

Linda

By Diana Burbano

A super badass story of finding your inner hero. A long monologue for a Chicana.

CAST: La Linda: A Chicana woman.

TIME: Now.

A cute Los Angeles bungalow. A woman comes out the front door carrying a box. She is singing "Los Laureles" from Linda Ronstadt's "Canciones de Mi Padre." She ends with a loud Mariachi cry. She stops, listening. Laughs.

LA LINDA:

If mi abuelita was still here, she would've answered back just as loud, and we would've danced around the kitchen, using cucharas for castanets until mi papa would yell at us to quit with the tonterias and get him a chela.

She sighs.

You can't go home again, que no? But what can you do?

This old neighborhood is getting so gentrified! The local paletero is some twenty-year-old white with wax in his mustache.

Indicating the box.

I'm glad I did an idiot check. I found this stuffed in the closet of mi 'ita's old room.

She sets down the box, which is labeled "Mi Linda." She opens it. Takes out Linda Ronstadt's "Living in the USA" record.

Look at this! Makin' the vinyl-lovin' hipsters jealous.

I wanted to BE Linda Ronstadt. For such a tiny little thing, Linda had such a big sound! I LOVED her god-so-beautiful voice and her cheesy, sexy look. I remember wearing the tube socks and short shorts.

Pulls a pair of roller skates out of the box.

My skates!

Tries them on.

¡Qué patas tan grandes! I begged and begged for them for my thirteenth birthday. I skated around and around our neighborhood that Saturday morning belting out—(sings) "You're no good, you're no good, you're no good bay-bee you're no gooooood..."—until Mr González came out and begged me to stop. He said I was flat. I said "So was Linda!" He said "I meant your voice." (sings) "I'll say it again..."

Sings a bit more of "You're No Good" to a Mr. González in the audience. We hear a door slam. Looks through the box. Pulls out a poster of Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman.

Oh, my god. Wonder Woman. La Mujer Maravilla. Dang.

Look at her teeny, eenie, eenie, weenie waist!

Wonder Woman was a Lynda, too. Lynda Carter! With a "Y" instead of an "I," for fancies. You know, I never missed one minute of that TV show. Not one.

La Wonder Woman gave me hope. Once, in the second grade, I got knocked down by this boy in my class. He'd pull my braids and sit on me like I was a pony. The teachers never did anything. When the bell rang, he whispered "wetback" in my ear. I knew what it meant. At seven years old, it wasn't the first time I'd heard that word.

I asked mi abuelita what Wonder Woman's golden lasso of truth was made of, and she said she had some of the material in her sewing kit!

I took my lasso to school. I tried to rope the boy, but I ended up whipping him hard in the face with the end of the rope. He told on me to the playground lady. She looked at me all stern at first, and then she smiled! She said, "Good for you, mija. Don't let no boy treat you like crap."

I wanted to be Linda. (pronounced Lih-n-da) Linda! (pronounced Lee-n-da) and fierce.

Sings the theme to Wonder Woman à la Linda R.'s "Blue Bayou."

"Wonder Woman... Where the world is mine, where I'm fighting crime, on the Bluuuuue Bay-ooooou!"

A badass superhero singer who could do whatever I wanted. Mujer Maravilla/La Cantadora Dorada!

Going farther into the box, she pulls out a program.

Ah. Middle school. Abuelita decided that she was going to send me to the "fancy" school near her work. It had better test scores, better students, no gangs. Yeah. It was white. I stuck out like a little brown sore thumb. Oh, Hera. I was miserable.

Right before Christmas vacation, that first year, I signed up for the school talent show. The popular girls howled laughing when they saw that. Jerks. They followed me around at recess, teasing me. Telling me to give it up; nobody wanted to see me onstage. I never cried. Never. Amazons don't cry. I was doing my chores that night and I THREW the laundry into the basket so hard it made the whole thing flip over onto the floor. 'Ita didn't yell, though. She helped me pick up the basket, made me pan con chocolate, and we watched her novelas together until I fell asleep.

That was a tough Christmas. The family mi 'ita worked for made her work late every night. And I don't know where she found the time, or the money, but when I opened my Christmas present, Abuelita had made me a Wonder Woman costume. It was nestled in a fancy box from Nordstrom, tissue paper and everything.

I waited to try it on until my brothers were outside trying to kill each other with their new lawn darts. I put *Simple Dreams* on the record player. I stripped down to my chones, and piece by piece I became la Mujer Maravilla. I put the tiara on my head and turned (*does the WW paddle turn*). I got super dizzy, but looking at myself in the mirror, I belonged in that superhero costume. This was baby feminista armor.

As Linda hit the last note on "Poor Poor Pitiful Me," a beam of sunshine came in through the window and glanced off the tiara. Just like in the TV show! It was a sign. I knew then and there what my talent show act was going to be. I'd played guitar for years, even though my dad said the guitar was for the boys

I knew I was asking for trouble. Look, all the other acts were basically a bunch of cheerleaders doing stupid dance moves to canned music. Two of them were dancing to "Play that Funky Music White Boy." Which should tell you all you need to know about my stupid school.

I was #12: really close to the end. I was pretty damn nervous. Had to pee SO BAD, but I couldn't get in and out of the costume in time, so I had to hold it.

My turn finally came. I rolled out onstage with my guitar. I toe-stopped, strummed my first chord, and sang: (*to the tune of Blue Bayou*) "I'm going back someday, come what may, to Paradise Isle... Where the girls are tough, And boys get roughed up, Paradise Isle... Where I can go... with my laa-ssoo, and I can clearly see, that familiar sunrise, through tied-up guys, how happy I'd be."

I got so into it that at the end I twirled and fell, (*falls*) but I played like I'd planned it. (*plays it off with a Flashdance gesture.*) Tada!

I was in a weird DC alternate universe. I knew people were laughing. I heard them. I didn't care. I bowed like I was Linda Ronstadt herself, at a concert in the Hollywood Bowl. Mi 'ita was clapping like crazy. I looked out, and yeah, it wasn't like I was winning everyone over. This wasn't an ABC Family movie, where all of a sudden I was accepted for my differences. They were laughing in that mean way kids have. But.

BUT. There were actually a few people who seemed to be clapping for real. A teacher I didn't know gave me the thumbs-up. Someone's mom was whistling. A cool-looking teen girl was smiling. I saw them. My fellow Amazons. In the sea of mockery I endured for the next 6 months, I remembered those genuine looks of approval and acceptance, and that fanned a little flame in my soul.

I got through middle school, and high school was a little better. I did so well, I decided to apply to college. I was the first person in my family to even try!

When I showed the acceptance letter from CSULA to mi 'ita, she was like, "No, duh!" Filling out my course schedule, I saw an elective called Xicano Studies. With an X. An X! Like X-Men, X. A superhero letter if ever I saw one.

That Xicano Studies class was so intimidating. Holy crap. It took almost till the end of the year for me to actually speak up in class. But I was listening. I found out so much about myself, about my family. About where I came from, and who I was. I felt like I had been born again.

I was doing research for a paper in my second year. The topic was "Latinas in the Media: Spitfire Sex Goddesses and Sexless Servants." Morrissey was on the record player, and, bored, I looked up at the wall of my dorm room. My friend, Tonantzin, who wanted to be the Aztlán Marilyn Monroe but feminist, had put up a poster that she found at a flea market in Hollywood. It was a collage of faces, of Latinos, Hispanics, Mexicans, who had worked in the movies and on TV. I had never really looked at it closely. I saw Rita Moreno, Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, and—I looked closer—there, in the middle, about three tiny faces apart from each other, there were Linda Ronstadt and Lynda Carter. My heart skipped a few beats.

Quiet.

Las Lindas were Mexicanas—my childhood totems, my guiding lights. Both of them.

I ran to the library for confirmation. I found out Wonder Woman's real name was Linda Jean Córdova Carter. Linda with an "I." Her mother Juanita was "of Mexican descent." And La Ronstadt? It was her dad's side.

Dude, Wonder Woman was the ultimate American hero, and she was MEXICAN!!!

Sings to the tune of the Wonder Woman theme song.

"Wonder Woman! Fighting for your con-sti-tutional rights!"

I wrote about Las Lindas for my graduate thesis on Latinidad in popular culture. When I read the paper, some jerks in my Xicano Studies class were ranking on them, 'cause they were all, like, "passing." What did that mean? Passing. Linda Ronstadt put out *Canciones de Mi Padre*. That was a hell of a "This is who I am" statement.

Mi 'ita, she read every book I brought home. She used to joke that she would be the next person from our family to graduate. I never doubted it. She was going to get a GED and go

to CSULA. She wanted to focus on myth, leyendas. Her Wonder Woman was La Virgen de Guadalupe. I think she could've gotten her Master's. She really would've blossomed.

She fights back her tears. Packs up the box and picks it up.

She was proud of me. The last thing she told me was, "Mija, eres la Mujer Maravilla de verdad, verdad." And I said, "No, Abuelita, La Wonder Woman? Eres tu."

Indicates box.

She kept my childhood in this box. For me? For herself? I'll never get to ask her.

Looks around.

I've got a teaching job across the country. We're going to Minnesota, te imaginas? I'm not scared. I'm excited to be a light in the darkness. Maybe there's a girl there who needs to meet a fellow Amazon. I'm taking my guitar and my roller skates, my gold bracelets and mi abuelita's love. I'm proud of who I am, proud of where I come from. I'm going to get in my invisible jet, go out over the Blue Bayou, and take over the world.

LIGHTS OUT