



# Songs My Mother Sang to Me: An Oral History of Mexican American Women

By Patricia Preciado Martin

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Martin's quest took her to ranches, mining towns, and cities throughout southern Arizona, for she sought to document as varied an experience of the contributions of Mexican American women as possible. The interviews covered family history and genealogy, childhood memories, secular and religious traditions, education, work and leisure, environment and living conditions, rites of passage, and personal values. Each of the ten oral histories reflects not only the spontaneity of the interview and personality of each individual, but also the friendship that grew between Martin and her subjects.

*Songs My Mother Sang to Me* collects voices not often heard and brings to print accounts of social change never previously recorded. These women document more than the details of their own lives; in relating the histories of their ancestors and communities, they add to our knowledge of the culture and contributions of Mexican American people in the Southwest.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

As a counterpoint to the largely urban and California/Texas orientation of Chicano scholarship, Martin ( *Images and Conversations* ) has interviewed 10 Arizona-area Mexican-American women born in the early part of the century, showing the mosaic of life in rural and urban areas as well as ranching and mining towns. Aware of negative stereotypes of Mexican women, Martin notes that her subjects have a wide range of experiences—one working as a radio journalist, another a laundress and a third a Eucharistic minister at a hospital. The oral histories—presented as narratives, not dialogues—are full of details of the women's daily lives, from cooking to childhood songs to religious practice, but they likely will interest only specialists. There are notable moments: Julia Yslas Velez adopted a political maxim from a black activist: "I want Mexican faces in high places"; Carmen Celia Beltran recalls how her father's political involvement in Mexico forced her family to hide in the mountains. However, one wishes Martin also probed issues like class consciousness and marriage to Anglo husbands. Photographs, mainly of the subjects in their youth and their parents, add texture to the interviews.

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### Review

"Motivated by the love of her own Mexican American heritage, Preciado Martin has documented the lives and memories of ten women of her mother's and grandmother's eras. These women relate the histories of their ancestors and their communities, including their lives on family-run farms, in mining towns, and on cattle ranches, adding to our awareness of the culture and contributions of Mexican American people in the Southwest. Representing one of the few studies focusing on Arizona, on rural life, and on the transition from rural to urban, this collection provides an important counterpoint to the largely urban orientation of contemporary Chicano scholarship."—*Latin American Resource Review*

"Ten remarkable women—average age, 82—recall the triumphs and tragedies, joys and sorrows, of a bygone era in southern Arizona. Spanning the transition from rural to urban life, their stories form a mosaic of Hispanic culture in a world that was at once harsher and simpler than today. The author exhibits a rare sensitivity for her subjects and exercises a masterful editorial touch that imparts elegant simplicity to these distinctive voices. Absorbing, totally engaging celebration."—*Books of the Southwest*

"Like the dried meats and fruit preserves of the days before refrigeration recalled with such relish by her interlocutors, this book will stand the test of time. Its many evocative memories are bound to inspire the storytelling, remembering and dreaming of younger Chicanas seeking to build a present and a future in which to live proudly as Mexicans in America. And the many women readers who will come to this book because of their interest in learning about the pioneer Mexicans of Arizona will find a repository of unadorned, unpretentious and graceful stories."—*Women's Review of Books*

"Martin . . . has the heart and soul of a poet. A gifted short-story writer, she makes these oral histories sing."—*Southwestern Mission Research Center*

From the Inside Flap

Motivated by a love of her Mexican American heritage, Patricia Preciado Martin set out to document the lives and memories of the women of her mother's and grandmother's eras; for while the role of women in

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