

GLORIA VELÁSQUEZ

A WOMAN OF GREAT SPIRIT

BY JO ANN LLOYD

"WHEN YOU'RE BORN WITH NOTHING, you have everything," claims award-winning writer Gloria Velásquez, professor of Chicano literature and culture. "My parents were farm laborers. I grew up in a shack with no indoor plumbing."

A committed humanitarian who aims to correct injustices and right wrongs, the diminutive dynamo credits her humble beginnings for her strength and values. "If I had been born into luxury, I might not have become a woman of great spirit."

For 21 years, the native of Loveland, Colo., has served as an inspiration and role model to Cal Poly students, especially female students and students of color. "I want to teach them to appreciate diversity, embrace different philosophies, inspire social change."

Among her many accomplishments, Velásquez is San Luis Obispo's 2005 Poet Laureate. She is also a novelist, musician, teacher, mother, daughter, sister, grandmother and mentor. Many say she epitomizes the Chicana Superwoman, the title of an early collection of her poetry.

In the book's introduction, poet Margarita Luna Robles writes that Velásquez's poetry "reads like diary entries in the life of a Chicana." Her poems "do not relate what children might write in a school assignment about what they did in the summer. The journeys are the migrant fieldworker maps followed by many Mexicanos from the late 19th century to the present." □

MEMORIES

by Gloria Velásquez

In Johnstown, Colorado
thinning sugarbeets, the patrones
chopped wood, ice-cold water.

In Alamosa, Colorado
picking potatoes, straw mattresses
candles, oil lamps, canvas curtains.

In Denver City, Texas
sweat, construction workers,
brown barrios, haards of children.

In Loveland, Colorado
segregated neighborhoods, white schools,
cold lunches, used clothing.

In Greeley, Colorado
college degree, automatic dishwasher,
air conditioning, iced tea.

