I want to be a nurturing, loving mother; to be a giving, loving, and challenging life partner; to be a warm, compassionate, curious friend; to see beyond paradigms and patterns to help myself and those around me create what is in the highest good. I desire that the world unfold its problems and evolve from them as it will. I desire that all earth’s creatures not have to live through incredible suffering for learning to happen, and I wish to surrender myself to the universe and accept all life’s adventures.

# My Grandma Shirley

BY JESSICA TUMPOSKY

My beloved Grandma Shirley, my dad’s Jewish mom, was a fabulous gardener. Even in upstate New York, her flowers always bloomed huge, despite the long dark winter that preceded their arrival. I’m convinced it was her loving, attentive, nurturing eye that helped them grow to their full beauty.

She also showered me with this love. I was her oldest grandchild, and her favorite. I basked in her love and attention. I spent lots of time with her, more than the other grandchildren, because she lived close by. My parents were divorced, in school, and working abroad, so sometimes when they needed to they sent their only child to Grandma’s. She always welcomed me with open arms. I loved spending Hanukah with her and learning Hebrew prayers as we lit the candles.

When I left for college in New York, she always visited me. A great lover of theater and art, she planned one or two weekends a year for a whirlwind of museum trips, Broadway and off-Broadway theater, and eating extravaganzas at fancy restaurants. We always stayed “with the nuns,” as she said, at a hostel run by a Catholic church not far from where I lived in Greenwich Village. Though she loved to splurge on these trips, she also always found creative ways to save money.

When I was in Italy for a semester in 1999, Grandma Shirley came to visit. Though she loved travelling, her mastery of foreign languages was terrible, a family joke. But she left her comfort zone, drawn to Italy’s art and history, knowing that her studious granddaughter knew enough Italian to get around. I laughed, knowing she couldn’t even manage a “Buon giorno” without slaughtering it.

My 76-year-old grandmother decided that the “perfect” journey would be a road trip around Sicily. She planned every detail months ahead. We would

see every piece of famous artwork, every sacred shrine, historic town, and ancient ruin.

How we would survive her driving was another matter. Grandma Shirley was an English professor for over 40 years, a meticulous cook, and known for many things, especially for her terror-inspiring driving. So when we rented a huge boat of a car, with a big trunk for our luggage, I was nervous. I was under 25, so she did all the driving. Her reputation as a lead foot, coupled with a devil-may-care attitude about road rules, made everyone anxious. But I had survived the Adirondack Mountains with her and didn’t even flinch, much.

Sicily’s roads are narrow, filled with speed-crazed Italian drivers, just like Shirley. They didn’t flinch at her driving, either. One day we drove up the winding mountain road toward Erice, a beautiful ancient town known for its temple to Venus. We maneuvered 27 hairpin turns, as my lunch churned in my stomach. The ancient Sicilians built the shrine for Venus on a gorgeous, flower-covered, craggy mountaintop. A tribute worthy to the goddess and all that is beautiful in this world.

Erice is breathtaking, with one-lane gray cobblestone streets. Everywhere, white doves wandered and cooed. These graceful messengers added to the otherworldly feeling of being engulfed in history. But our car was so large it barely fit through the streets. I could reach out the window and brush my fingers against the stone buildings. We finally parked and went to our hotel. We explored the town, pounding the cobblestones until our feet were worn and aching. After an exquisite meal, we retired from our “perfect” day.

The next morning, we rose with the sun, ready for the next leg of our journey. Shirley turned the ignition key. Nothing happened. Again, and again, nothing. We were 27 hairpin turns up a mountain road, with a dead battery. I remembered the road signs that said to turn on car lights in the tunnels. We had never turned them off. The boat car was dry docked!

There was no repair shop in Erice. But there were 15 Sicilian men, from their 20’s to their 70’s, who circled the car, throwing ideas around and gesturing

importantly. We stood back and cracked our first smiles. Our mood had been a little somber, though never disastrous. After 20 minutes, one went off and brought back some jumper cables. Once our car was roaring, we thanked the men, as they shined their big Italian smiles. Then we hit the road, laughing and singing, in happy off-tune full-volume joy.

This story is important to me because it contains the essence of my grandmother’s spirit. She passed away in December, 2006, but even that left me with no fear. In all our adventures together, in many unknowns, I was never afraid, but filled with the of joy of experiencing all the “perfect” things to do in life.

She taught me so much about unconditional love—it’s not something forced. It’s something you genuinely feel and enjoy. This incredible love for a person manifests in a true interest in what they do and where they are in life. I was nurtured by this loving attention. Just as the flowers in my grandmother’s garden always bloomed big, I’ve been able to bloom more fully in the warmth of that love.

My grandmother wasn’t a calm person, but she took things in stride. We sat back and let the Sicilians do what they do, and rolled with the tide. The best word I can think of for Shirley is “buoyant.” She always rode the waves to the surface because she was able go with the flow of life, not meekly, but full of her own being, with open eyes.

When I started teaching fourth grade at an inner city school in Brooklyn a few years later, she came to visit. A bigger stretch than Italy in many ways, since she grew up on the Upper East Side and considered her fancy neighborhood the “real” New York. She was adamant about spending a day in my classroom, with twenty boisterous, mostly African-American, nine-year-olds. She needed to see and experience what I was doing. She gave me her unwavering support as I became my own woman.

I thank you, my darling Shirley, for sharing these things, and so much more, with me. Since you’ve passed from this life, Venus inhabits me more than ever before. I suspect that you were one of her greatest manifestations.





# Evelyn Valdez Martinez

## DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Evelyn was born and raised in the small town of San Acacio in southern Colorado's San Luis Valley. One of nine children, she learned early that her parents' 850-acre ranch was a labor of love that required all available hands to mend fences and herd cattle. In the shadows of the lush Sangre de Cristo mountains, she bonded with her natural environment and was impressed even as a child with nature's beauty.

After graduating from Trinidad State Junior College with a degree in Fine Art and Interior Design, she pursued a career in real estate and commercial art. After raising their two children, she and her husband focused their attention on missions to tribal people in Mexico as part of their commitment to Amigos Ministries, through the Peace of Christ church. Today, this award-winning oil painter divides her time between her studio work in Denver and her humanitarian work on behalf of the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico's Copper Canyon.

### PHILOSOPHY

A good work ethic is vital to a successful journey through your life's work. We wear many hats throughout our lifetime. Women especially must multi-task most of their lives. It is something we do well, maintaining a home, family, and career, and upholding our dreams and those of our children. Keeping our dreams alive through all this is vital, but can be very difficult.

My journey has been filled with life's challenges, but I always had faith, and I knew that through perseverance, my art career would happen. I had all the demands and pleasures of working many different "careers"—in real estate, being an artist, raising children, and being a wife. My passion and driving purpose were always to follow my dream of living as an artist; every day, I studied, drew, and painted. I knew that a time would come when I could turn my part-time artist's life/career to a full-time passion... and I have.

My deepest desire for the world is that our fellow human beings find it in their hearts to love others before themselves, and to love God above all. For me, there is no greater joy than the experience of being with people of different backgrounds, especially those who genuinely practice humility, wisdom, and humanity. I love traveling to other countries and spending time with local people, as opposed to spending time being entertained as a tourist. Good conversation and fun-loving friends and family are the treasures of life. Reflection is important, taking time to enjoy nature, to paint, to draw, and to appreciate the beauty of the world.

### EVELYN'S

## Life Quote

IT HAS BEEN REVEALED TO ME THAT STRONG WOMEN ARE THE "DANCE OF LIFE." THEY CREATE, NURTURE, AND ENHANCE LIFE. DURING EVERY HARDSHIP THAT A FAMILY ENDURES, THESE WOMEN TAKE THE LEAD. THEY WORK HARD, THEY COMFORT, THEY CURE, AND THEY SOMEHOW KEEP THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER. THEY COME THROUGH IN A SOOTHING RHYTHMIC DANCE. THESE WOMEN COME TO THE TWILIGHT OF THEIR LIVES WITH A WELL-EARNED CONFIDENCE, SECURE IN WHO THEY ARE. THESE PILLARS OF OUR SOCIETY ARE TRULY THE "CORN MOTHERS."



# Curanderas de Mi Alma

BY EVELYN VALDEZ MARTINEZ

(HEALERS OF MY SOUL)

My maternal grandmother, Beneranda Olivas, was a curandera (herbal healer) in our Colorado village, San Acacio (La Placita, “the little place”). The community depended on her for remedies: setting broken bones, childbirths, caring for cuts and bruises. Most families had little access to doctors because we were isolated and the roads were rough. Thankfully, God made women like my abuelita (granny) who had great empathy for everyone, and no one was ever turned away. We took care of our own. Our little community was one extended family, because everyone had worked and lived closely together for almost 150 years.

My grandmother was the joy of my life. She was strong-minded and efficient. She always knew the right thing to do. Her kindness was legendary, and her determination not to be questioned. When my abuelita said something must be done, she meant it.

At around nine, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. A doctor in Alamosa, 40 miles away, confirmed the diagnosis. I was scared, because back then, many people died from it, in sanatoriums. I remember asking my grandmother what would happen to me. She said matter-of-factly, “Get well.” Since she was a no-nonsense kind of person, I believed her.

My grandmother never minced words. She told everyone, including the doctor, her plans for my recovery. She concocted a bitter tonic, an herbal remedy I was to drink four times daily. I was to spend time outdoors in the sunshine all summer. So, with the doctor’s approval of her homemade prescription, I was sent to live with Aunt Polonita, Uncle Pat, and their two sons in Longmont, Colorado.

San Luis is Colorado’s oldest town, settled by Spanish colonials in 1851. It sits in a high valley and gets very cold at night. Our village of San Acacio sits seven miles west of San Luis, between the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan mountains. In the summer, the runoff from Culebra, a 14,000 foot peak that loomed above us, made our valley a lush green paradise. We were famous for our potatoes, peas, lettuce, and the fertile plains where cattle grazed. But nights were always freezing. So I was sent off to the hotter climate of Longmont.

Longmont was 250 miles north, in the high plains. The mountain passes we traveled on our way were scary and exciting, though the trip was exceedingly long. I was excited; I almost forgot I was ill. After all, I was traveling with my favorite uncle and my madrina (godmother).

The weather was quite different. Days were hotter, and evenings didn’t cool off. I missed my siblings and the meadows of my beloved valley. But I enjoyed the glamorous town with its shops and busy streets. The park with swing sets and slides was exciting. Though I tired quickly, I didn’t feel too ill to enjoy this new place. My cousins and I played with two neighbors. They were chubby, and we called them Los Pansonsitos (chubby little ones). I didn’t realize until years later that wasn’t their names.

Tía (Aunt) Polonita was my mother’s older sister. She was a tranquil, reserved lady, a thin, small woman of medium build, with dark brown hair. She had a fun sense of humor. A devout Catholic, she said long prayers at bedtime, and her family and I did, too.

She was light of heart and very dear to me. Though they were not a family of means, she always had a table full of delicious food.

Every morning, my aunt would awaken me early. Every meal was a full-blown feast: eggs, tortillas, bacon, and of course, papas fritas (French fries). Afterwards, she gave me a huge glass of that ugly-tasting concoction of medicinal herb tea. Rumor has it the elixir contained manzanilla (chamomile) yarrow, and piloncillo (unrefined brown sugar), among other things. This treatment was repeated three more times each day.

After breakfast, my tía took me to spend the day in the sunshine. We walked and spent lots of time in the park downtown. I thought this was a big city, but it was really just a small town. I adored walking around town and smelling food cooking in the cafes.

My tía, who had worked on the farm growing up, had not done so for many years, as she was raising her sons, my primos (cousins). They were 13 and 14 that summer and had probably looked forward to their mother taking them on outings, but her attention was focused solely on me.

Sunshine is vital to recovery from this illness. So my aunt asked farmers if they needed any help. Before long, she and I were leaving at sunrise and coming home at sunset. We spent long hours in the fields. Little did I know that she was nursing me back to health. I mostly played and listened to her stories and gentle tales of family as she picked corn, lettuce, and peas. That summer, I learned about the earth’s

glorious ability to grow beautiful and nutritious things. She also taught me to iron. I ironed all the handkerchiefs and dish towels. The best part was when we visited my cousin Beverly on a farm in the outskirts of Longmont. We’d swim in the stock tank; it made a nice swimming pool. The cows didn’t like it too much, but who was afraid of cows?

By summer’s end, my doctor and grandmother agreed I was healed. I returned home to my parents and siblings. For the next three years, I had many checkups and chest x-rays. Many people said it was a miracle I had recovered, but I knew the miracle was the loving devotion of my tía Polonita and my abuelita.

When I got home, I realized how much I had missed my parents, my noisy, fun-filled home, and my brothers and sisters. But most of all, I was thrilled to be back with my abuelita, who I called Mamita.

I’ve always remembered Aunt Polonita’s gentle care and daily sacrifice that summer. She’ll always hold a very special place in my heart. In her honor, I later painted a large oil painting of her house, bathed in beautiful lavender and orange light: the colors of dusk.

I called the painting “Polonita’s Sunset,” because my tía was always a ray of sunshine in my life, and her passing was her sunset. Her example encouraged me to be there for family and friends when they’re in need of love and care, through illness or other hardships. I appreciate Aunt Polonita’s example of love, compassion, and devotion. It gave me a lesson in life that I honor: to give with joy and gratitude, and to know that by giving of ourselves, we can make someone else’s life easier in their time of need.





ALAMOSA, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the San Luis Valley Museum in Alamosa, Colorado on March 19, 2016, in conjunction with Adams State University, Alamosa

Bertha A.  
Velarde  
(A P O D A C A)

Bertha was born in Alamosa, Colorado. Growing up in Alamosa was a struggle. Her father was a bootlegger and her mother was a cook, and money was very scarce, making it hard to provide for three children.

The richness of material items was not a priority for Bertha growing up, but the richness of helping others was a gift she was blessed with. She completed high school and went on to pursue her career as a nurse. She worked at a hospital as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA), and for a local nursing home, where she provided care and undivided attention to the patients.

Bertha and her husband Walter Velarde lived in the San Luis Valley for over 120 years combined. Their daughter Bonnie Medina, son-in-law Larry Medina, and grandchildren Larysa and Logan maintain the family home in Alamosa. Bertha always extended a welcome to any family member, distant or close, or to any stranger who needed a helping hand, a bite to eat, or a drink.

Bertha Velarde was born on June 9, 1957 and passed away on January 3, 2018

BERTHA'S

Life Quote

IN THIS LIFE YOU WILL NOT GO HUNGRY OR COLD AS LONG AS YOU BELIEVE IN YOUR FAITH AND KEEP YOUR TRADITIONS THAT HAVE BEEN PASSED ON ALIVE.



PHILOSOPHY

I was born and raised in Alamosa, a small town in the San Luis Valley that is still my home. My father was a soldier in the Army when he met my mother, who worked in a Mexican café in Alamosa. They got married in Taos, Nuevo Mexico, and started a family. My mother was my role model. She taught me how to cook (especially how to make tortillas), and to clean, iron, and sew to make our curtains, blankets, and pillow cases. I have passed these skills on to my daughter, who carries on our traditions as *gente mexicana*. Our traditions of using natural medicines to heal, and making sure you eat all the food on your plate, since you don't know where your next meal will be coming from, have taught me how gracious our mother earth is, and the strength of our prayers. I grew up with faraway *tías*, who took on the role of a grandma, since my blood relatives had passed on or were unknown. There were many hidden secrets, but the strength of these ladies gave me strength to never forget who I am and where I come from. I love to cook, so I always have *biscochitos* or a homemade pie to share with people who come to visit, as my door is always open. I value my roles as a mother, grandmother, and wife, and I am blessed to be connected to so many people who I have passed by or met. My life struggles have helped me become the person I am today, and to keep an open mind and a loving heart.

GLOSSARY

<i>biscochito(s)</i>	Sugar cookie(s), usually made with cinnamon and anise.
<i>consejos</i>	Advice.
<i>gente mexicana</i>	Mexican people
<i>La Llorona</i>	Literally, "the weeping woman." A legendary figure from folklore, who after being abandoned by her husband, drowned her two children in a river out of grief and anger. The legend says that she snatches children who misbehave, to replace her lost children.
<i>morcillas</i>	Blood sausages.
<i>tía(s)</i>	Aunt(s).
<i>yerba buena</i> ( <i>hierba buena</i> )	A type of mint, usually spearmint, and the tea made from it.

# My Simple Life

My story starts with learning how to live off the land and do more with less. Growing up in Alamosa with less things than others taught me to be grateful for every meal I ate, and for the clothes I had to keep me warm during the winter months. My mother taught me how to cook and sew, so that I had the skills needed to live with less. She worked all the time, so her time with me was very special. We only had a wood stove to heat our three-room house, and to cook on. My mom made fresh tortillas every day for breakfast and dinner, and she always had some type of "sweets," known as "dessert," for others. From homemade tortillas, pies and/or *biscochitos*, we always had something homemade to eat.

Our language growing up was Spanglish, and our English was very broken compared to the proper way of speaking. My family was very distant from each other, so I didn't get to know my real grandmother. My grandmother was also my godmother, and she helped guide me growing up. As I got older, I learned from my mother and godmother how to cook and take care of myself. I met my husband in 1978. His mother became a second mother to me, who taught me more about living off the land, and how our mother earth takes care of us.

My mother-in-law was a kind, strong, and giving person. She never hesitated to open the door to a stranger, pick up a hitchhiker, take off to Oregon alone to see one of her daughters, or go hunting on her own in her Chevy Impala. She taught me the art of wood hauling by making sure that the cut logs were loaded properly in the truck, and making sure there were no logs left behind. She taught me how to butcher animals for food, and how to cook almost

BY BERTHA A. VELARDE

all the parts of the animal to make sure nothing went to waste. I remember when we butchered a sheep and she made *morcillas*. I was a little uneasy with this being served for dinner, but with homemade tortillas and fresh frijoles, it was very good.

She also taught me how to treat illnesses with herbs from the mountains, and to understand the beauty of nature. She was an inspiration to many others, as she was a very strong woman who would not take no for an answer. My journey in life has given me the strength to teach my own daughter how important it is to respect our mother earth, our elders, and the life our creator has given us. Every year, the enjoyment of hauling wood gives me a feeling of achievement as I help my husband haul the wood to heat our home. Being in the mountains gives me peace, because it is so natural and quiet that I feel so free, and it supports my family and me with heat and food. My mother-in-law also taught me how to accept the tough times that my family and I would encounter, and to see them as a lesson to learn, and an opportunity to make a difference for my daughter and her future.

I have been blessed with the knowledge that has been passed to me by my mother, my godmother, and my mother-in-law and her family. I have mastered the art of making tortillas and can make a meal with the least amount of food, to make sure my family and guests leave my home with a full stomach for their journey.

I grew up with the *consejos* that *La Llorona* would visit your house if a child cried at night; that you should never go to bed with your hair wet, as it will cause sinus problems, so make sure your hair is dry; and to always respect your elders. My use of Vicks/

Mentolate (Mentholatum) for the common cold, and for anything that hurts, is a still a strong belief, or fix, that these ladies taught me to use. It's amazing how something so simple as using Vicks or a cup of *yerba buena* can make you feel better in a matter of seconds. The culture of life of our indigenous ways has been passed from our ancestors to all of us, to share the beauty of the world. The traditions of natural medicines or the use of Vicks (not using the directions on the bottle!) or my grandma's/tía's recipe for cookies, pies, and tortillas. They didn't use recipes that specified the exact amount needed for the ingredients, and that is why I think their food was so good! I think that is why we can't get that same flavor that I remember from recipes—they knew the exact amount of that pinch of salt, sugar, or baking powder. They included it, and voilà! Something good was made, and it tasted so good, since it was made from the heart.

Now I am left with the spirits of my mother, godmother, and mother-in-law to remember in my heart, and to be there when I need them to remind me how important are the traditions they taught me, and how they need to be shared and used. The stories they shared, and the challenges they faced growing up and raising their families, have been my guide to raise my family and provide them the guidance I was given. I have learned to be grateful and always lend a helping hand, and I always take care of my family. These are traits that have been graciously applied to me. The story of the how these women influenced my view of life, and the skills they taught me, will never go away. My mom would always tell me, "In this life, you will not go hungry or cold, as long as you believe in your faith and keep alive the traditions that have been passed on to you."





# *Aurora Villareal-Aguilera*

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the Arizona State University Museum  
of Anthropology (Tempe, Arizona), on October 7, 2010





Aurora Villarreal-Aguilera was born in San Benito, a small town at the southernmost tip of Texas. She is one of ten surviving children out of fourteen born to parents of Mexican descent. She and her siblings were all delivered by a midwife and raised on a small farm.

After graduating from Los Fresnos High School in Texas in 1948, she had planned on attending college and then joining the military as a flight nurse. However, she met Reynaldo Aguilera and soon after got married. The couple moved to San Benito and had nine children. As she took on the full-time job of motherhood, she had a spiritual awakening and became a devoted Christian. She has dedicated her life to her community and family for decades.

In 1992, Aurora started a retreat to help Hispanic women discover and use their talents so they could become leaders in churches and communities nationwide. This nonprofit is now a large organization, Compañerismo Aurora, with a branch called Ministerios Aurora.

AURORA'S

## Life Quote

WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN  
TO HELP OTHERS, AND WE  
MUST DO IT COMPLETELY  
WHOLE-HEARTEDLY, WITH JOY.

### PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy started at a young age, due to my parents' influence. My father emigrated from Mexico at 12. Sadly, he never knew his parents and spent his entire life, from a young age, working hard. My mother came to Texas as an infant from Mexico.

My family were farmers. Though I was born in 1930 during the Depression, we never lacked for food. We raised chickens, hogs, and cows, which provided eggs, meat, and milk. We bartered vegetables for other staples. My parents provided a secure home—a loving home where we were encouraged to help those who had even less.

Although my father never attended school, he was wise and encouraged my education. Serving one's fellow man was of supreme importance for him. He served in World War I and proudly carried his service card. Six of my seven brothers also served in the military.

My mother felt cleanliness was next to godliness. She told me to be honest, helpful, and clean. She said man was the head of the home, but woman was the neck, and the head could not turn without the neck. My parents were honest, hard-working people. These are virtues I still carry with me.

In 1969 I was spiritually awakened to God's gospel truth and His redemptive plan for man. I became a new person. I began to truly understand that God had a plan for my life. God had placed me on earth to do good to others. I have tried to put myself in other people's shoes and act accordingly. Long before anyone said, "WWJD," or "What would Jesus do?" I followed that philosophy. I may not drive a fancy car or own a fancy house, but I am happy in the Lord.

## God Never Sleeps

BY AURORA VILARREAL-AGUILERA

I was blessed to be born into a family that had strong Christian values and lived by the word of the Lord. There are a lot of women I could talk about, including my mother and my mother-in-law, but the woman I would like to honor as a significant influence on me as a Corn Mother is Olivia Gonzales, my co-worker, my mentor, and my friend. I did not even meet her until I was past retirement age, but her influence on me has confirmed my deep belief in the goodness of God and the kindness of humanity.

Olivia was married to a Spanish man, and even though she was an Anglo lady from Louisiana, she always seemed to me to have the heart and soul of the desert people of Arizona that I had grown up with imbedded in her spirit. She was soft and gentle, like the sunrise over the great vastness of Phoenix in the morning, and yet she was as determined and strong as the mid-day heat. In her words and actions I could always see the stark beauty of the Creator's hand at work.

I met Olivia after I retired from the State of Arizona Economic Security office back in the '80s. My husband had taken ill, and I needed to be at home with him to care for him. I was used to helping people through my work, and I missed the interaction of being involved with the community. When you spend 22 years as an advocate for those who are in need, it is difficult to just walk away. So I volunteered at the Rio Vista community center.

Olivia was the director there. They provided food, toiletries, clothing, and other essential services to those who were in dire straits. She had a big heart, and every day, when the people who were homeless or down on their luck came into the center to get help, she always took time to listen to their stories.

I asked her one day if she ever got tired of listening to their stories. She told me, "God never sleeps. It is not for me to judge anyone or to put myself above anyone. Everyone has a story, and it is my job to listen to their story and help in any way I can." One day, a 70-year-old grandma came in and needed help with clothes and food. Both of her daughters were in jail, and she had taken on the chore of caring for all the grandchildren. This might not seem so unusual, but there were eleven grandchildren to care for.

Normally, at the center we packaged things up and were able to just give the people what they needed on the spot. But this was a huge family, and there was no way we could just give the grandma a few bags and send her on her way.

So Olivia packed us all into the car and loaded the entire back seat and trunk with everything the family might need. We spent the whole day helping the grandma get phone numbers and the resources she needed to get on her feet.

Another time, Olivia had heard about my next door neighbor Carlos. His wife had died unexpectedly, and he was beside himself with grief. He had no money for the burial, and the mortuary told him that every day that his wife's body was in the morgue, they were going to charge him. I had been trying to raise money from the churches and radio stations to help him.

Olivia came to my desk and asked me how much Carlos needed. I told her it was a for a poor family, almost a thousand dollars (back then, that was more than it is now). She pulled out her purse and wrote a check to Carlos on the spot. She told me to tell him he did not need to pay it back; it was her gift to him. I remember looking at Olivia in wonder, knowing that she was helping a man she had never even met. I knew from things she had told me that she had experienced some hard times in her life. She was never bitter about anything. In fact, she always said that even if someone hurts you, you need to look at them through God's eyes. She lived her life being patient, forgiving, and kind.

To this day, whenever I think an ugly thought (which is not often, but we all have our moments), I think of Olivia. There is much sadness in the world, but there is also much happiness. Through her good works and open heart, Olivia was able to spread happiness even in the darkest of places. When I met her, I was a 60-year-old woman who had seen and done many things. I had walked with the Lord for many years, and still I was in awe of her.

Olivia filled my heart with the youthful exuberance of hope. Seeing how she approached life and treated others made me realize that we are never too old to be given a new perspective on the world.



# Rita Flores de Wallace

DENVER, COLORADO

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

Rita was born in Galeana, Nuevo León in the late 1930s. Her small town in the mountains of Central Mexico was famous for its fruit orchards. She spent her formative years traveling all over Mexico with her family and studying the traditional folk arts of the indigenous people of the region. She studied dance with the prestigious Bellas Artes Academy in Mexico City for six months and then continued performing with their Coahuilan dance troupe for the next twelve years. During this time, she mastered many artistic skills. She taught throughout Mexico as a master artist, renowned for her papier-mâché, paper flowers, and folk dancing, and especially for her bordado mágico (magic embroidery).

In 1978, Rita met her husband-to-be, John Wallace, a teacher from Denver. She moved to Colorado, where she continues to teach at schools, universities, and museums as a master folk artist. She has received numerous awards for her work with the community. These include the Rex Morgan Award from Denver's Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) for contributing time, talent, and spirit to positively impact the cultural community; Centro San Juan Diego's Las Madrinas Award; Denver Public Schools Lena Archuleta Community Award; a two-month exhibition at the Onda Arte Latina gallery in Portland, Oregon; a tribute event and month-long exhibition and celebration of

her art at Denver's Corky Gonzales Library; a two-week exhibition and celebration of her art at Denver's Chicano Humanities & Arts Council (CHAC) gallery; and the Colorado Council on the Arts Master Artist Award. She has toured widely throughout the United States.

## PHILOSOPHY

In 1911, Pancho Villa and his revolutionaries rode through my village. Almost all the men were killed in the fighting that ensued, including my grandfather and many of my uncles. My mother vividly remembers the burning of the town and the orchard (la huerta). She and her three sisters were only able to survive the horrors and abuse by hiding for three days in a rock chimney.

Through all this, though, my family never lost their faith in God. I was raised in that orchard with my grandmother, mother, father, and smaller brothers and sisters. We were always taught to be generous to those in need, and to be proud of our heritage.

I had great respect for the makers of arts and crafts; their weaving and flower making were so beautiful to me. Even though these women were not rich, they made these stunning creations to represent their love and affection for their family and community. I also saw that it seemed that the really rich people were the ones who gave the least to the poor; maybe they were afraid of becoming poor themselves. The working poor were the ones who really took care of the sick, and of those in need. My family was blessed with being able to feed and support themselves, because we had restored our orchard and we always helped the mestizos, the indigenous people of the village.

My grandmother encouraged me to learn all I could about the folk arts of our village, because she knew it was important to have someone pass on their magical secrets. Today I continue to spend my life teaching and passing on the ancient techniques and artful creations, so that the world will not forget the gentle, kind spirit of the women of that epoch.

RITA'S

## Life Quote

LA BURLA ES LA CARETA  
DE LA IGNORANCIA.

TO MAKE FUN OF  
SOMEONE IS THE MASK  
OF IGNORANCE.





# Two Stories About My Abuelitas

BY RITA FLORES DE WALLACE

I have two stories. Both of them are about my abuelitas (grannies) and both are about shawls, beautifully woven magic shawls that have refined and defined my very being to this day.

The first story takes place in Galeana, the village of my birth. As everyone knew, this village had suffered many hardships during the revolution, and many people had died because of it. My abuelita Lenore, my mother's mother, kept all her surviving children together and made a good living from tending the orchard we had restored after the siege.

It was a magnificent place. In the summer, flowers grew the size of dinner plates, and everywhere were bees and butterflies. It was breathtaking—trees filled with quince, apples, pears, apricots, avocados, and pecans. You can't imagine a more perfect paradise. It was God's solace for all we had been through.

When I was about five, a great windstorm came through the village. These storms are legendary. Every August, we experienced what I think is called a monsoon season. This was a particularly violent storm, and as I and my sister and two brothers cowered under pillows and blankets, the wind whipped and howled outside. My grandmother Lenore, my mother, and my Tía (Aunt) Lilia, who was 12 years old, stood at the windows watching as trees flew by. I knew this storm was a really bad one.

Suddenly, I heard my grandmother cry, "Oh, no! The compuerta!" This was the wooden gate that held the water in the irrigation ditch. The Río Galeana ran past our front yard, and we had small irrigation canals running off it to water the trees in the orchard. But the rain and wind were so strong that the river was overflowing the ditch. Soon, water was flooding the house and we were standing ankle deep in river.

Calmly, my grandmother said "We will all drown if we don't cut the ropes that hold the gate closed." She grabbed her woven gray and white shawl, which hung from a nail on the wall, and went outside. It was a very important family heirloom. It was the shawl that wrapped us up as babies, held us close to abuelita's breast when we were sick, and covered us when we napped. She was not going to wrap us up this time; she was going outside into the storm. My mother begged her to let her go instead, but my abuelita said "No, you have your children to take care of." She pushed my mother aside, grabbed a machete, and went through the door.

We ran to the window. We could see my abuelita, her hair flying everywhere and her shawl whipping wildly in the wind, holding a large machete over her head and fighting the storm. When she reached the gate, she firmly chopped at the ropes that held it shut. Water rushed everywhere and almost washed her away. As she fought her way back to the house, windblown and battered by pelting rain, I saw a vision. The shawl had taken on the spirit of my grandmother; she was wrapped in a cloak of valor and honor. My grandmother was a hero!

The second story took place when I was eight years old. My father had moved us to Saltillo, Coahuila, about an eight-hour train ride from Galeana. He wanted to be a farmer—

not a fruit picker, but a farmer. He wanted to work with cows, horses, and goats. It may be the Mexican version of a settler.

His parents had already moved to this place, which my mother said would be very different from the place where we grew up. How different I didn't know, but something about moving scared me.

When we got off at the train station, I was almost in tears. It was the middle of nowhere. It was hot, there was a lot of sand and cactus, and the wind was blowing everything across the horizon in a cloud of dust. My father stayed at the station to wait for our luggage, while my mother and I and my three siblings started the two-hour walk on the only road to our new house.

My mother wrapped us in a shawl and tried to encourage us not to be sad. When we arrived at the house, it was empty. No lights, no candles, no heat. Very different from the lush, fragrant orchard and warm, cozy home we'd left. We were depressed, and before long, we were very scared when the wind began to howl like a wounded animal.

Soon, the biggest sandstorm I'd ever seen kicked up and covered the whole world in blowing sand. My mother, and we little ones, huddled in a corner of the house, trying to keep warm. Mama sang and told us stories, trying to keep us calm. But the storm was so loud and the sky was so dark. I was starting to feel more than just scared. I felt like I was trapped in a foreign land with no hope of escape.

Just as my despair seemed it would never end, one of the boys said he saw something from the window. He laughed and yelled for us to come look. There, in the middle of the driveway, was a small figure wrapped in a brown and beige woven shawl. It was my grandma. Her hair whipped around her face, and the wind seemed to suck her backwards each time she took a step toward the house.

It was my father's mother, my abuelita Sara! She had walked all the way from her town on the other side of the train station to our house. It took her hours. Under her arms were two big jars. One was filled with sweetbreads and the other with lemonade.

We ran to the door and embraced her. We were relieved. Joy filled our faces. Abuelita Sara hugged and kissed us and told us not to worry. She had come to rescue us. We were happy once again.

This was the second time in my life that the image of a grandmother wrapped in courage and wearing the shawl of love and honor had graced my sight. These images are forever etched into my memory. For these memories, for the honor of my abuelitas, I have devoted my life to passing on the art of bordado mágico, because today in Mexico and the United States, the magic is being lost. I want to ensure that the younger generation appreciates and realizes that these women wove their hearts and souls into these shawls. A world of kindness and a world of love have been put into them by the fingers of the women who wove the threads. So much love, in such small gestures.



# Anne Luise Zapf

KLONDYKE, ARIZONA

Inducted as a Corn Mother at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado, on October 30, 2008

The Reverend Anne Luise Zapf was one of the founders of the all-races Peyote Way Church of God in Klondyke, Arizona. Anne has spent over thirty years advocating and promoting religious tolerance, as well as ecologically enlightened lifestyle choices. She has lectured and taught at seminars throughout the Southwest and advised numerous organizations and individuals in Europe and Asia.

Born and raised in Philadelphia in a prominent musical family, she is a gifted and accomplished singer. She attended Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado and received her B.S. degree in Zoology. She and her husband Mathew Kent have three grown children. They have worked with the late master potter Immanuel Trujillo to create nationally acclaimed Mana Pottery, which is on display at the Smithsonian Institute of Native American Art in Washington D.C.

ANNE'S

## Life Quote

"WE BUT MIRROR THE WORLD. ALL THE TENDENCIES PRESENT IN THE OUTER WORLD ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE WORLD OF OUR BODY. IF WE COULD CHANGE OURSELVES, THE TENDENCIES IN THE WORLD WOULD ALSO CHANGE. AS A MAN CHANGES HIS OWN NATURE, SO DOES THE ATTITUDE OF THE WORLD CHANGE TOWARDS HIM. THIS IS THE DIVINE MYSTERY SUPREME. A WONDERFUL THING IT IS AND THE SOURCE OF OUR HAPPINESS. WE NEED NOT WAIT TO SEE WHAT OTHERS DO."  
— MAHATMA GANDHI

### PHILOSOPHY

As a Christian child, I often asked my mother about God. I was disturbed that innocent children were born with physical or mental deformities, and that some people would go to "hell"; that seemed so unfair. She said to trust God and have faith. Her simple faith, though precious, seemed unsatisfactory, so I investigated many religions, seeking answers. When I met my husband Matthew, I felt an instant connection. He, too, was on a spiritual quest, but his included using sacred psychedelics.

On meeting the divine presence by ingesting the holy sacrament Peyote, I began to realize my privilege of living in this magical multiverse. My experiences with Peyote changed my perception of God. I realized that my duty was to serve Earth and her inhabitants, especially those unable to help themselves. Coming from the dominant Caucasian race, I realized the injustices suffered by different races at its hands. But I also learned that all races and cultures exhibit racial prejudice and dishonesty. Disillusioned, I dedicated myself to the welfare of other species, particularly the divine Peyote cactus, whose native habitat in South Texas has been almost destroyed. I seek to become a bridge from the spiritual to the physical. I educate people to reduce fear and increase understanding of the Peyote Way. I hope to increase our awareness and understanding that all creatures have a unique function and help maintain a balance of life, death, and rebirth.

My deepest desire is that we balance our needs with those of other creatures, and for a fairer distribution of the world's riches, so that even the poorest among us can have happy, flourishing lives.

Before the Great Spirit I am frail and self-conscious, but through my frailties I have learned many things that I hope to share with others. My deepest desire is to lose all self-consciousness, so I can be a pure channel from the spirit world to my human and animal brothers and sisters.





# A Simple Math Lesson

BY ANNE L. ZAPP

Born in 1924, a child of the Depression, my mother grew up to become a prototype of the modern 20th-century woman. A registered nurse with a Masters in Music, she still practiced frugality in her homemaking. She had two careers, first as a nurse and then as a high school music teacher. When her best friend became ill, Mom refreshed her nursing credentials so she could take care of her friend while she was in the hospital. My mother was an accomplished seamstress and hand made all my school clothes. Granted, my wardrobe was, to me, embarrassingly small: two new school dresses and one new church dress per year, but it was complemented by hand-me-downs from my sister and some store-bought play clothes. My sister and I were often made matching dresses, which meant that after I outgrew the Donald Duck dress Mom made for me, I got to wear my sister's. My favorite gray wool dress coat was replaced by my sister's gray wool dress coat. My sister soon developed an "hourglass figure," while to this day, I have a lean and lanky, stick-thin body, which brought to an end my wardrobe of hand-me-downs.

My mother pampered me, because when I was six months old I caught chicken pox and was very sick. Later, when I was in second grade, I developed a whooping cough. At night the coughing would start, and I would be unable to stop it. My father found it aggravating, so I would do all I could to stop the coughing fits, often covering my head with the bed sheets, but it was no use. Cough syrup had no effect, and our doctor decided to have me hospitalized for observation. I remember that my mother made several new pajama sets and a robe for my hospital stay. She told me she wanted me to think of the clothes as her love, and that she was always with me, hugging me. I stayed in a ward with some very sick children and found it difficult to sleep. During the day I had no cough, but at night,

the coughing fits would start. I had no control of my situation, but the bed rest seemed to help, and I was released after a month. These two illnesses gained me a reputation as the "sickly child," which I resisted and resented. Still, I often struggled with those late-night coughing fits and had several bouts of pleurisy. I eventually learned to control, or at least suppress, the coughs, so my father could sleep.

My mother moved me to a new school district the next year. Because of my long absence from school, my teachers wanted me to repeat second grade, but Mom insisted that I not be stigmatized by being held back. I often wonder if I might have done better in school had I been held back. I remember being astonished at how hard third grade was. I think it was in third grade that I memorized my times tables. I loved twos and fives, but as I got to the higher numbers, I began to doubt my ability to memorize them. One day, I came home from school feeling very despondent. When Mom asked me what was wrong, I burst into tears. I was overwhelmed by the nines. I wondered how I could possibly learn all these big numbers. My mother grabbed me and pulled me against her pillow-like breasts in a big bear hug, and laughingly told me nines were her favorite numbers.

First, she told me to hold my hands out. "Now, Annie," she said, "put your left index finger down, and what do you have? On the left of it you have one finger, and on the right you have eight fingers, right?" I looked and nodded. "You put your second finger down, which means you were multiplying by two. The one finger on the left of it is the tens, and the eight fingers on the right of it are the ones, so two times nine is eighteen." She then had me put my second finger back up lower my third finger.

With two fingers up on the left and seven on the right, three times nine was twenty-seven. One

by one, we worked through my fingers, showing an easy way for me to multiply for nine times one through ten. I couldn't believe how easy she had just made something that had just seemed so insurmountable, but she wasn't done yet.

Now that I was seeing light at the end of my mathematical tunnel, she led me to the kitchen table and grabbed a pencil and a piece of paper. She told me to write a column of numbers from zero to nine. "You're going to love this," she said. "Now, I want you to make a column next to the other one, listing the numbers backwards from nine to zero." As I did, I again saw the answer to the nines tables instantly revealed. As I looked at my two lists, I saw 9, 18, 27, 36, 45, 54, 63, 72, 81, 90. I don't remember, but I think she showed me several more clever multiplication tricks, but these were the ones I remembered and used from then on.

Out of all the memories I have of my mother, none have stuck with me like this one has. It is representative of who she was and how she approached the world. An eternal optimist of strong opinion, she kept her opinions largely to herself. She knew how to draw the best out of others. Until the day she died, she was always my closest confidante, holding back judgment of me while providing spiritual, emotional, and financial support for the life I have chosen. There is no one closer to me than she was, and I miss her.





# *In Loving Memory*

## *Lucy López Dussart Lucero*

Born: October 10 , 1919, Somerset Colorado. Died: Feb. 14, 2010, Denver, Colorado.  
In loving memory of the Tía Lucy.  
Everyone called you auntie or mama. You are missed greatly.

## *Carolina Mejia*

Born: September 17, 1922, Bernal New Mexico. Died: Dec. 26, 2009, Denver, Colorado.  
To one who always was there to help out for those in need.  
Your faith never wavered.

## *María Isidorita “Dora” Esquibel*

Born: April 11, 1937, Sabinoso, Mexico. Died: May 7, 2013, Boulder, Colorado.  
For the warrior who never stopped fighting for her people.  
Your most famous dicho was “I never let any tell me what to do!”  
Because of your integrity and dedication many have lives have been enriched.

## *Nellie Escobedo Plasencio*

Born: February 27, 1925, , Solomonville, Arizona. Died: November 2, 2014, Safford Arizona.  
Nellie Plasencio will be remembered for her service to others,  
her compassion, and the wisdom she imparted to her family and friends.  
Her faith gave her strength and guidance through her life's journey.

## *Bertha A. Velarde (Apodaca)*

Born: June 9, 1957, Alamosa, Colorado. Died: January 3, 2018, Alamosa, Colorado.  
She was a loving and exceptional wife, mother, grandmother, and cousin, and friend to all.  
She will be dearly missed.

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