

carmen meets

Cobalt Poets Series # 158 ~ February 19, 2008 - PoetrySuperHighway.com/cobalt



Born Chicago, Illinois, grew up in Mexico, Brazil, Texas and New Jersey. Since being drafted in 1961 (I was sent to Puerto Rico), have been very active politically, moving to Los Angeles in 1967 as a student activist. Participated in many demonstrations and political organizations devoted to social justice. Worked for 35 years in factories throughout L.A. County as a machinist. Retired May 2005 to devote full time to art & poetry.

pancho villa &

her stories all so sharp, straight-out
("muy franca") as when Pancho Villa
came to town, he strung
the chinos up on lamp-posts,
small business-men soon ran away
to refuge in Los Angeles.

now 93 at the end of this month,
she was 14 there in the
clean streets of Chihuahua when,
on horse-back, Villa had
her neighbor brought out into
the daylight: "llévenmelo y
mátelo" he ordered.

she never forgot.

they crossed the bridge,
El Paso 1926, some tall gavacho,
friend of the family, brought
her, her cousin & her aunt
into the U.S. & arranged
papers & transportation...

she told me that she cried when she
arrived & saw the poverty, dirt street
("142 steps" she always tells me)
of La Loma, all the way up at the
top of Chavez Ravine ("right there
behind 3rd base" is where my
brother-in-law points out
their house had been).

up there on the hill ("you would
have loved it, Don" she tells me)
everybody always inviting each
other over to taste some good menudo
they'd cooked up or to show
some quinceañera outfit...

on summer evenings they'd plug in a
toca-discos into the main power-pole
& dance (she loves to dance)
& Lalo's voice

would counter-point the mariachis
& norteñas, beer & home-made wine
kept them all dancing.

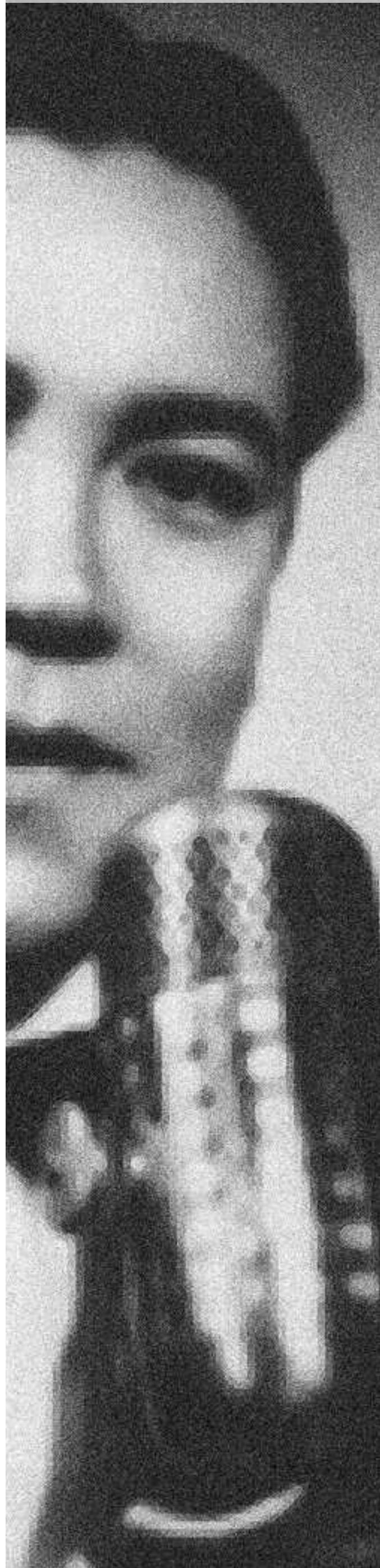
she paid her house off with her years
of work in garment-factories down
all those many steps in that L.A.
her husband would go off into
to dance-halls & perhaps turn up
much later on at City Jail, the neighbors
all pitching in to go his bail.

the Black & Jewish ladies taught her
English & she read newspapers &
all kinds of magazines bilingually,
when she spoke Spanish to her children,
they'd always answer her in English.

years later on a summer evening
we sat next to the stage,
Arroyo Seco Park, and there was
Lalo Guerrero, long craggy face
& guayabera rounding out his
grandfatherly form, just arrived
from Albuquerque - I'd met him
before, in Little Tokyo,
wandering among orange cones &
concrete barricades, baffled
by complex traffic pattern in
heavy construction,

across the street from the New Otani,
I'd helped him cross, so I introduced
them, she looked up at him
after so many years of listening
to his records & idolizing him,
the dances & schoolgirl memories
came rushing up into her eyes with tears
& he smiled down at her with real
happiness at this small lady
(almost 90 then), her proud face
shining out as he walked
up onto the stage & sang to us about
the beloved community.

lalo guerrero



Don Newton