

Strong Hearts, Inspired Minds

21 Artists Who are Mothers Tell Their Stories

Rowanberry Books Portland, Oregon

By Anne Mavor

Photographs by Christine Eagon

Linda Vallejo PAINTER

AFTER WANDERING AROUND the industrial area of downtown Los Angeles, Chris and I finally find Gallería Las Americas, the gallery owned by **Linda Vallejo**, which represents contemporary Latin American and Chicano fine artists. Ever the business woman, she immediately gives us a tour. "Isn't this beautiful, wonderful, powerful." The enthusiasm and dedication, especially for her own work, is direct and unabashed.

Linda has worked in printmaking and sculpture, but now focuses on painting. She shows us painting after painting of large, luminous faces of women surrounded by butterflies and other symbols. Her work is highly symbolic and ranges from womanhood to harsh visions of urban life. It has a directness and clarity about it that defies misinterpretation.

Born December 2, 1951, Linda Vallejo is the oldest child of Adam Cavazos Vallejo and Helen Munos Vallejo. A brother and sister followed. Her father was in the Air Force so, though born in East Los Angeles, Linda spent her childhood traveling all over the United States and Europe. She currently lives in Long Beach, California with her husband Ron Dillaway and sons Robin, ten and Paul, eight.

Linda identifies herself as an indigenous Chicana. Her father's family has been in California for five generations, while her mother's family emigrated more recently from Mexico. Linda tells me, "My favorite thing about being Chicana and Mexican is that I'm an Indian." For the last fifteen years she, along with her sons and husband, has been practicing Indigenous American religion.

We sit at a small table overlooking downtown Los Angeles. From time to time the small portable phone at Linda's elbow rings and she answers it briefly and efficiently. She calls attention proudly to her black wool suit, a recent birthday present from her father. In addition to the gallery, Linda works as a consultant and grant writer for nonprofit organizations. She also teaches grant writing and personal management workshops.

Linda speaks in a direct, machine gun fashion. Information, opinions and feelings spill out at a relentless pace. Here is someone who is entirely clear about where she has come from and where she is going. I love her high expectations for herself and determined willingness to work for her goals. Giving up is not in her vocabulary.

Because of her military upbringing and the fact that she traveled so much as a child, Linda grew up separated from her Chicana culture. It wasn't until her twenties that she discovered it. I ask her what it was like to travel so much. She laughs and answers. "You take a Chicana, turn her inside out and upside down and flip her around a little bit, and that's what happened to me. I've been pressured into being myself all my life, because I've never had a group to cling to. We were always moving so much, I developed a character that Ethel Merman would enjoy. A sort of Rock of Gibraltar. And every now and then it cracks, too. But the travel was incredible. I saw the Roman ruins, I visited France, I visited Portugal. I studied theater in London. I went to high school at a private boarding school in Madrid, Spain. I did the preppy thing, almost."

The early sixties found Linda in Montgomery, Alabama when the schools were being integrated for the first time. She was there to witness all the riots and killings and bombings. It was an experience that affected her deeply. I ask where she, as a Mexican American, fit in. "I didn't," she says sadly. "I couldn't go in the black bathroom. And if I went into the white bathroom, I was afraid that someone would . . . A lot of people thought that I was Creole. Or Puerto Rican. Or Cuban. They didn't really know about Mexicans in that part of the country. I had white friends who knew that I wasn't black, but I never dated. And that hurt."

Loneliness is a constant theme in Linda's life. She brings it up frequently during our conversation as a reason for her life choices. "I studied a great deal. Spent a lot of time alone. My parents were really big on doing well in school. I had already decided to go to college when I was seven years old and to become an artist. I was unhappy as a young girl. It was too much loneliness for me. That's why I got married and had to have children. I just couldn't be alone in a studio for the rest of my life. It would have killed me."

Her experience growing up in a military environment overshadowed much of her childhood. She learned organizational and speaking skills, but the life was harsh. "We were independent, because we had to be. My father was a diplomat for many years, so we had to be well dressed and prepared. I learned how to speak well, because I was always being asked questions by diplomatic individuals. I was on cue quite a lot. It's really not a lot of fun being a military child. The most exciting thing, really, was the travel."

Linda's father, who retired as a colonel, was in the military for twenty-eight years. He started out as a pilot, but for the last ten years of his career was a diplomat. Subsequently he earned a law degree and now has his own law firm. "My mother was the consummate diplomat's wife," Linda adds. "We were surrounded by a lot of love and a lot of interests. But there was a lot of pressure, too. There still is. My dad loves it." Linda chuckles. "That's why he's a lawyer. He loves that stuff."

"Did your mom love it, too?" I ask.

"Apparently." Linda laughs again. She enjoys her parents. "Imagine her, coming from a poor, farm worker background, wearing cocktail dresses, getting to go to diplomats' parties and hanging out with the Prince of Spain. It has been like a Cinderella story for my mom. I have photos of her in the most fabulous gowns. She's always been a looker. She's real young, only

sixty-three. So is my dad. When I go out with my parents, people think they are my brother and sister."

Linda has nothing but praise and admiration for her mother. "You can tell that she nurtured me and protected me a lot as a woman, because of the courage that I have today. Everything grows around her. She treats her plants and her children with the same kind of loving touch. I had the patent leather shoes and the handmade dresses. I was the first granddaughter on both sides, so I was pampered pretty terribly.

"The children love to be with her, because she's really kind of funny. We sit around and just cut jokes and laugh all the time. She's incredible. And she's suffered her own illnesses in her own time. The one thing about my mom that I admire is, when the shit flies, my mother just stands up and beams."

"Like what?" I ask.

"She had cancer." Linda replies abruptly. "They did a mastectomy on my mom three years ago now. But she saved everybody, nobody saved her. It was because of her attitude about her physical being and about her health."

"What was her attitude?"

"She took charge. She made all of her own decisions regarding her healthcare. She didn't become super weak and then afterwards blame everybody, because they didn't make the right decisions. My father just said, 'Helen, it's your life, you have to do what you have to do.' And she just did it in the most beautiful way.

"She has a great sense of humor about it. She had the mastectomy within forty-eight hours of the test and the next day, when everybody was in the hospital ready to start crying, my mother was sitting on the bed, cracking jokes. Boob jokes. I knew she had her private moments, but she wasn't doing the self-pity thing. And she never did. It's been very amazing. I'm very, very proud of my mother. She has a lot of resilience.

"If you really needed somebody to be there for you, my mom would be there. That's how come my dad made it as far as he did."

Linda smiles as she adds, "You know what they say, behind every really great man, is a better woman."

I nod. "I believe that one."

"The men need the women to stand behind them or else they just topple. In the Native American Indian tradition, the women always stand behind the men. Everybody thinks it's because they are subservient. It's not the truth. It's because the guys are supposed to take the first shot. But the women are in the back literally holding them up. In all the ceremonies, the women stand behind the men for that reason. It's the power of the women behind the men that allows them to do what they do."

"Who helps the women?" I wonder.

"God, Mother Earth. The women are born with strengths that men just don't have. Statistically, there are more male babies born, but more male babies die. Giving birth can be compared to being shot." Linda tips her head back and roars. "Women's pain tolerance is twice as high as men's. That's why women live longer. Why do women go through birth, bleeding every month and live longer than guys? Because they're stronger."

"Hmmm." I pause here. I need to think about that.

Linda has consciously wanted to be an artist since the age of seven.

She has strong memories of making art at age three or four while at preschool in Germany. "Can you imagine?" she hoots. "Who did preschool in the fifties? Me. I remember we did finger paints on an egg for Easter and I was extremely happy. I'm still painting.

"I won my first awards for art when I was six years old and my work was put up on the bulletin board. I was writing little stories and pictures at that time and I did the plays in my neighborhood. I was also always asked to do art for people when I was very small. When I was in high school, I was writing music and playing the guitar. I wrote my first song when I was twelve." She stops here and explains matter-of-factly, "But I gave up music to paint. I wanted to be a mommy. You can't do everything."

After high school in Spain, she returned to Southern California to be with her family. She received a bachelor's degree from Whittier College, then took a two year break before graduate school. In her typically rigorous style, she said to herself at the time, "If you don't produce a portfolio when you get out of undergraduate school, you don't deserve to go to graduate school to study art. I want to see what you do." She then produced a series of linoleum mono-prints and etchings that gained her acceptance at California State University at Long Beach. "It was a good and inexpensive school that I could afford to put myself through. I modeled in art classes and did factory work and worked at Self Help Graphics as an art instructor to get my MFA in lithography. I did really well in school."

Linda pauses in her narrative to add, "I haven't painted for about six weeks but you'd think I hadn't painted for six months, the way I'm agitated and upset. But if I don't paint, the loneliness takes over. Being a physical human being is difficult for me. I'm much more spirit than I am body and it's hard. So I fill it with the massive portfolios of work and the two businesses."

Growing up so separate from people, her models were the great artists in the museums she visited. They affected her deeply. "I got to see the Louvre and the Prado and all the museums. I got to see all the Italian art. I got to see the Sistine Chapel before I was graduated from high school. That poetic artistic soul is not just something that belongs to dead people. I really get upset about that. We have all the feelings that Van Gogh or Picasso or any one of the ones that you want to mention had. That's what we have in common. The artist's soul is a big elastic thing."

Her extended family was also a source of inspiration. "My great grandmother and my grandmother and my mother were very important to me in terms of resilience and truth of character. Hard working, optimistic, always willing to give me what I needed to be able to feel good about what I was doing with my life.

"Yet I wasn't surrounded by women of color. I was the only Mexican in my junior high school. The only other Chicano in my high school was a boy and he dated all the blond cheerleaders. I didn't even know what it was to be Chicano or to be a woman of color until I came back to the United States when I was twenty-five years old. And I found out about this fabulous culture that I was a part of."

"Even when you were in college in Whittier you didn't know?" I ask.

"I had no sense of it at all." Linda explains, "I was an artist. I dressed like an artist, looked like an artist. I was in the theater department all the time. Painting, too. I was either writing music for the plays or writing the plays or doing the props for the plays or acting in the plays. My whole life was art, art, art."

Nowadays Linda is well connected to the Chicano art movement. "We understand the same language. We understand what the aesthetic means, what the lifestyle means, what the commitment means. It's been seventeen years, so people call me Vetarana now. Old timer." Linda laughs long and hard. "The other day someone introduced me as one of the high priestesses of the Chicano art movement. I paid a big price for that intro and it meant a lot when she said it. Now I'm a Chicana in Native American ceremonial. I've just had my fifth year anniversary of conducting Native American ceremonials in women's prisons."

"Can you be more specific about which Native American tradition you are following? Is it secret?" I ask.

"No, no," she assures me, "it's not secret. It's just somewhat difficult to explain. But I'll try. My family and I have been adopted by Sioux, Navajo and California Indian people. The Sioux is the largest tribe in the United States right now. We participate in Bear Dance ceremonials, Sun Dance ceremonials and sweat lodge ceremonial. And although I conduct the sweat lodge ceremony in a lodge that is built according to the Sioux traditions, I am welcomed as a Chicana to pour water. I use the California Indian songs, Sioux songs and personal songs that have been given to me to conduct the ceremonial."

I ask how she first met her husband and she answers, "I was so incredibly independent, kind of a big mouth, always doing what I wanted to do. I really didn't know whether I would find a man that would marry me and make a family with me. But my husband is an exceptional human being. I lucked out. I picked him up at the LA airport. 'Hey, you're cute, do you want to have a cup of coffee?'" She was twenty-one and a hippie. "It turned out that we were getting on the same plane going to the same place. We dated over Christmas and we've been together ever since. Twenty-one years later, here we are.

"Ron's a very different person than I am. What we actually have in common is the home front, where the children are raised and the way the house is. The way we were brought up was very

much the same. We are also developing a spiritual relationship now, but it's taken many years. I've always felt it's been a plus that he hasn't been a heavily spiritual Christian white guy, because I probably would have had a lot of trouble bringing Native American Indian thought and philosophy into my house."

Her voice becomes strained when she speaks about her struggle to have children. "I knew I was infertile since I was fifteen because I never had regular cycles like other girls did. And that fed into my fear of not ever meeting a man, being married and having children. I thought, 'What man's going to marry me if I can't have children and make a family?' I thought for a long time that I would end up single, living in New York in a loft, producing a lot of art, traveling back and forth to Europe and Mexico." Linda chortles as she adds, "And raising a lot of good hell, which I'm completely capable of, believe me!"

She then continues. "I went through major surgery and then lost two babies. I finally got my first son when I was thirty-two. And when the baby was born, I told them, 'Please, I need to sleep tonight, just keep the baby in the nursery and feed him with the bottle tonight.' It was thirty-six hours of labor and then a C-section. I was wiped out. At 2:00 in the morning, they brought the big pram with the babies all crying for their mommies. And I started bawling like the biggest baby you ever saw. I can still cry today, thinking about how I felt.

"At that moment it hit me that I could be a mom and I would be a good mom. For seventeen years, it appeared as if I wasn't going to get any children. And I was afraid that if I didn't get them, I probably wouldn't end up married. I would just go off and do my thing. As you can see, I'm doing it anyway. The only thing that really keeps me anchored is the fact that I go home every night and make dinner and take care of homework and wash babies and do Christmas.

"At one point, very early in my marriage, I was separated from my husband for about seven months. I was doing the infertility thing and I reached a point where I just couldn't suffer anymore. I got an apartment which was basically one huge studio. You know how that is. Your bed is somewhere underneath the canvases. Your telephone is some place. I looked at the walls and I said, 'I can't live like this, this is too lonely. I will go mad.' I went home."

Linda's journey to motherhood is symbolically documented in her work. She describes in detail what happened. "Before I had the kids, I took prints from my master's degree and folded them up into geometric shapes. Then I covered them with Plexiglas boxes and plastic. The work looked like abstractions of the inner body. One of my friends said it was about my infertility. Like a uterus and fallopian tubes that were covered with plastic film. And that is exactly what my insides looked like at the time. Everything was there, but with cobwebs inside my body. I then had surgery to clean it up. It didn't really dawn on me until later that I was creating inner vision with this outer work.

"I then did sculptural works out of wood which were about being born from the earth and being a woman and giving birth. The figures seemed to be breaking out of the wood. A friend said, 'There's a lot of pain in those sculpture pieces, Linda. I can't decide if they're being eaten alive by the wood, or whether they are actually emerging.' And I said, 'Well, that's because there's change.' It was me breaking into who I was as a woman." Linda nods and leans toward me. "A

lot of people don't know the real meaning of that work, because I don't share about my history and infertility."

It was during this wood sculpture period (1979-1980) that Linda was finally able to conceive. She had her first pregnancy in 1980, but lost the baby. In 1984 she gave birth to her first son. During this period she also started her involvement in the Native American spiritual work. "I had begun sun dancing. Sun dancing is an amazing ritual that takes place over four days and three nights, where you don't drink or eat. You stand in the sun all day and dance with several hundred people. I think the dance healed me so that I could become a mother. It centered me spiritually.

"And then I did this whole series of paintings of beautiful, beautiful images of women in different erotic poses, poses of what might be considered mature womanhood. So the child thing and the spiritual thing and the family thing are completely interlaced."

Linda pauses and explains, "I don't like cathartic work, even though some of my work is specifically personal and very cathartic. I would rather take personal catharsis and turn it into language which connects me to other people. I want to have community. I want to have relationships with people. I'm not going to become Frida Kahlo. She became very myopic and pretty much buried herself in those images of self-pity. I decided to work towards transcendence and transformation."

But as a mother, Linda is securely grounded in the material world. "I'm real good at telling my kids the truth," she says proudly. "One time we were driving down the street and we saw a homeless guy, who had obviously had a hit of something because his eyes were bopping in his head. At the stoplight I said, 'Boys, check this guy out. Don't stare, don't point, but check this guy out, see his eyes? He's probably just gotten some heroin or some crack cocaine at one of the alleys around here. And that's what it looks like.'

"I also give those responsibilities and a lot of freedom, because I trust that their knowledge protects them. I'm big on education and they're both at the top of their classes. They both have access to making money. We have a point system at the house for chores and art and music and studying math. Three points are a dollar. They can set goals and buy things for themselves. They both have savings accounts.

"I also think that giving them a spiritual core has been very important. Robin and Paul oftentimes will conduct ceremony with me. One will sit on my right, one will sit on my left. I take them into women's leadership circles. They see me in leadership and see that women have leadership responsibilities and it's important to respect women. I'm hoping that rubs off. I think it is very special for any child to be involved in the spiritual choice of their family. Family and spirit is where all the strength comes from. You can do anything you want from there on out."

Linda's biggest challenge as a mother is her lack of patience. "I have a bad temper, but I try real hard to be honest about it. I apologize for my fits immediately after and explain things. One day Robin said to me, 'You know, Mom, you're really too hard on yourself.' So I know that they're not afraid of the rage. Everybody carries something. I carry anger. I never hit my children, but I do

abuse them with my voice. Right around PMS time, man, I just hit the ceiling and pick a fight. They don't last too long, though. That's the good thing."

Linda knows all about support. She knows how much she needs and what kind. And she figures out how to get it. "My maid has been with us seven years." Linda talks even faster. "She's also my baby sitter. She's a Mexican woman who comes to my home. She's my confidante and very close friend. We got her papers, we got her dental care, we got her a gynecologist. Without her, I couldn't possibly do what I do. She's very ill right now and I miss her desperately. That's another reason why I'm agitated lately. I don't have the help, the backup that I need.

"My mom takes my children, but we don't live close enough for her to have them all the time. Most of my girlfriends are so busy with their own children that I don't get backup from them. LA is so spread out that your best girlfriend lives thirty miles away. In my old neighborhood, I had a wonderful woman named Marge, who lived across the street and took care of Robin every day when he was a little baby. And I had someone cleaning my house, so I could really grow and do things and come and go as I needed to and still be able to be a mom."

Linda sighs. "I wish I had more support. If all of my best friends and my sister and everybody could all live in one neighborhood, it would be fabulous. I worry about my children in the urban center so I don't tend to leave them around. I would think even in the rural areas it would be pretty difficult.

"My husband is the strongest support for me being a mother. He does the schlepping with the baseball and the basketball. He takes Paul to his horseback riding lesson and helps me with the children and cooks for them when I can't be there. It's unfortunately down to the nuclear family. There isn't much extended family around anymore. That's why I insist on being married with children. I would never want to be single with children. I can't imagine the isolation. You'd literally have to live in the same neighborhood as some of your relatives to be able to get the backup you would need."

Linda is also proud of the artistic support she gets that enables her to do all that she does. "How many artists do you know own a gallery and still have it after four years? I get support from the Latin American community, because I'm not just an artist trying to make money and be famous, I also have a family. The heart and soul of the buying clientele are my people in the indigenous Chicana community, people who I sweat with and dance in ceremonial with and pour water for and teach their children. That's how this thing thrives and how it really pulses. Hundreds of people support me in this.

"Artists support me too. Last month an artist sent me a check and said, 'Gee, Linda, we know how hard you're working and dammit, you deserve to make a living, too.' The gallery business is really very difficult. There's some money, but nothing that really matters. And he took pity on me. Can you imagine?"

Her children and husband also tell her honestly what they think of her work. "Oh, they like some, they don't like others. They'll come into the studio and say, 'That one is not done is it? I think it really needs some blue over here.' Yeah, the kids are great, they do their own paintings. They

are very good, especially my little one. And they know that, contrary to what people might think, we could take these paintings here and burn them right now and it really wouldn't affect me very much."

I look closely to make sure she is serious. She is. "Why is that?"

"Because the paintings are not me," she explains. "They are not my children, my religion, my body or my mind. The paintings are paint on paper. And I can create millions more."

"So it's the doing." I comment.

"It's the doing for me," she agrees. "It's being an artist and producing that means everything to me. When it was really tough times and I was trying to save money, I produced two one-woman shows out of a studio in my house for two consecutive years. I did it as a way to prove to myself that I can work anywhere. To people who say to me that they can't produce because of this or that I say, that's baloney. You can produce anywhere if you want to.' I produced forty in five months, including twenty major paintings, between nine and one in the morning, on a little rickety easel in the corner of my den. My children were there and saw all the processes."

Linda grins when she thinks about how her artwork will affect her sons. "Oh God, I won't know for another twenty years. People say, 'Are you teaching your kids art?' I go, 'No, believe me, by the time they are teenagers, they'll hate the fact that I'm an artist.' They'll say, 'Well gee, Mom, if you hadn't been an artist, I could have had that electric car when I was sixteen.'

"I'm not going to teach them anything. They'll watch me struggle, they'll know the whole thing. And people go, 'Do you want your children to be artists?' I say, 'No, I don't.' If they have to be artists, then I will help them. I will teach them marketing, I'll teach them everything to help them make it through. But if I have a choice, I'd like the little one to be a veterinarian because that's what he wants to be. The big one wants to make money so I told him flat out, 'You want money? There ain't no money in art. Be a collector.' I've already started their collections for them. I'd like them to support art and artists. There's a million of us. We need every collector we can get, even if he is only nine years old."

Would she ever consider leaving her family? Linda answers me seriously. "Well, I was separated from my husband early on. But at this time, no. I wouldn't even consider it. Being without my children would just devastate me. You could destroy all my art and I could make it.

You could take my spiritual work away from me and I think I could make it. You could take my business away from me and I probably would throw a party. If you took my husband away from me I would be very sad, I doubt I would marry again, but I would make it. But if you took my kids from me, I just don't think I could make it. I'd probably paint devastated art about that forever. Horrifying thought."

Throughout the interview I have been impressed by Linda's ability to orchestrate all the parts of her life. I ask how she does it. She answers immediately. "My philosophy has been that if you combine the spiritual, the psychological, the physical and the creative together, into a strong group of four, you can have a whole life and actually accomplish something. If I let the spiritual

go completely and just did the art and the business and the family, I wouldn't be complete. If I let the art go and did the family, the spiritual and the money, I still wouldn't be complete. And on and on around the circle. Each one has to be given a certain amount of attention. I've built a philosophy that makes me the closest to a whole human being that I can become." She smiles broadly and adds, "I don't think in little strands of hair, I think in full heads of hair."

"It sounds like all of those things nurture you," I comment.

"Yes," she says with satisfaction, and adds adamantly, "I'm not the kind of person who keeps running. I'm very willing to say, 'My kids are sick and I can't be there today.' I don't stay out late very often and I'm not the self-sacrificing type. You'll very rarely see me ill because of it. Money isn't worth it. Nothin's worth it. Not even ceremony is worth it. Your first and foremost responsibility is to take care of yourself, to heal yourself, so you can do your work. Who cares if you're different from everybody else in your community? Your spirit and philosophy are very personal. Only you know what makes it tick and what brings the rhythm. That's what life's all about. You've gotta figure it out."

When she does get frustrated at not having time to work on her painting, instead of getting angry, she quickly rearranges her schedule so she can resume work as soon as possible. "Like today? As soon as we leave here, I'm driving down to the studio. I've already made arrangements to stay late tonight. And I'll probably get there and just sit at the easel, looking into space, trying to reach it. You know that philosophy I was telling you about? It has a schedule that goes with it. Studio two days a week, gallery three days a week, writing grants one day a week. I'm very military like."

Linda further describes her schedule. "Right now I have a new client and my schedule is sort of topsy turvy. But once I get into the rhythm of it, I'll pick a solid day and a solid night to paint. And then I'll just do it religiously and there ain't nobody that'll stop me. Because the painting has to go on all the time. If it stops it's like being constipated for days. My spiritual work is basically one Sunday a month when I pour water in the prison. We do major ceremonial twice a year. It's like a big family vacation in late July, early August, I close the gallery and we go to big ceremony in Arizona."

But Linda rarely travels on business. "I usually make the price so exorbitant that they don't take me. Instead they pay me to stay in town and work while they're away. I don't travel with the gallery either. If I travel, I travel on vacation and take my family.

"I wasn't the kind of mom who took my kids all over the place either. When the kids were little, for years I didn't go to openings. 'Why don't you drag your kids along?' people would ask. Because kids aren't going to have any fun there. All there is, is liquor and chips. And there's all this noise and all these people. They're going to have enough art openings to gag on by the time they're thirty. Who needs more of chat?"

This separation of business and family life is important to her. "No one has my home number. If you want to see me, you have to come to the business. And no one even knows how to reach

me at my studio. The appearance is that I'm rarely at home but it's actually the opposite. I'm home quite a lot. I cook four nights a week."

She becomes angry, "People get on my back about it. They tell me the business would be stronger, my career would be stronger, all this baloney, if I was out and about a lot. And I'm like, 'You know, fame doesn't really cut it for me.' When I sell a piece, now that cuts it for me. Then I can go home and do Christmas." She pauses and states, "I think fame is a lie."

Linda has created a life for herself based on her own set of rules and standards for success and happiness. And by her own standards, she is exactly where she wants to be. For the future, she sees only embellishing. "I've already made all my choices. The business is doing well. My family's built. I have a good relationship with my husband, and my children are growing. It took me seventeen years to consolidate and create this plan for my life.

"Artistically, I want to have one-woman shows every other year till the turn of the century. My dream is to have the biggest party this side of the Pecos, December the 31st, 1999. I'm going to have a beautiful, first class patio party, with awards to artists and collectors. Tickets at the door. Artists for free. Artists deserve a lot for their sacrifices."

Linda has lots of advice. It comes out of many years of thinking hard about this subject. "Make a decision for your life and stick with it, be loyal to yourself. Nurture yourself. Think ahead, and don't get caught up with the baloney about being rich and famous as an artist. It doesn't exist.

"One of the lectures I give is about the philosophical core. In the center are inspirational experiences. You know how the center of the flower has little circles and poles that stick out with the seeds on the end? Each one of those stands for a moment when you're inspired. Inspired to begin a painting, inspired to do something special with your child or with your husband. From there come all the petals which are all the things you do. The paintings and the poetry and the trips with your family.

"Never allow anything or anyone to talk you out of creating. Never allow your creativity to take a back seat, but to sit right next to you in your life. I've met a lot of women who were painters then became mothers and are no longer painters. And women who don't paint as much as they need to. I can see that they are missing something. They have paid a price that they didn't have to pay.

"A long time ago somebody asked me a question about that and I said, 'Anybody who tells me I can't have it all can go jump in the lake. Because I'm going to have it all.' I was like, cocky, but I got tired of people saying, if you're a mother, you can't be an artist and if you're an artist, you can't be a mother.

"I was the girl who was forced to be independent because I had no one around me. But I also didn't have anybody telling me what to do or be. That's how come you end up with someone who can say, 'You know what? I'm going to be a mother and I'm going to be a wife and I'm going to have a house and I'm going to be an artist and you know something else? I'm going to own a gallery and I'm going to be spiritually and physically sound. So there!'"

