

# Latino Roots Raíces Latinas

## José Luis Sámano & Ema Pérez

Ema Pérez was born in Cotulla, Texas on August 11, 1945. Ema's mother was born and raised in Mexico in a small rural town; her father was raised in Texas. Ema's mother's family raised animals on a small farm. They also owned a store where they sold items such as rice, sugar, and coffee. Ema's parents married in secret, most likely due to an anti-Catholic movement that prevailed in Mexico at the time.

Growing up in Texas, Ema found that people of Mexican descent were segregated from whites in restaurants, buses, and other public places. She remembers sitting as a child in the "Colored" section: "Colored meant Mexicans, Indians, and African-Americans." Ema remembers her family working very hard in Cotulla and elsewhere.

*"I had six brothers. I was one of the youngest yet I had to work as hard as the rest of them. I always was doing something to help out. When my Dad couldn't get work, he'd take all of his kids out with our old horse and wagon to cut wood and sell it to the neighbors. We would go around to different towns near San Antonio – Beeville, Dalles, Corpus Christi, Mathis, Kingsville...and cut wood and sell it around town or we would work gleaning corn for the farmers. I remember in Tyler, Texas, the farmer let us stay in this big warehouse. There were pinball machines in this warehouse. We worked there for two weeks. The reason I remember that is because my youngest sister died. I had two little sisters after me, but both died when they were babies. We worked there and as soon as we buried her, we left. Then we went to another little town and worked there and then we left. We moved on to another place after that."*

Ema began working at the age of six, starting with carrying water and moving on to picking cotton and other crops. "We lived in a migrant camp in Tulare, California...we picked grapes there. Then in Riverside we picked oranges and plums, and in Paris, California, we picked watermelons and onions. Then we went to the state of Washington to harvest sugar beets."

Ema came to Oregon in about 1958 at about the age of twelve. She and her family worked in Keizer and lived in a migrant camp by the Willamette River. They picked hops, beans, and other crops. During that time her brother contracted tuberculosis. The entire family was tested and Ema, her dad, and two nieces were then diagnosed with TB and were interned in the Marion County Tuberculosis & Health Center. "It took our family almost a year to get better. My dad and one brother were in the hospital even longer. They had to take part of my Dad's lung out. After that we moved to Silverton. We would go to the Mexican movies that were shown in Woodburn on Wednesdays."

Ema graduated from high school in Silverton and came to Eugene in 1965. She was recruited to the Upward Bound Program at the University of Oregon. "They recruited what they called 'disadvantaged' students, including African-Americans, Native Americans, whites, and Latinos. In fact, there were five Mexican guys and me." Ema completed her B.A. at the University of Oregon in 1972 and a Master's Degree in 1974. Ema had her daughter Consuela in 1975.

Ema met Luis Sámano in 1977. They first saw one another at mass at the St. Thomas More Newman Center at the University of Oregon. Luis asked Ema out to lunch. They got along and about six months later they got married. They each had a house and children and decided to consolidate their property, put their families together, and move to Alvadore. Luis started working for the 4J School District. Ema worked in family services for the state.

Luis retired in 2001 but remained active in Lane Community College, teaching at the Puertas Abiertas, (Open Door) Program, Rites of Passage. Ema retired from Adult and Family Services with the State of Oregon in 2003. They continue to be active in issues of concern to the Latino community such as voter registration, anti-immigrant state ballot measures, and bilingual access and education.

Their children have assumed professional positions in the education and health fields in the Eugene-Springfield area. Michael Sámano was the head of the Ethnic Studies Program at Lane Community College and completed a Doctorate in Education at Oregon State University in 2007. Debbie Sámano-Hopper became a nurse in the psychiatric unit at Sacred Heart Hospital in Eugene. Consuela Pérez-Jeffris was Assistant Director at the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Oregon and is now working at the UO Associated Students Executive Office at the Erb Memorial Union.



Ema Pérez nació en Cotulla, Texas el 11 de agosto de 1945. La madre de Ema nació y creció en un pequeño pueblo rural de México; su padre creció en Texas. La familia de la madre de Ema criaba ganado en una granja pequeña. También tenían una tienda en la que vendían víveres, como arroz, azúcar y café. Los padres de Ema se casaron en secreto, probablemente debido al movimiento anti-católico que predominaba en México en esa época.

Habiendo crecido en Texas, Ema encontró que las personas de origen mexicano eran discriminadas en los restaurantes, autobuses, y otros sitios públicos. Ella recuerda haberse sentado de niña en la sección para "la gente de color". "Gente de color significaba mexicanos, indígenas y afroamericanos". Ema recuerda que su familia trabajó muy duro en Cotulla y en todas partes.

*"Tuve 6 hermanos. Yo era una de las menores, pero tenía que trabajar tan duro como todos los demás. Siempre estaba haciendo algo para ayudar. Cuando mi papá no podía conseguir trabajo, se llevaba a todos sus hijos... en nuestro vagón tirado por un caballo... a cortar leña y se la vendía a los vecinos. íbamos a varios pueblos vecinos... Corpus Christi, Mathis, Kingsville... a cortar leña y venderla. O trabajábamos para los granjeros pizcando el maíz sobrante. Recuerdo que en Tyler,*

*Texas el granjero nos dejó quedarnos en su almacén. Había máquinas para jugar al "pinball". Trabajamos allí dos semanas. La razón por la que lo recuerdo es que se murió mi hermana. Yo tuve dos hermanas menores, pero ambas murieron cuando eran bebés. Trabajamos allí, y en cuanto la sepultamos, nos fuimos. Luego fuimos a otro pueblito, trabajamos y nos marchamos. Luego fuimos a otro lugar, y así."*

Ema comenzó a trabajar a la edad de 6 años, empezando por acarrear agua, y más tarde cosechando algodón y otros cultivos. "Vivimos en un campamento de trabajadores migrantes en Tulare, California... donde cosechábamos uvas. Luego en Riverside pizcamos naranjas y ciruelas, y en Paradise, California, sandías y cebolla. Luego nos fuimos al estado de Washington a pizar

*remolacha azucarera."*

Ema llegó a Oregón alrededor de 1958, como a los 12 años. Ella y su familia trabajaron en Keizer y vivieron en un campamento de migrantes por el río Willamette. Cosechaban lúpulo, frijol, y otros cultivos. Durante esa época su hermano contrajo tuberculosis. La familia entera se sometió a la prueba de la tuberculosis y Ema, su padre y dos sobrinas resultaron estar contagiados y tuvieron que ser internados en el Centro de Salud especializado en tuberculosis del Condado de Marion. "Le tomó a nuestra familia casi un año sanar. Mi padre y un hermano estuvieron en el hospital aún más tiempo. Tuvieron que extraerle parte de un pulmón a mi padre... Después de eso nos mudamos a Silverton. Los miércoles íbamos a Woodburn a ver películas mexicanas."

Ema se graduó del bachillerato (high school) en Silverton y se mudó a Eugene en 1965. Fue reclutada para el programa Upward Bound de la Universidad de Oregón. "Reclutaban a estudiantes 'marginalizados', y supuestamente ahí iban incluidos los negros, los indígenas, blancos marginados y latinos. De hecho, éramos 5 muchachos mexicanos y yo". Ema terminó su licenciatura en la Universidad de Oregón en 1972 y una Maestría en 1974. Ema tuvo a su hija Consuela en 1975.

Ema conoció a Luis Sámano en 1977. Se vieron por primera vez durante la misa en el Centro Newman de la Universidad de Oregón. Luis invitó a Ema a comer. Se llevaron muy bien y se casaron seis meses después. Cada uno tenía casa e hijos, así que decidieron consolidar sus bienes, juntar a sus familias, y mudarse a Alvadore. Luis comenzó a trabajar en el Distrito Escolar 4J, y Ema trabajaba en los servicios para familias del estado.

Luis se jubiló en el 2001 pero se ha mantenido activo en Lane Community College, dando clases en el Programa Puertas Abiertas, Ritos de Iniciación. Ema se jubiló de su empleo en Servicios a Adultos y Familias con el Estado de Oregón en el 2003. Ambos continúan trabajando en temas relacionados a la comunidad latina, como son el registro de votación, la legislación anti-inmigrante, y el acceso igualitario a la educación, así como la educación bilingüe.

Sus hijos ocupan puestos profesionales en el ámbito de la educación y la salud en Eugene-Springfield. Michael Sámano trabajó como director del Programa de Estudios Étnicos en Lane Community College, y está cursando su Doctorado en Educación en la Universidad de Oregón. Debbie Sámano-Hopper trabajó como enfermera en la unidad psiquiátrica del Hospital Sacred Heart en Eugene. Consuela Pérez-Jeffris fue Directora Asistente de la Oficina de Asuntos Multiculturales de la Universidad de Oregón y ahora trabaja en la Oficina Ejecutiva de los Estudiantes Asociados en el edificio de la Erb Memorial Union de la universidad.

### Latino advocates, supporters say legendary labor leader should be honored



Ema Pérez-Sámano (left) and Connie Mesquita, both in red tops, demonstrate in support of naming one of Eugene's new elementary schools after the late Cesar Chavez.

### Rally caps push to name school for Cesar Chavez

BY ANNE WILLIAMS  
*The Register-Guard*

Hoping to sway a school board viewed by some in the crowd as dismissive and insensitive, advocates of the name Cesar Chavez for one of Eugene's two new elementary schools held a spirited rally outside district offices Friday.

Wearing bright red arm bands and red bandanas, the many Latino youths there were the focal point of the midafternoon rally, which drew close to 150 people of all ages and colors.

David Piercy, a retired district administrator, nodded toward them before the rally.

"It's time to honor our Latino youth," said Piercy, who was there with his wife, mayoral

candidate Kitty Piercy. "Look at them all. I believe now they are the largest minority enrollment in the district, and it's a group of people that are sometimes alienated from schools. I think it's important to honor them."

Cinthya Martinez, a sophomore at Churchill High School, said the name would speak volumes to the Latino children of her

generation and those that will follow.

"It will really mean something to us and it will give us a label here in Eugene," she said.

The hourlong event capped a tense week in the lobbying effort, which began earlier this year as a polite suggestion from the Jefferson Middle School Latino youth club and

Please turn to **RALLY**, Page A13

Fotos: Ema en 1953; Ema con su familia en Woodburn, OR, 1987; Luis y Ema; Ema y Connie Mesquita en 2004.