

***Sueños (Beds for Dreams)***  
by Carmen Lomas Garza

Carmen Lomas Garza is a Chicana (Mexican American) artist who lives in San Francisco but grew up in Kingsville, a medium-size town in southern Texas. Her family history in the Americas dates back to the 1520s when Spanish ancestors on her father's side first came to Mexico from Spain. Her father was born in Nuevo Laredo just before his parents fled from the hardships of the Mexican Revolution by crossing the Rio Grande into Texas.

Lomas Garza's mother's family had worked for generations in Texas as ranch hands or *vaqueros* (cowboys) and on the railroad. A great grandfather on her mother's side walked from Michoacán, Mexico, to Kingsville to work as a chuck-wagon cook on the King Ranch.

Lomas Garza has many stories to tell about her family's rich heritage, about her memories of growing up in south Texas, and about how supportive her parents were of her desire to become an artist.

Carmen Lomas Garza knew she wanted to be an artist when she was thirteen years old. She did not have access to art lessons, so she resolved to teach herself. She went to the library and checked out and read every book she could about art. She also practiced drawing every day--she drew pictures of people she saw at school, at home, and in her neighborhood, even drew her pets. By the time she reached high school, she had developed an impressive portfolio of work.

Within the close-knit Mexican American community of Kingsville, Texas, Carmen received love and encouragement from her family and from a broad range of friends and neighbors. But when she ventured outside the comfort of her community, she experienced prejudice. The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s helped give her new pride in her mixed Native American and Spanish ancestry. In college she decided to dedicate her art to the Mexican American community to show her gratitude and celebrate her rich *mestizo* heritage.

In fact, *Sueños (Beds for Dreams)* is dedicated to her mother, who also wanted to be an artist. Lomas Garza says,

*I have a very vivid memory of what people were doing, where they were, what they were wearing, the time of day, the colors of the atmosphere, and so when I recall*

*something, I have the whole picture in my mind. So when I'm getting ready to do a certain painting, I rely on what I already have in my mind, and then I do move some things around. I do have poetic license to make the picture be able to tell the whole story with all its details. . . . That actually is me and my sister Margie up on the roof. We could get up on the roof by climbing up on the front porch. . . . That's . . . my bedroom, actually it's the girls' bedroom. . . . My sister and I would hide there [on the roof] and . . . we also talked a lot about what it would be like to be an artist in the future because both of us wanted to be [artists]. And I dedicated this painting to my mother because she also wanted to be an artist. And she is an artist, she's a florist now, so her medium is flowers. . . . She gave us that vision of being an artist. . . . That's her making up the bed for us.*

-- from an interview with Andrew Connors, May 1995, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Lomas Garza has said that she want to make her art as easy, simple and direct as possible. Her paintings focus on joyful childhood memories of her everyday life with her family, as well as on community festivals and events. Some of her earliest paintings depict her grandfather and her in the garden. Others depict dinner at her house and couples dancing at a party. All of Carmen's artwork incorporates *monitos* (little figures), a term she learned from her grandmother. Her *monitos* include her brother and sister, parents, grandparents, and others. She also depicts the family cat and even the lizard she would sometimes see crawling on the porch.

She wants the Mexican American population to see themselves in her work, recognize that fact and celebrate their rich cultural heritage as a result. It is Lomas Garza's hope that, in this process, others will see similarities to their own cultures, or differences that are interesting to them and that they are curious about. She also wants her work to educate others as to who the Mexican Americans are as a people.

Carmen hoped that by painting positive Mexican American activities, her art might help eliminate the racism she experienced as a child.