

CARMEN LOMAS GARZA

Background Information:

Carmen Lomas Garza now lives in San Francisco, but it is her native town of Kingsville, Texas, that is depicted in her paintings.

Within the close-knit Mexican-American community of Kingsville, Carmen received love and encouragement from her family and from a broad range of friends and neighbors. Still, she experienced the pain of prejudice when she ventured outside the comfort of her community.

Carmen's paintings focus on the joyful memories of everyday life with her family, as well as community festivals and events. Filled with familiar faces from her childhood, her *monitos* include her brother and sister, parents, and grandparents. The family cat and even the lizard she would sometimes see crawling on the porch are also depicted.

(All of Carmen Lomas Garza's artwork incorporates *monitos* (little figures), a term she learned from her grandmother. Each of her paintings illustrates a vivid memory of her childhood.)

Carmen paints images of growing up as a Mexican-American girl in Texas, so people can see how her life was similar to the lives of children of different backgrounds. But she knows it is also important to understand the differences between cultures. Respecting both similarities and unique qualities among people builds tolerance and understanding. In this way, Carmen's stories are educational.

When Carmen was in college she decided to dedicate all of her art to the Mexican-American community. It is her way of showing gratitude to her community and celebrating her rich *mestizo* heritage at the same time. She is very proud of her background, which can be traced to a mixture of races found in the United States for many years, including Native Americans and early Spanish settlers.

The Chicano movement helped give Carmen new pride in her heritage and her traditions. It was a liberating experience for her to paint the everyday scenes of her Mexican-American family and community in Kingsville, Texas.

from the webzine *del Corazon!* On the Smithsonian Art Museum Website
<http://www.nmaa.si.edu/>

Painting One: Curandera

Garza has painted more than one image of a *curandera*, a healer. In her book, *Family Pictures*, she describes how people would go to regular doctors for medicine, but would often also ask for a visit from a *curandera* to do a final cleansing. The *curandera*, a highly respected person in the community, would use herbs and incense during the healing.

Paintings Two and Three: Nopalitos Frescos/ Picking Nopal Cactus

“In the early spring my grandfather would come and get us and we’d all go out into the woods to pick nopal cactus. My grandfather and my mother are slicing off the fresh, tender leaves of the nopal and putting them in boxes. My grandmother and my brother Arturo are pulling leaves from the mesquite tree to line the boxes... This is my grandfather Antonio Lomas. He’s shaving off the thorns from freshly-cut cactus pads, called *Nopalitos*... *nopalitos* are called the “food of last resort,” because back when there were no refrigerators and your winter food supply would run out, you knew you could eat the cactus pads through the last days of winter and the early days of Spring. My grandmother would boil the *nopalitos* in saltwater, cut them up, and stir-fry them with chile and eggs for breakfast.” From the books *Family Pictures* and *En Mi Familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza.

Painting Four: *Cama para suenos/ Bed for dreams*

“My sister and I used to go up on the roof on summer nights and just stay there and talk about the stars and the constellations. We also talked about the future. I knew since I was 13 years old that I wanted to be an artist. And all those things that I dreamed of doing as an artist, I’m finally doing now. My mother was the one who inspired me to be an artist. She made up our beds to sleep in and have regular dreams, but she also laid out the bed for our dreams of the future.” From *Family Pictures*

Painting Five: *Para la cena/ For dinner*

“This is my grandparents’ backyard. My grandmother is killing a chicken for dinner. My grandfather is in the chicken coop trying to catch another chicken. Later, my family will sit down to eat Sunday dinner – chicken soup.

That’s me in the blue dress with my younger brother, Arturo. He was so surprised by the scene that he started to spill his snowcone. We had never seen anything like that before. I knew my grandparents had always raised chickens, but I never knew how the chickens got to be soup.” From *Family Pictures*

Painting Seven: *Sandia/ Watermelon*

“It’s a hot summer evening. The whole family’s on the front porch. My grandfather had brought us some watermelons that afternoon. We put them in the refrigerator and let them chill down. After supper we went out to the front porch. My father cut the watermelon and gave each one of us a slice.”

It was fun to sit out there. The light was so bright on the porch that you couldn’t see beyond the edge of the lit area. It was like being in our own little world.” From *Family Pictures*.

Painting Nine: *Cakewalk*

“Cakewalk was a game to raise money to send Mexican Americans to the university. You paid 25 cents to stand on a number. When the music started, you walked around and around. When the music stopped, whatever number you happened to step on was your number. Then one of the ladies in the center would pick out a number from the can. If you were standing on the winning number, you would win a cake. That’s my mother in the center of the circle in the pink and black dress. My father is serving punch. I’m the little girl in front of the store scribbling on the sidewalk with a twig.” From *Family Pictures*

Painting Ten: *La Feria en Reynosa/ The Fair in Reynosa*

“My friends and I once went to a very big fair across the border in Reynosa, Mexico. The fair lasted a whole week. Artisans and entertainers came from all over Mexico. There were lots of booths with food and crafts. This is one little section where everybody is ordering and eating tacos.

I painted a father buying tacos and the rest of the family sitting down at the table. The little girl is the father’s favorite and that’s why she gets to tag along with him. I can always recognize little girls who are their fathers’ favorites.” From *Family Pictures*

Paintings Fifteen and Eighteen: Earache Treatment

Here, Garza portrays another folk healing, this time a cure for an earache.

Garza, Carmen Lomas (1990). *Family Pictures*. San Francisco: Children’s Book Press.

Garza, Carmen Lomas (2000). *In My Family/En Mi Familia*. San Francisco: Children’s Book Press.