

Águila:



The Vision, Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Two-Spirit Shaman in the Ozark Mountains

By Maria Cristina Moroles & Lauri Umansky

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are honored to include in this Voz issue excerpts of a new book, **Águila**, that details the journey of a Chicanita/Indigena growing up in Dallas, Texas being fully aware of her place in the world and suffering the "atrocities of the city" that drive her away from her familia which she recounts in the book. She eventually encounters a spiritual path that leads her to become a Two-Spirit Rainbow Prayer Warrior who now leads a sanctuary in the Ozarks of Arkansas. [Note, photos used here are not in the book.]*



Águila, formerly known as Sunhawk.

Awakening

I am an indigenous woman, a daughter of Tonantzin, my Mother Earth. I am a Two-Spirit Rainbow Prayer Warrior. I am Matriarch of Santuario Arco Iris, a wilderness healing sanctuary in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas.

A vision led me to this land, with the sacred responsibility to protect my Mother Earth here in all her aspects - her water, soil, rock, and all inhabitants: trees, plants, animals, and all humans. As steward and spiritual leader and teacher, I follow the guidance of nature, my Mother Earth, my Ancestors, and the Ancestors of these lands. Dreams and visions of past, present, and future times guide me.

My Ancestors -Coahuiltecan, Aztec, and Star Nation- lived in our original territories ranging from Utah to southern Texas to the Mexican states of Coahuila and Nuevo León and many parts of the surrounding Mexican states. Turtle Island is my Mother Land.

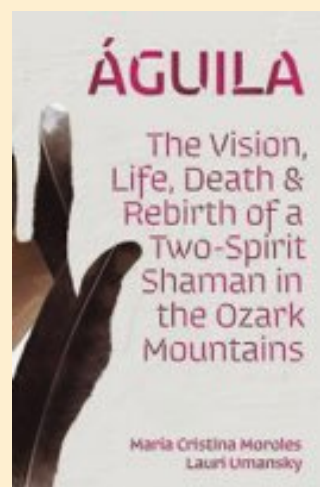
Like many indigenous people, we were forcibly displaced from our original home lands. Medicine people and elders from all around our continent have told me the story: We were displaced by white men's wars, their greed, their ignorance. They had lost their true spiritual wisdom, their

understanding of universal laws and knowledge.

I first came to this wilderness sanctuary to escape the atrocities of the city that had befallen me. I was led by a vision to this mountain, to heal and protect myself and my daughter. I was led here to live. Initially we sought simply to survive, with the intention to build a place where we could thrive. I needed to reclaim my self-determination, to remember who I truly am.

Over decades, I studied and received wisdom from North and South American masters of their own respected indigenous teachings and healing practices. My teachers, my community, bestowed upon me, not as badges to flaunt for personal or financial gain, but as recognition of sacred responsibility, these titles: Curandera Total, Chamán, Master Massage Healer, and Águila.

I always remember that I am only a part of a global indigenous family of women. This



memoir documents my story, the herstory of one woman who is similar to millions of indigenous women. As people of color, as women, we have all struggled and suffered atrocities to survive. This world we live in channels us from birth toward menial services as maids, housekeepers, bodies churning out babies to power the vast farms, factories, and prison systems. The few who hold excessive power live extravagant lifestyles off

the backs of people of color and those of low income. They continue to grab our lands, systematically stealing our way of life and denying us the most basic human rights.

I share here my story of waking up to remember our sacredness and the sacred universal laws given to us, the original indigenous people, by the Creator, telling us to protect our Mother Earth, protect the old, young, poor, and vulnerable.

I pray that my story gives others courage to face the challenges of these crucial, changing times. I share my story to demonstrate that we can rise above our oppressors' theft of positions of power and leadership, of resources, of the very land, our Mother Earth, and all Her bounty.

It is our time as indigenous women to speak out. We must act NOW for the survival of our indigenous peoples, our sisters, our children, and our planet, Mother Earth.

I may be labeled a displaced indigenous woman, but I am not that. My Mother Earth is everywhere I go. She is with me. She led me here. She led me back home to this sacred mountain. She and our Ancestors want us to remember, to never forget, our original ways. They know a time is coming, a time of great Earth changes. Now more than ever, we will need to remember and return to the original ways, to live in harmony with nature and our neighbors, to respect our Mother Earth and Father Sky, to respect ourselves and one another in honorable ways.

What I tell needs to be told. It is the true story, the apple cider vinegar version, raw and unfiltered. It takes fortitude to swallow, as it has taken to live. Brace yourself.

I will lead you along the path that brought me to a mountaintop in the Arkansas Ozarks. There my body lay wracked with hepatitis. There I died at the age of twenty-three, as buzzards circled in. Know that I will not abandon you in that place of desolation. On that winter day, as a red-tailed hawk screeched across the brilliant sun, scattering the other birds of prey, I returned to this world as "SunHawk." My new life began.

I am a Two-Spirit Rainbow Prayer Warrior. I am daughter of Tonantzin, my Mother Earth. And make no mistake: I am also a renegade, a rebel, a survivor, a survivalist, an adventurer, a homesteader, and a matriarch. I fear nothing. The Ancestors show the way

Dallas: Vision

My life took another turn.

I had a vision. It came first in a dream. I saw myself standing at the top of a mountain, almost as if I were a tree rooted in the soil of that place. At the same time, I could see myself from above, from an eagle's eye, distant yet clear, arms outstretched toward the sky. A wild, uncharted scent pervaded the air, like the trace of every being, plant or animal, that had ever existed, pressed into one clear essence. I could hear below the city in apocalypse, with sirens screeching and bombs blasting, people moaning and animals—dogs, cats, horses—wailing as they stampeded through melting tar roads to escape the burning metropolis. I felt safe on the mountain.

Somehow, I knew this dream to be more than a dream, even the first time it came to me. In its urgent pull on every facet of my mind and senses, in its defiance of the boundaries of perspective and time, in its call to levels of my being beyond those I could name, I recalled my most intense experiences with psychedelics. I took psychedelics not to get high in an ordinary sense. I sought truth: transcendent, lucid, prophetic. Why are we here on this Earth?

Why do we suffer? What are we supposed to be doing and how are we supposed to do it? I had asked these questions since childhood, finding no answers whatsoever in the fire and brimstone sermons at the Baptist churches my mother sometimes dragged us to. LSD, and psilocybin—the magic mushrooms— even more sharply, allowed me to pierce the veil, to glimpse the world of the Spirit. I ached for that world and knew when I touched it. I did not flinch at its brilliance. I craved it more than anything in the material world. And so, I knew this dream to be a vision when it visited me, and I knew that it held the meanings, the map, of my life's path.



An ojo de dios planted in the earth to look out over the land during an annual caminata at the santuario.



A river at the Santuario Arco Iris

...I told only one person about the dream: my mother. She closed her eyes as I described the vividness, the quality of light and sound, the perception of another realm. I could not liken the experience to an acid trip in the telling, of course. Instead, I told her, "If Jesús had this dream, he could sculpt it. Amá Angelita could have sung it. Words can't describe it."

"These dreams will come to you, as they come to me," she said. "Amá Angelita sings to you. The Ancestors speak to you. You must learn how to listen, mija. We bear this burden."

Afterword by Lauri Umansky

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This final excerpt is Lauri Umansky's afterword that details how the book was put together in an amazing collaboration.*

This book reflects a collaborative process. The process involved a deep dive into memory for María Cristina. She revisited, and spoke of, the experiences of a lifetime. Some she recalled for the first time in many years. Some she spoke out loud for the first time ever. Some she had told over and over, and not always in the same way, depending on audience and circumstances. These pages reflect the memories she wants to tell at this moment in her life, in as full or as truncated a form as she believes will preserve her story for posterity. I believe that she has told her truth as she understands it now, from the vantage point of almost seven decades of living.

This is always true of memoir, as of memory. We bring to it experiences we have encountered, reshaping our understanding of those experiences all the while. There is no static moment of original truth in memory, or in memoir. Beyond a few historical signposts, it cannot be "fact checked." Nor should it be. It is an exercise in creative nonfiction, truthful but also molded into a narrative.

Our practical process in writing the book went something like this: First I transcribed all of the tapes. This took many months of close work, much of it coinciding with my work quarantine at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Then, working with the transcribed material, I drafted sections of the narrative, using as much of María Cristina's actual wording as possible. Spoken word differs from written word at every level of structure, however, complicating the matter of "authorship" from the start. As I completed sections, I sent them to María Cristina. Did this section say what she wanted it to say? Did the words feel right to

her? She made many corrections, some of fact and some of sequence or tone or nuance. Each segment passed back and forth between us several times until it felt just right to her.

Occasionally we recorded a new session to fill in detail that our initial round of interviews somehow missed. María Cristina also sent writings she had done over the years: poems, prayers, blessings, ceremonies, recipes, eulogies. We worked some of these into the manuscript where we felt they belonged.

We included as many photographs as our publisher allowed, trying to give readers a fuller sense of the people, places, animals, and plants that populate the narrative. The photo essay about Isis in her final days, through death and burial, we included at the explicit request of Sheila "Isis" Brown upon diagnosis of her terminal illness.

I tried to stay out of the way in the telling of María Cristina's story. Recognizing the fallacy of that invisibility,

however, I have shared in this postscript some of the experiences and perspective that brought me to our collaborative work. We will leave it for readers, scholars, critics, and the future to name the genre, if they must. Is it an as-told-to memoir? Is it a co-authored work of creative nonfiction?

Yes and yes, I would say. For me, the book is a gift to a treasured friend as she works through the meaning of her time in this life. I believe that she has told her story with integrity and valor. It is a unique story of profound depth, written in the Book of Life for the ages, and preserved here in these pages.



María Cristina's familia is an integral part of her story including her brother, Jesús, who became a famous sculptor and died in a car accident. Pictured: *Disc Sun*, by Jesús Morales.



In her book, María Cristina recalls the tragic death of her comadre, Marsha Gómez, who was eulogized by a network of Indigenous mujeres at Alma de Mujer in Austin Texas. Pictured: *Madre del Mundo*.