

Alejandra's Photo Album

Alejandra Kim Bolles

Artist, Writer, Head Chef and Star Sailor

February 26, 1938 – September 22, 2011

Alejandra was born in the Mayan city of Ticul, Yucatan and died in the Yale-New Haven Hospital. She grew up in a life of poverty but in 1964 she met David Bolles and was married to him in 1968. After her marriage she moved to Massachusetts and then a couple of years later to New Hampshire. When her three children reached school age she began to attend the University of New Hampshire and graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. While taking her classes she also taught Mayan cooking classes at the University and began to write her cookbook. She also worked on writing down Mayan folktales and helping her husband write a Grammar of the Yucatecan Mayan language.

One of David's avocations was sailing a Star boat. Alejandra learned to crew on it and together they participated in various regattas through the years. She formed many friendships while attending these regattas and was happy to renew them at the Centennial Regatta at Larchmont Y.C. which took place on September 13-18, 2011.

On the Tuesday two days after the Centennial Regatta she was admitted to the Yale-New Haven Hospital to run some tests due to chest pains and by Thursday she was in the operating room for by-pass surgery. She did not survive the operation.



On Impromptu, Star # 8035, at the Sunapee North American Championship, 2002

Photo by Guy Gurney

In the introduction to her cookbook Alejandra has the following account of her early life:

A Note About My Life

I was born in 1938 from a Mayan Indian mother and a Korean father in a place called Ticul which is a Mayan Indian town situated in the Yucatan peninsula.

My parents were very poor which was not strange to me because everybody I knew was the same. As a matter of fact I thought that we were well off because we had a taco stand at the railroad station nearby. There were two trains coming in everyday, one at seven in the morning and the other at four in the afternoon. The taco stand business was very hard because everything had to be ready for the arrival of the trains, and because the train only stayed at the station for twenty minutes, therefore you had to try to sell everything in this period of time. Most of the time there was a lot of food left over which I thought was great because then we could eat as much as we wanted.

The preparation of the food for the taco stand took all day. Most of the work had to be done by me and my older brother because we were the oldest. My mother was not strong enough to help because she was always pregnant. She had a new baby every other year until we got to be eleven children not counting the miscarriages.

There was a person in my life that helped in the shaping of my personality and beliefs. This was my Mayan Indian grandmother. Grandmother was a very down to earth woman. She helped me against my mother's rage when I burned the beans or when the chores were not done when my mother wanted them to be done.

There are two languages spoken in Yucatan, Spanish and Mayan. Grandmother spoke only Mayan whereas my mother would speak to us in Spanish. Therefore I grew up speaking both languages.

Grandmother taught me how to cook in a very primitive way with almost no utensils. We improvised for things that we didn't have. For example we used banana leaves for plates, flat limestone rocks to grind spices or sticks for stirring the food.

Grandmother never let the fire die out. She would bury the fattest ember in the ashes and miraculously the next morning uncovered it and start the fire all over again.

Because there was so much to do and so many babies to take care I only got to second grade which I failed because of so many absences. Then a Gringo from California married me and brought me to New Hampshire. I thought that I was going to loose my mind. There was nothing to do. All I had to do was to touch a button and the chores were done. Well, David the Gringo is very smart. He did not want an hysterical wife so he sent me to college and now I hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

Presently because the machines are still here to do my chores I continue taking art classes and go sailing with David on the weekends.

Alejandra's Memories

Over a number of years Alejandra wrote down memories of her childhood. This story, aside from following the life of Alejandra as she lived it under very trying circumstances of poverty, deprivation and parental abuse, also shows the unimaginable transformation of the people of Yucatan from the simple Mayan life style to the modern American life style which today has spread even to the people of most rural parts of Yucatan. For these memories see the companion book Alejandra's Memories.

Historical Background

Alejandra's parents were a mixture of Korean and Mayan. In the first decade of the 1900's Koreans were brought to Yucatan to work as slaves on the henequen plantations. At the time henequen from Yucatan was the main source for fiber to make bailer twine, binder twine, gunny sacks and other agricultural packaging material and goods. With the mechanization of farms in the U.S. and Canada there was a steadily increasing demand for the fiber. The local Mayan slave workforce was not sufficient to keep up with the demand, and thus the need to import laborers. At this time the Japanese had recently taken over Korea and were trying to rid themselves of Korean dissidents. They readily sold and shipped the dissidents off to foreign lands.

Alejandra's father's parents were sent to Yucatan as a couple. However, her mother's father was sent as a single man although apparently he had left behind a wife in Korea. At the hacienda which bought him there was a recently widowed Mayan woman who was a house slave, and as was typical of slave plantations everywhere it was the policy to have the women slaves produce as many offspring as possible. The hacienda overseer decided that Alejandra's Mayan grandmother should marry the single Korean, something she was not willing to do. In punishment she was required to come every day to "the big house" and was administered 12 lashes. Also, the food rations for her and her two children were cut back. Finally she gave in and married the Korean, and had two daughters by him. The youngest daughter is Alejandra's mother. The two children from the previous marriage were Alejandra's full-blood Mayan aunt and uncle, Tia Felipa and Tio Ladis.

At the time Alejandra was born in 1938, the Maya in Yucatan still lived very much the way they had lived for millennia. The Koreans, being mostly from peasant stock, for the most part adopted the Mayan life style, although they continued to have culinary habits, family values and social customs which could be traced back to Korea.

One of these family customs was that the oldest girl was destined to be the caretaker, not only of all of her younger siblings, but as the parents got older, of the parents as well. It was her duty to always be subservient to her parent's wishes, whereas the younger girls of the family had greater freedom, and in Alejandra's family's case all of these sisters went to school and became professionals. Alejandra meanwhile was not allowed to attend school beyond the second grade.

Another custom was arraigned marriages, which Alejandra managed to escape, much to the annoyance of her parents. With that Alejandra's parents gave up on any further attempts to arrange marriages, either for her or for her younger sisters.

Biographical Notes

Alejandra

Alejandra was the second child of 10 and the oldest girl. Because of this all of the household chores fell upon her once she was old enough to lift the babies, which were produced every other year, onto her hip and carry them about. She was a good and sensitive girl and a keen observer. Her upbringing was divided between three worlds: the Mayan of her maternal Grandmother, the Spanish speaking Mexican tradesmen of the downtown area with whom her parents frequently conversed, and the Korean which was her father's heritage and to some degree that of her mother's as well. Her full maiden name is Alejandra Kim Yu, but around the house she was called Ana Maria or Alejandra. Her Korean name is Su Choyin, meaning Aurora. The only photograph of Alejandra when she was young was taken as a group photo with her mother, three of her mother's children and some children of her mother's sister Tia Lola. Alejandra was about 3 or 4 years old when the photo was taken, because her mother is holding Yolanda, a small infant at the time the photo was taken. Yoli is the second child after Alejandra. Perhaps significantly, only Alejandra is dressed in the native Mayan huipil whereas the rest of the children are dressed in the Spanish Mexican clothing style of the time. Alejandra, because of her closeness to her Mayan grandmother, grew up bilingual and was equally at home speaking Mayan or Spanish. It was not until she went to school that she realized that there were two languages and that she had to be careful to speak only Spanish while at school. At the time, just as in the U.S., the Mexican government was trying to eradicate native languages. There was also a smattering of Korean words mixed into her vocabulary for those items such as Korean foods for which there were not adequate Mayan or Spanish names.



The earliest photo of Alejandra

Doña Martha
Alejandra's Mother

Alejandra's mother, Doña Martha, was the last of 4 living children of Alejandra's maternal grandmother Mam Uela, and one of two children fathered by the Korean Don José Yu. Her full maiden name is Martina Yu Chan. Although she was brought up in the Mayan world, she tried to present herself as being of the Spanish Mexican world. She spoke both Mayan and Spanish with equal facility and often slipped from one language to the other while speaking with people of the same social background. She was the darling of her family, with both her father and her mother doting on her, much to the annoyance of her older full sister Lola. She also elicited the same feelings from people from outside the family. It is not clear what the cause of her treating her children so brutally might have been, but for some reason she would beat her children, the oldest two especially, frequently and often mercilessly. At times the neighbors or her mother Mam Uela, should she be at the house, had to intervene to stop the beatings. Such things as not having the tortillas ready on time, or burning the rice, or other such would set her off and she would grab whatever was at hand, a belt, twigs, branches, sticks, etc., and start whipping Alejandra and her older brother Andres. She would even go so far as to tie their wrists with rope and stretch their arms upwards by pulling the rope over the rafter so they could not move while she was beating them. Such treatment of children in Mayan households is unheard of, so where this behavior came from is a mystery. She always viewed Alejandra as a servant, and even when Alejandra went back for a visit Doña Martha would begin yelling at Alejandra to do this, bring that, as if Alejandra had always been there serving her. Sometimes not even a "Hello, how are you?" is said when Alejandra arrived to visit, just orders are barked out. Not all of the children were treated so brutally, and the younger ones, especially the daughters, have no recollection of this behavior. For one of the daughters the pattern of having a favorite upon whom both the father and mother doted was repeated, although in this instance she was not the youngest of the girls, but rather the third from the youngest and 10 years younger than Alejandra.

Mam Uela
Alejandra's Grandmother

Alejandra's maternal grandmother, Mam Uela was born on the Hacienda Santa Rosa near Muna in the early 1870's and died in Mérida in 1967. Her maiden name was Manuela Chan. She was known to her grandchildren as Chichi, Mayan for "grandmother". She was raised as an indentured servant on the hacienda, or as the Maya themselves say, as a slave. She was married twice; first to a Mayan man who had the last name of Cen, and later after he died to a Korean imported indentured servant, José Yu. She had two living children from the first marriage, Ladislao and Elvira, and two from the second marriage, Lola and Martina. She grew up in a time of uncertainty and scarcity, and her small stature was a hint at her being malnourished while she was young. Because of these privations she had knowledge of how to live off the land. Despite her hardships she was a kindly person and treated Alejandra with respect. Because Alejandra's mother was frequently out of the house down at the market, which Alejandra viewed a blessing in disguise, Mam Uela was

Alejandra's principal mentor and teacher on how to do things in the house and in general was Alejandra's friend and companion. When things were not going smoothly in the house they would plot together on how to set things right so that when Doña Martha returned from the market after a morning of gossiping everything would hopefully be back to being acceptable so that Alejandra and her older brother Andres could avoid yet another beating.

Andres Alejandra's Older Brother

Alejandra's older brother was Andres. Aside from being Alejandra's partner in doing all of the household chores and getting things ready for the taco stand at the train station, which for a number of years was one of the sources of the family income, Andres was also the leader in the various adventures the older children would take into their surroundings. Over the back stone wall there was a semi-abandoned fruit orchard with a variety of tropical fruits and they would go there to play such things as Tarzan of the Apes and other such, climbing into the trees and swinging from the vines which hung from them. Andres' adventurousness eventually got him and the next eldest brother José into trouble. They became fishermen and were always willing to go out to areas on the ocean where the other fishermen would not go. On one of these occasions a storm came up and they were never seen or heard from again.

Other Characters

Andres Kim Jimenez, Alejandra's father

Don José Yu, Alejandra's maternal grandfather

Alejandra's younger siblings, in order of age: José (Chelon), Yolanda (Yoli), Wilber (Wili), Juan, Maria Guadalupe (Lupe), Ricardo (Archie), Leonor (Nochi), Martha.

Uncles, Aunts and Cousins:

Tia Lola Yu, mother of Alejandra's cousins Chula, Lupe, Manuela, Margarita (Goti), Carmen, Beto, Manuel.

Tio Manuel Kim Jimenez and wife Tia Margot, parents of another set of cousins; six girls and one boy.



Wedding photo of Don Andres Kim Jimenez and Doña Martina Yu Chan



Alejandra with her mother holding her sister Yolanda to her left and her cousins Margarita and Chula to her right.



Siblings Juan, José and Maria Guadalupe

Alejandra's Family Moves to Mérida

When Alejandra was 19 her family moved to Mérida. Now Alejandra was back living with her mother and father, and the old habits of them treating her as the servant began once again. While the rest of the daughters were sent off to school to make something of themselves Alejandra was required to run the household.

Fortunately for Alejandra, her closest younger sister Yoli shared what she was learning at school, and helped Alejandra to learn to read and write. Perhaps this experience led Yoli to become a teacher.



The second photo in Alejandra's life
taken after she moved to Mérida.



Alejandra's third photo, sent to the Gringo in 1966.



The wedding photo of Alejandra and the Gringo.



Yoli, dressed in Alejandra's wedding dress.



Yoli, dressed in Alejandra's Chinese dress, a gift of the Gringo.



Wedding day: Lupe, Doña Martha, Alejandra, Gringo.



Alejandra's Tía Lola and mother Doña Martha with Tía Lola's daughters,
Manuela, Lupe, Carmen, Goti, Chula



Wedding of Tío Manuel and Tía Margot
Doña Martha, Tío Manuel, Don Andres, Tía Margot, Mam Petrona, Tía Elvira.



Tío Manuel and Tía Margot
with Hermelinda, Lizbeth, Victor, Zoila, Telma, Laydi



Alejandra's first passport photo
taken before leaving for the US.

ALEJANDRA'S NEW HOME IN STOW, MASSACHUSETTS.







Alejandra in her new kitchen

ALEJANDRA SKIING IN THE APPLE ORCHARD





A VISIT FROM GRANDFATHER PIPER



With the Gringo and Grandfather Piper.

Humm! I'm not too sure about this!



With John Bolles and Grandfather Piper.



With John Bolles, Mary Piper Bolles and Grandfather Piper



With Peter Bolles



With John Bolles.

Well, I guess they are really not so frightening.



With the Gringo and Peter's children, Susie and Ben.



Second passport photo.

AFTER EDWARD'S BIRTH



The second winter in Stow, after the birth of Edward.

I love being in cold weather!!!



With Edward.



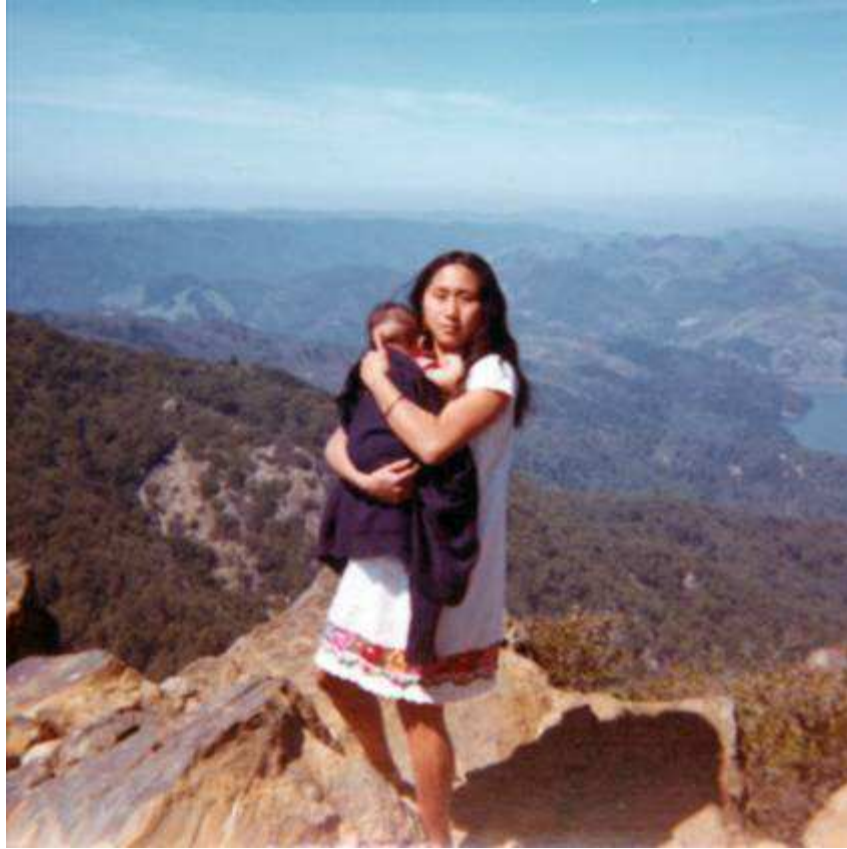


IN SAN FRANCISCO WITH EDWARD AND THE GRINGO



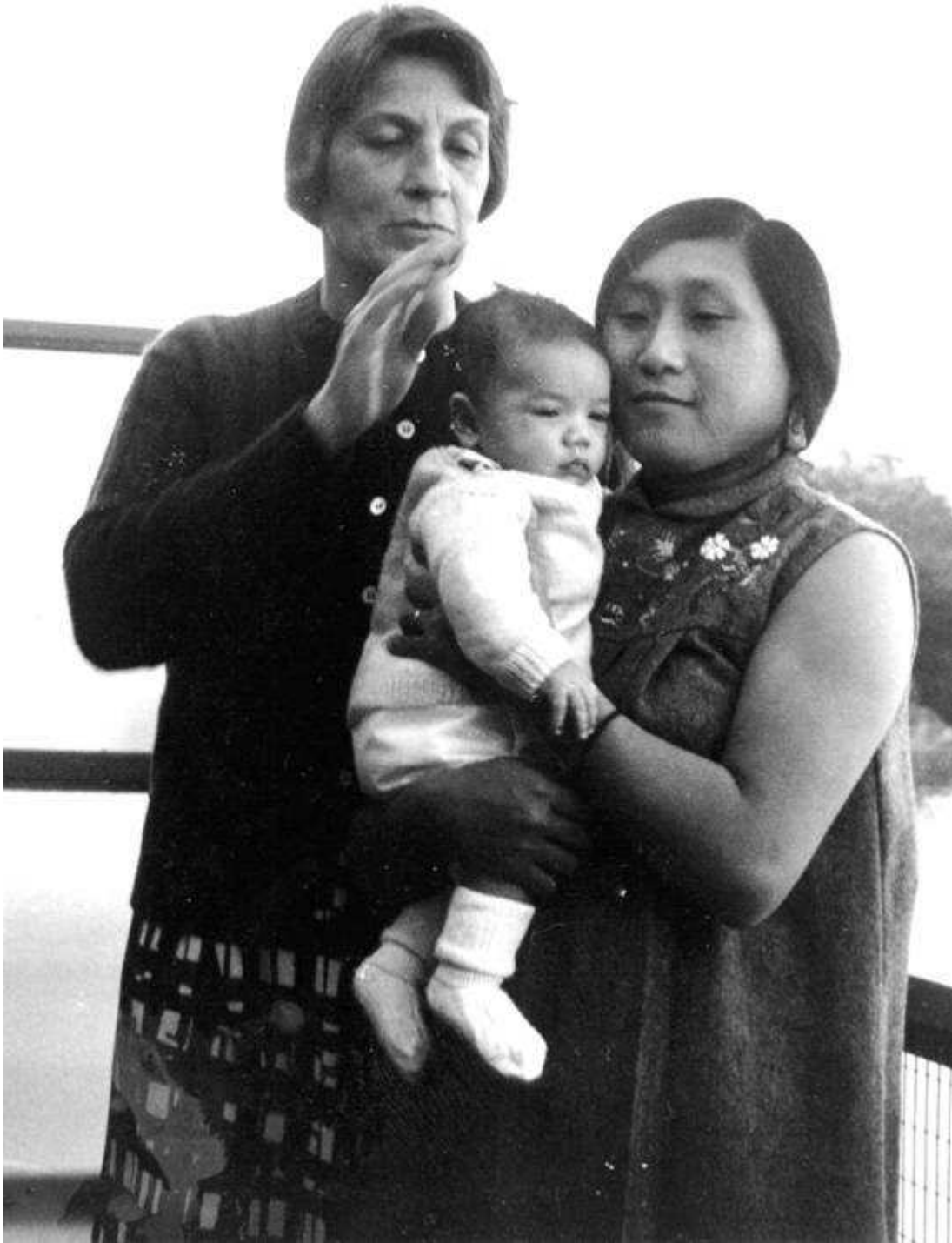


At Saint Francis Yacht Club.



On Mount Tamalpais.

WITH EDWARD AND MOTHER BOLLES IN TIBURON









Third passport photo.

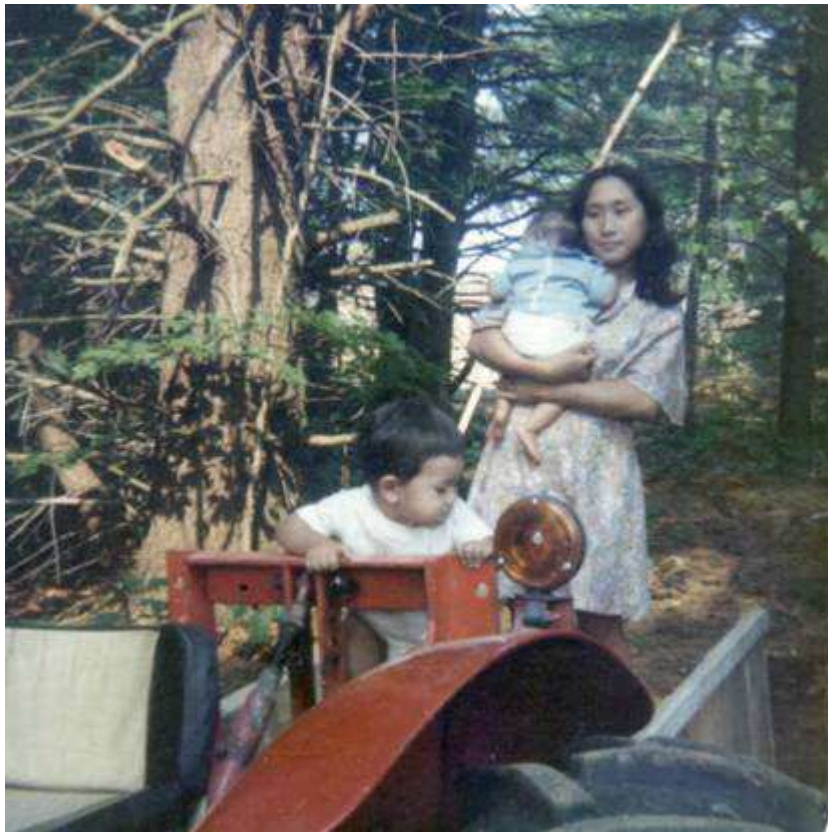


In Mérida with sister Lupe.

MOVE TO DEERING, NEW HAMPSHIRE



With mad-faced Mucuy



With Mucuy and Edward.

WINTERS IN KOM CHEEN



With Mucuy at Mam Bicha's Fiesta Party.



Talking with Mam Goya while Don Lio builds his house.



Talking with neighbor Don Lao while he builds his house.
With Edward, Mucuy and X-Nicol.

HELPING THATCH DON LIO'S HOUSE

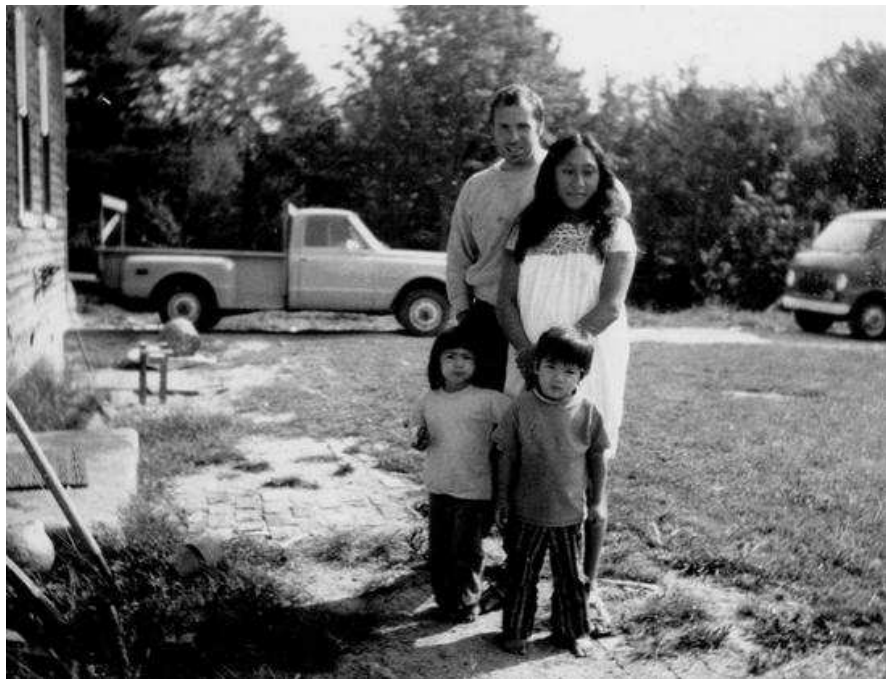




BACK FOR THE FARMING SEASON IN DEERING



With the Gringo, Edward and Mucuy.



With Edward, Mucuy and the Gringo,
after the house was moved.





Sailing on the pond behind the house in Deering.

BRINGING ALEJANDRA'S PARENTS AND SISTERS TO DEERING



In San Francisco.



In Grandmother Bolles' garden in San Francisco
with Mucuy, Nochi, Lupe, Edward and Martha.



At the Grand Canyon
with Edward, Mucuy, Don Andres, Lupe, Doña Martha, Martha and Nochi.

WAITING FOR EMILIA



With Edward and Mucuy.



In Deering Lake.
Still waiting for Emilia.



Rowing in Alejandra's double shell.
Gringo, Jackie, Edward and Mucuy
Still waiting for Emilia.

FINALLY, EMILIA ARRIVES



With Ben Bolles holding Emilia.











With Mucuy.



Digging the foundation for the barn.





Harvesting soybeans with Regina, David and Aaron Koch and Emilia.



In the living room in Deering
with Edward, Mucuy, Emilia and the Gringo.

ANOTHER WINTER IN KOM CHEEN



Outside her new kitchen in Kom Cheen
with Emilia.



At the well in Kom Cheen.



Making charcoal
with Emilia, Mucuy, Edward, Mam Goya and Don Lio.



With Don Lio, Mam Goya and Mucuy



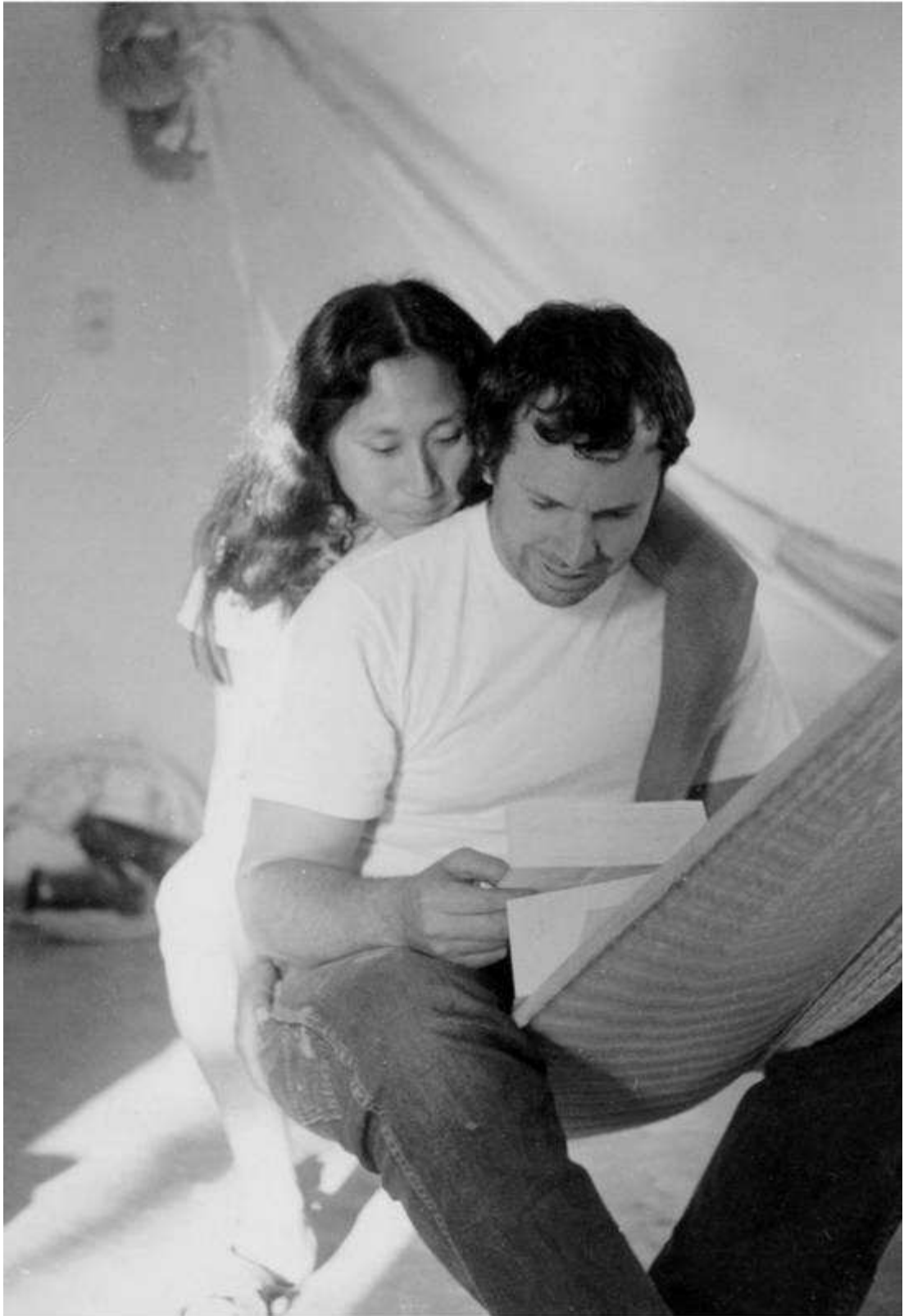
With Don Lio, Mam Goya, Doña Martha, Ángel, Don Carmen and X-Chula.



Dancing the Jarana with the Gringo
at the Fiesta del la Concepción Inmaculada, 1976



In the kitchen at Kom Cheen





Florentino Carreon from Tenextatiloyan with his pots



With Jessica, Emilia and Lupe



Making tamales with Doña Martha and Emilia.



In the henequen plantation with Jaime, Emilia, Mucuy, Lupe and Jessica.



At Uxmal with Lupe, Jessica and Tom.



At the ruins of Kabah with the Gringo, Jessica and Gerry.

BACK IN DEERING FOR ANOTHER FARMING SEASON



With Edward, the Gringo, Emilia and Mucuy.



With Mucuy and Edward.



With Edward, Mucuy and a rabbit.



With Emilia in the field.



In the corn
with Mucuy, Emilia and Edward

MOVE TO LEE



Digging snow with Edward, Mucuy and Emilia.



Homework project with Edward and Mucuy.





Getting ready to build the garage.



Emilia getting ready for a cross-country race.

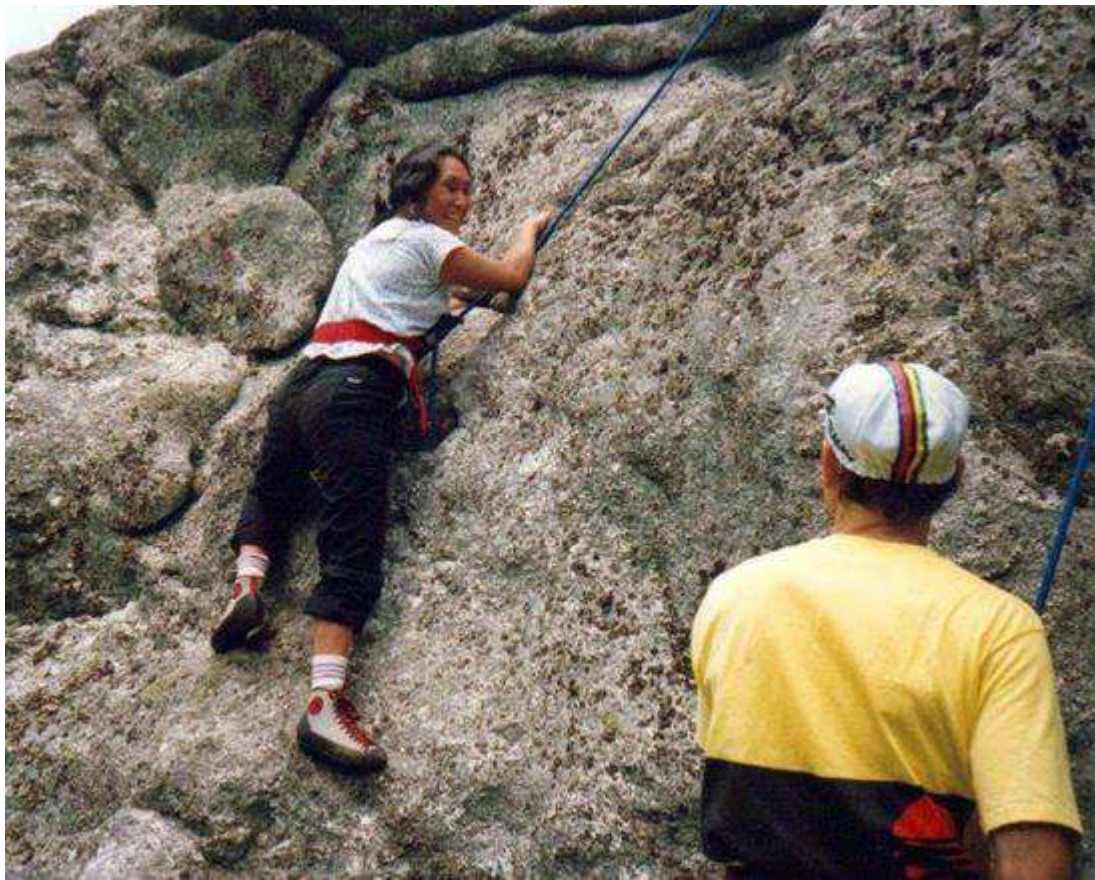




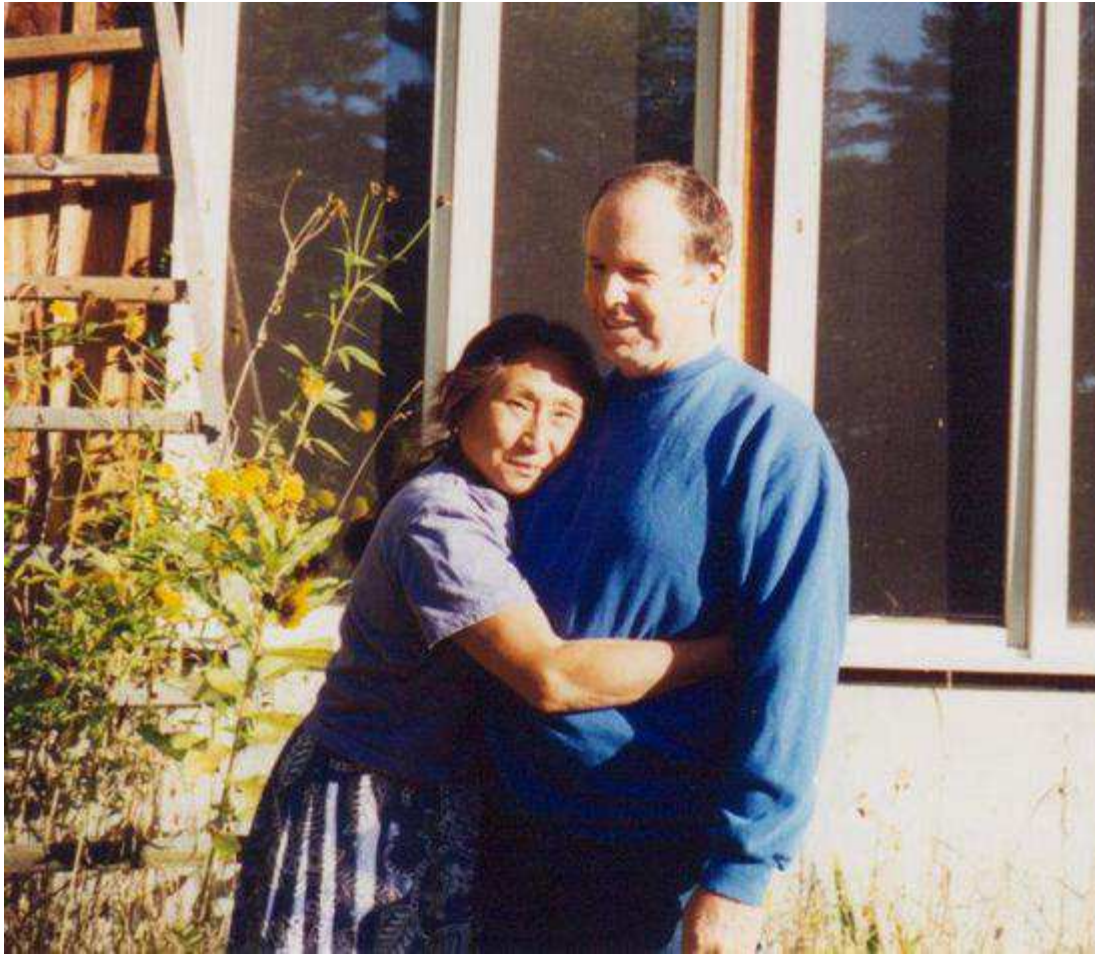
With Sandy Farrell.



Lunch with Mother Bolles.



Rock climbing with the Hamiltons.









HARVESTING SUNFLOWERS











With one of her etchings of sunflowers.



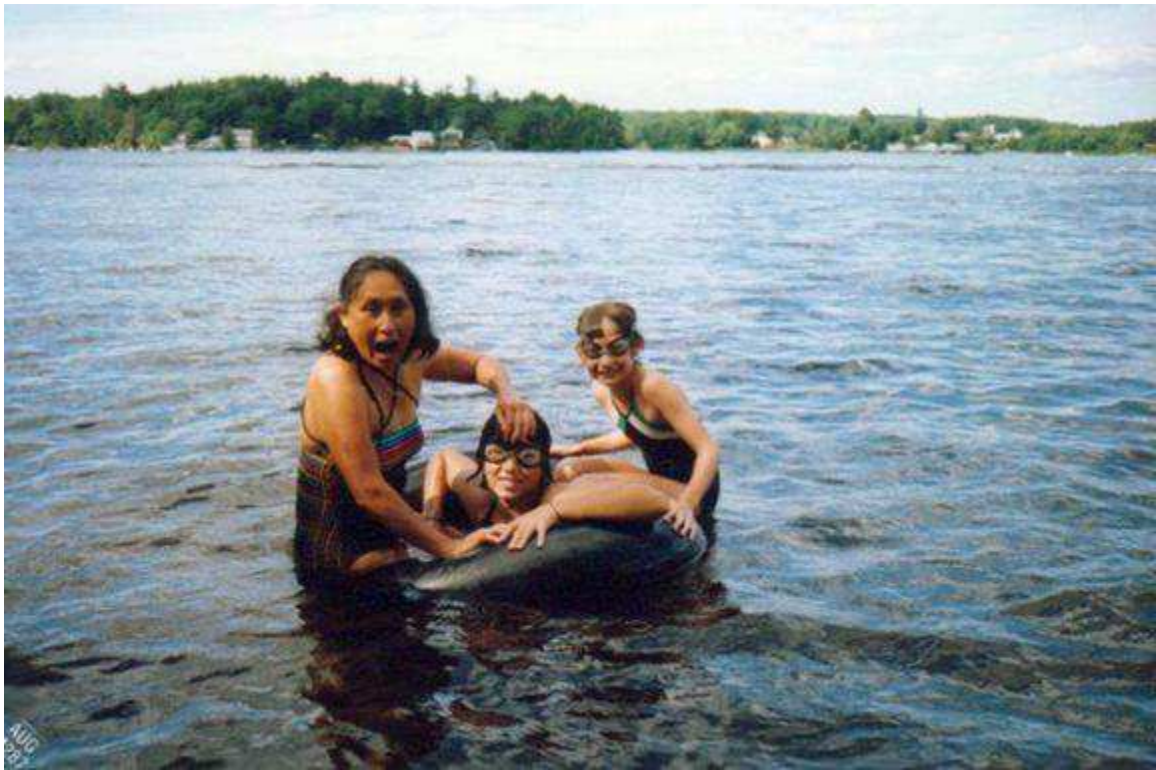
AT NORTHWOOD LAKE



Chasing the model boat, with Edward and the Gringo.



With Emilia and Sarah.







With Emilia and Sarah Hamilton.



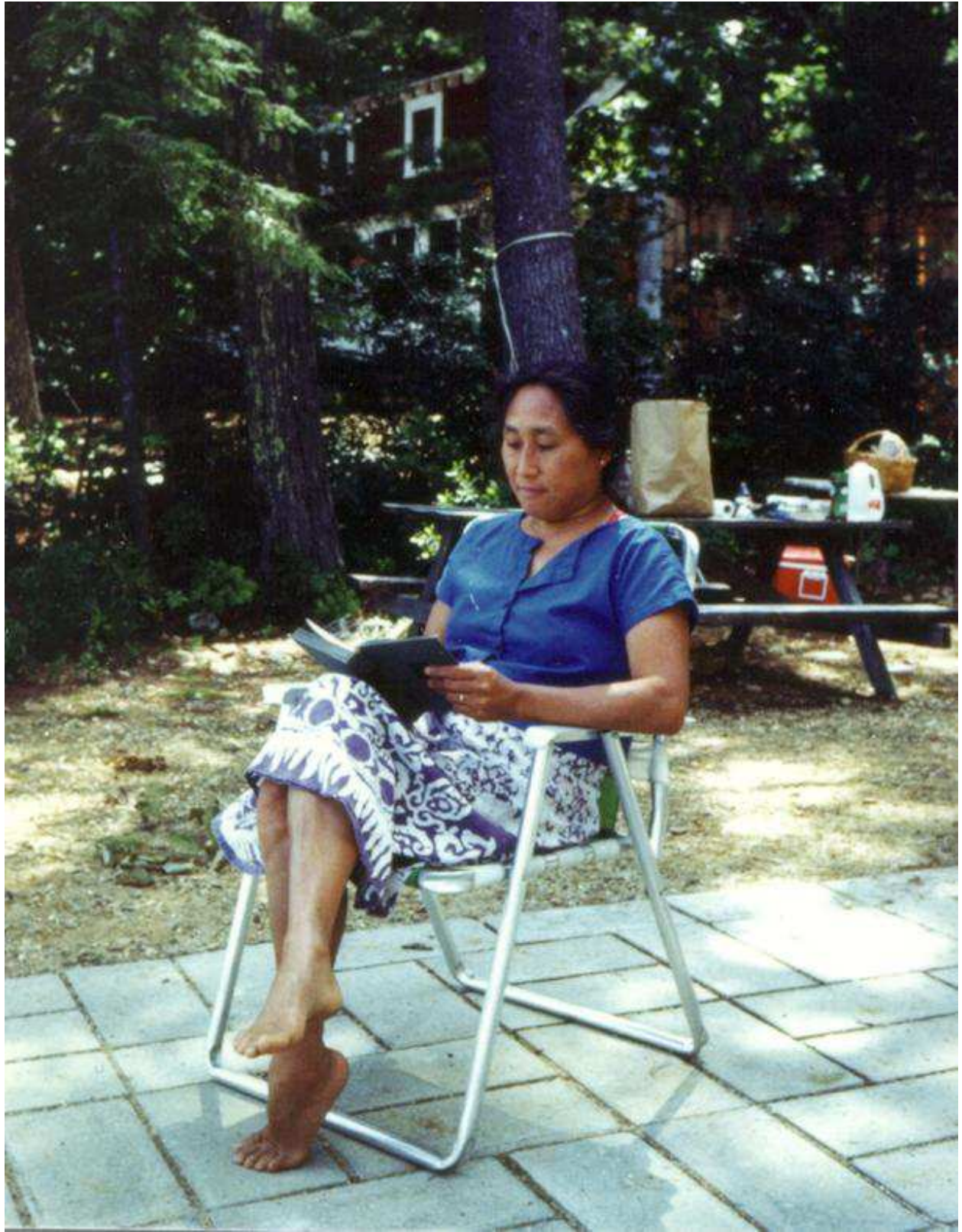




With Nochi



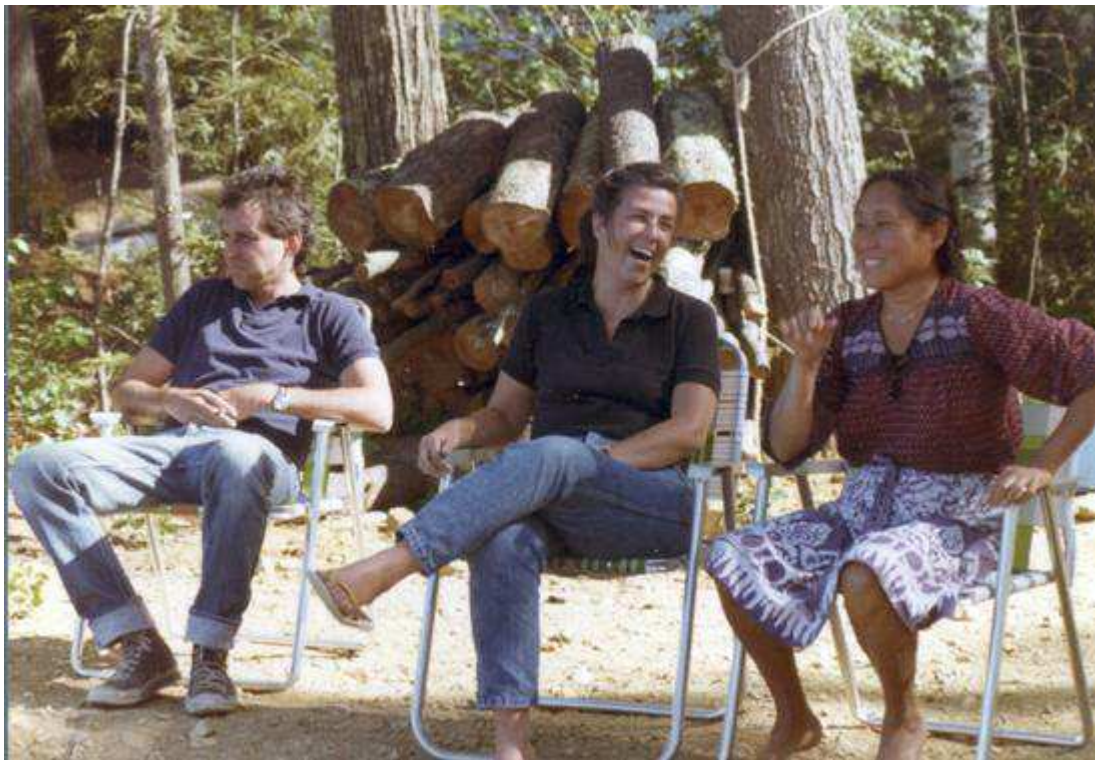
With Doña Martha.





With Emilia and Mucuy.





With Curt Mitchell and Moira Whalen.



With the Gringo, Lupe and Don Andres.

SAILING ADVENTURES



At Rockport



On Lake Sunapee

AT THE 1998 NORTH AMERICAN'S, LAKE GEORGE



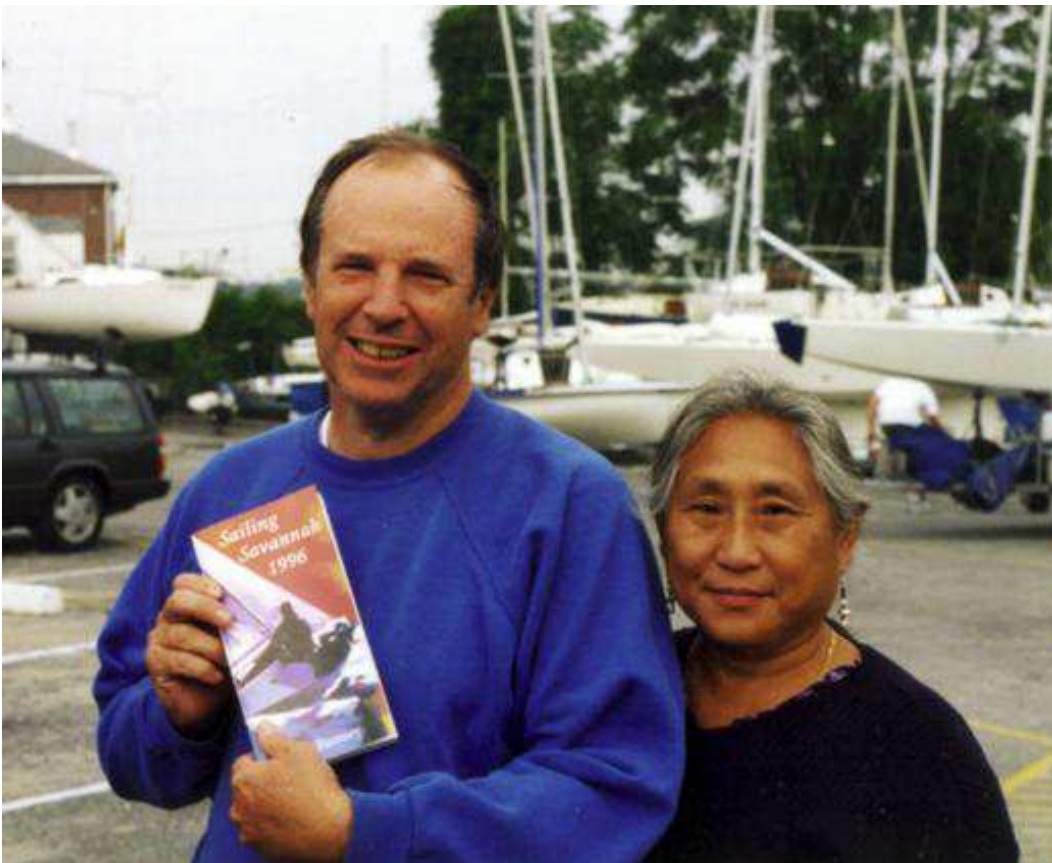
AT THE 1999 NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP, BOSTON



AT THE MILFORD YACHT CLUB



With Mucuy.



AT THE 2000 BACARDI





With Vince Brun and John Rumsey



After a days sailing in the Bacardi.

AT THE 2001 NORTH AMERICAN'S, MILFORD

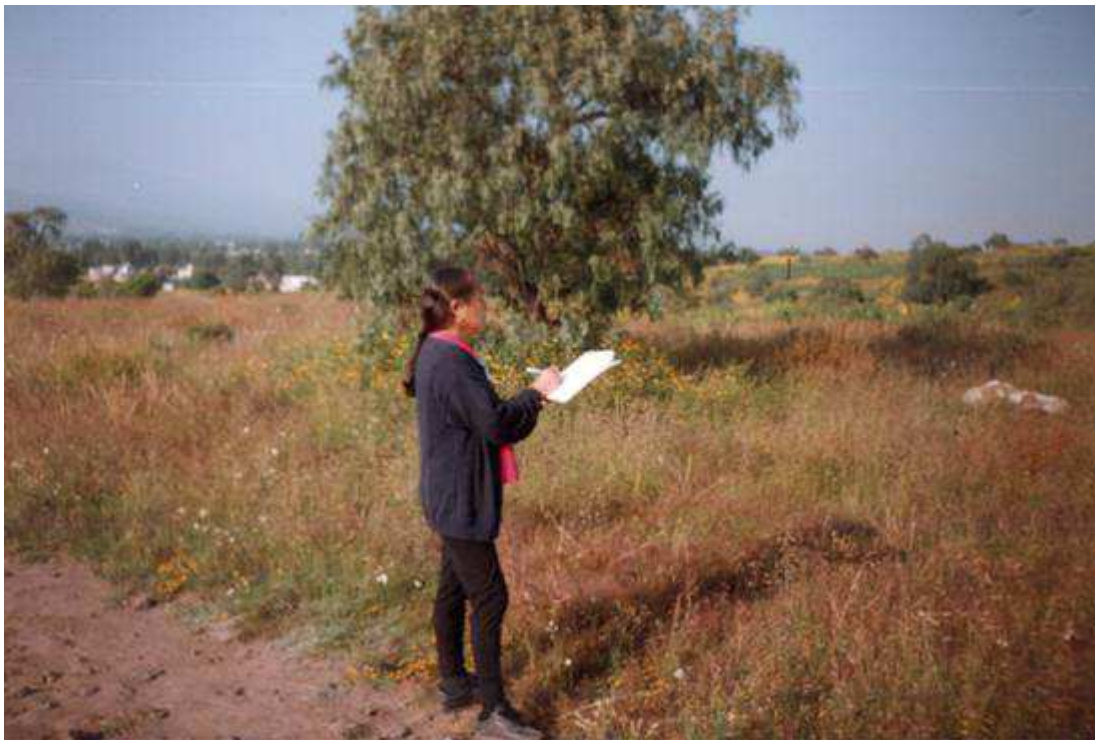


AT THE 2003 MASTER'S REGATTA, MILFORD

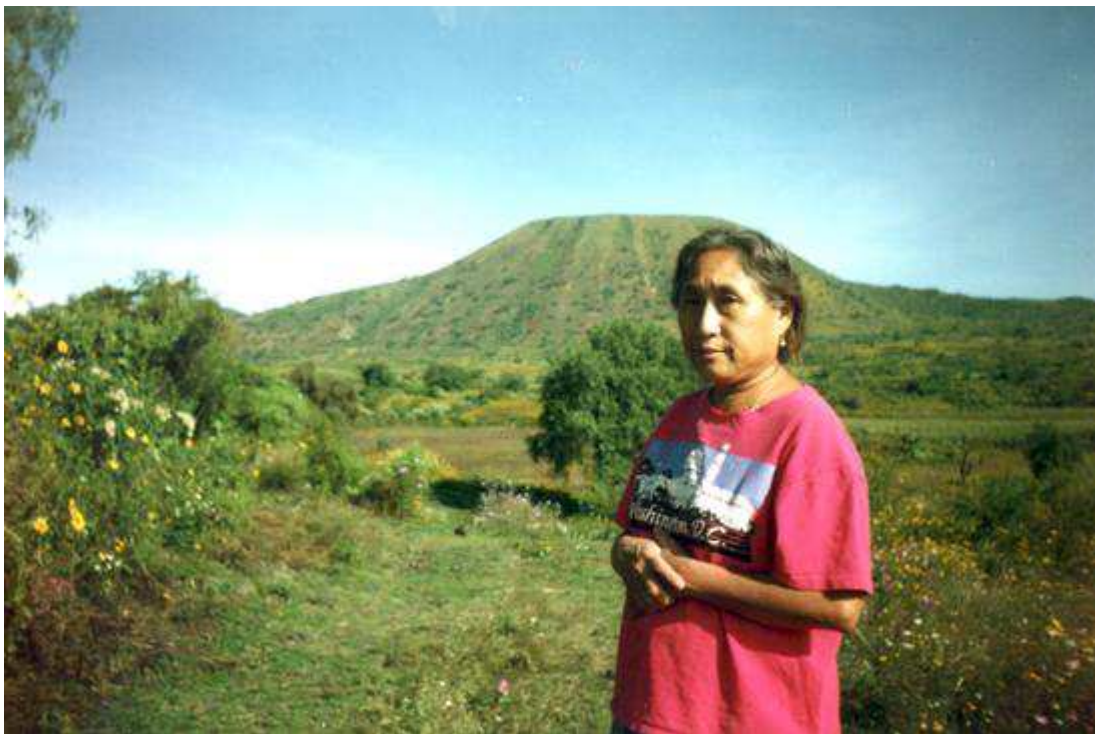


IN TLALTENCO, 1994









With the volcano Guadalupe in the background.



At the chimole fiesta in Milpa Alta.

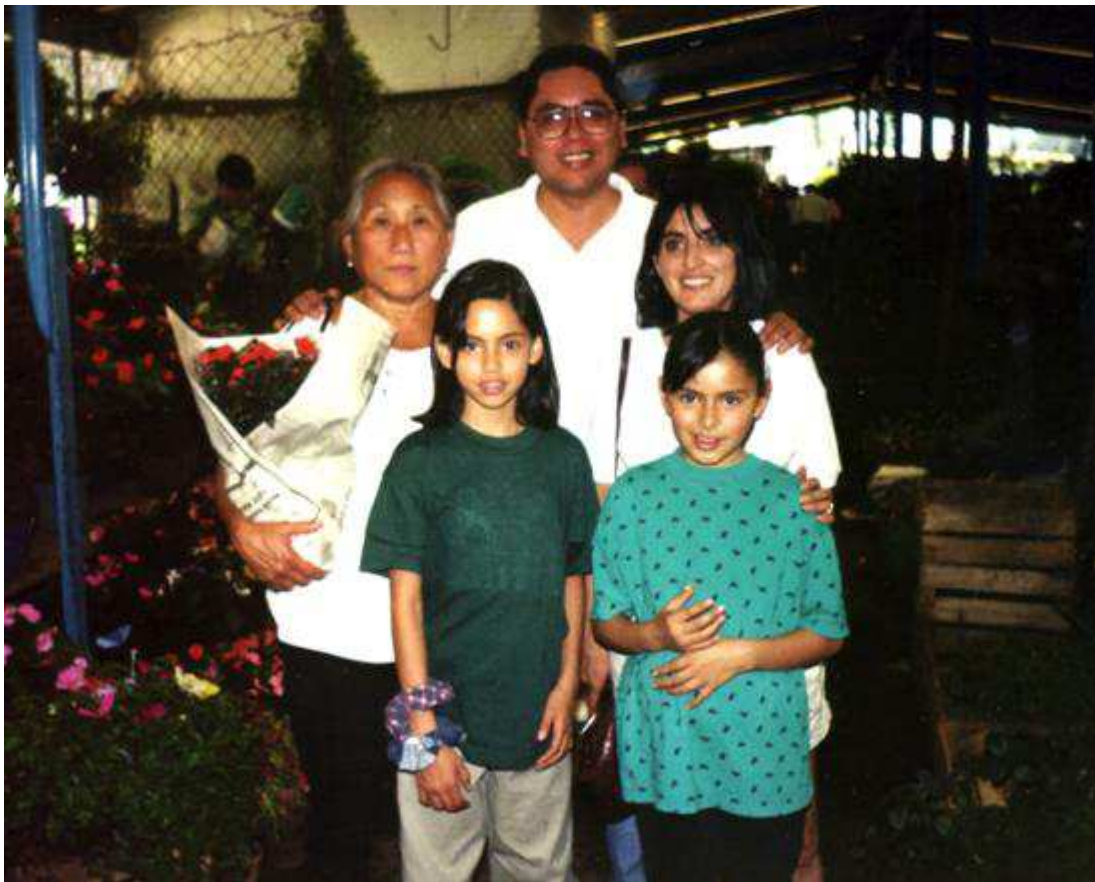


On the slopes of the volcano Iztac Zihuatl (White Woman)
seen over her left shoulder.



In a chalupa in the canals of Xochimilco
with Erasto and Margarita Antúnez.





At the flower market in Xochimilco with the Antúnez family.

ON THE 2009 TRIP



In Ithaca.





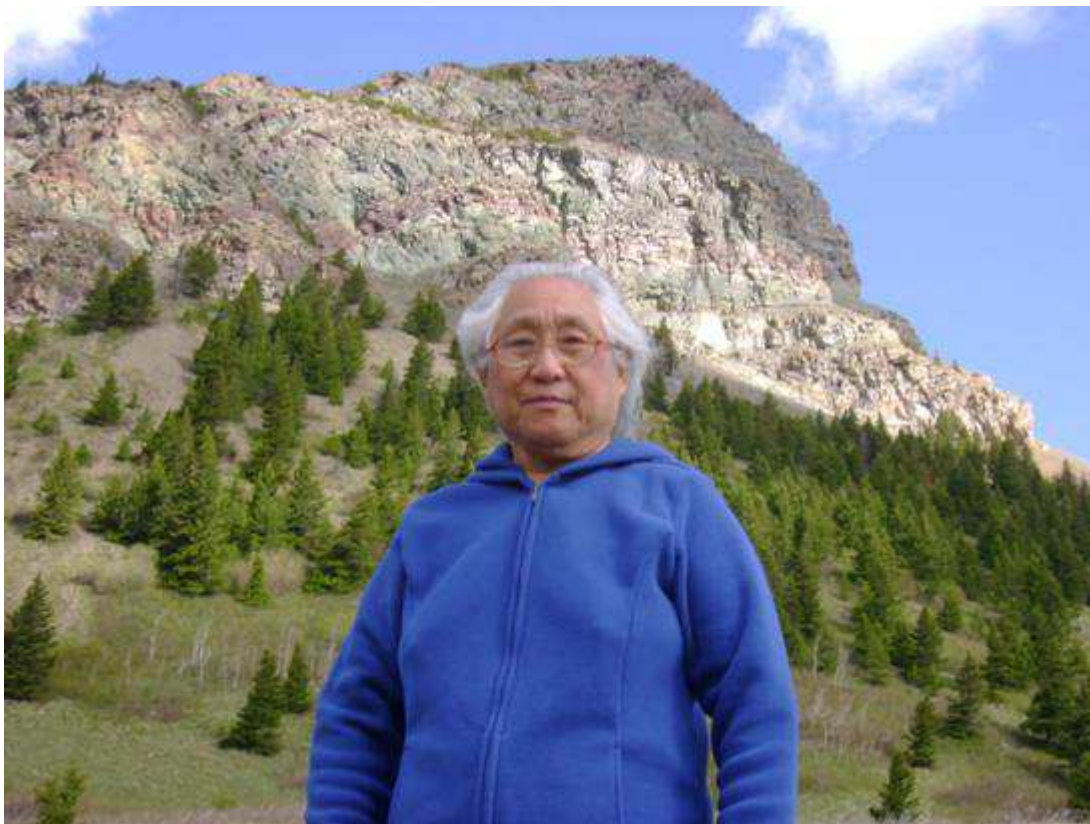




Glacier National Park in the background.

IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK





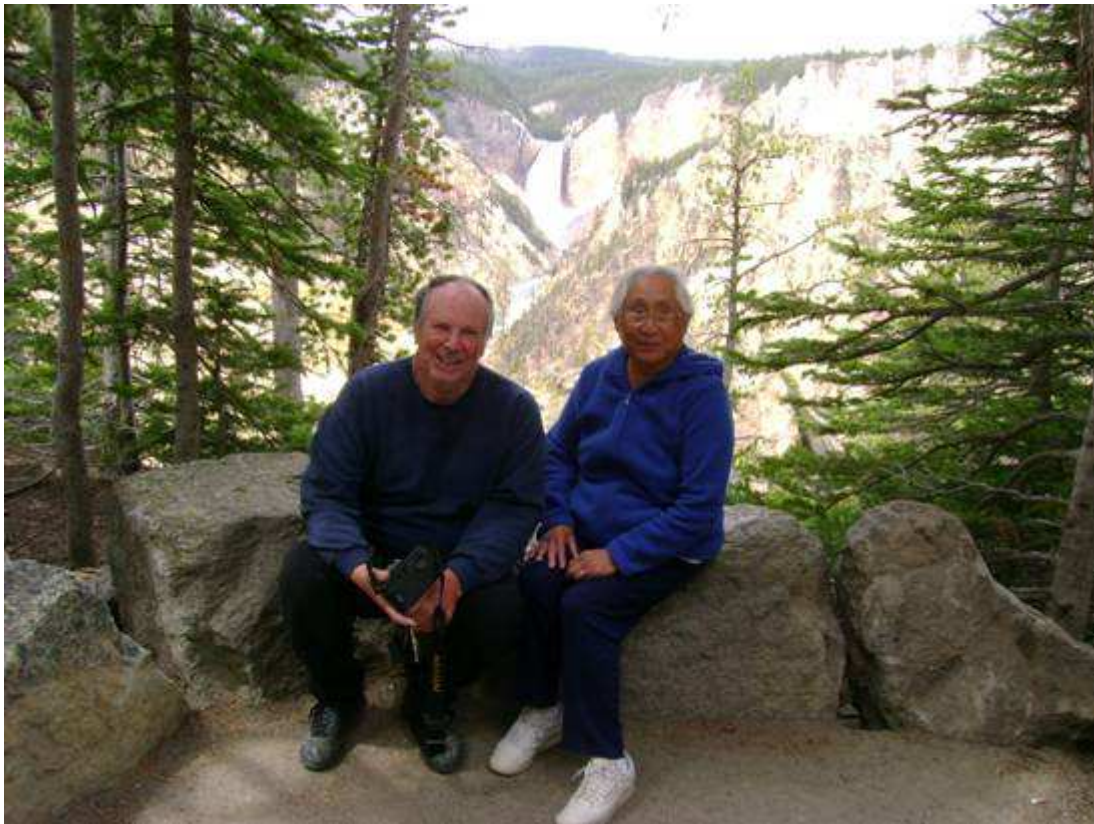


In Glacier National Park.

IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK







At Sacagawea's grave site.









With Regina Koch.

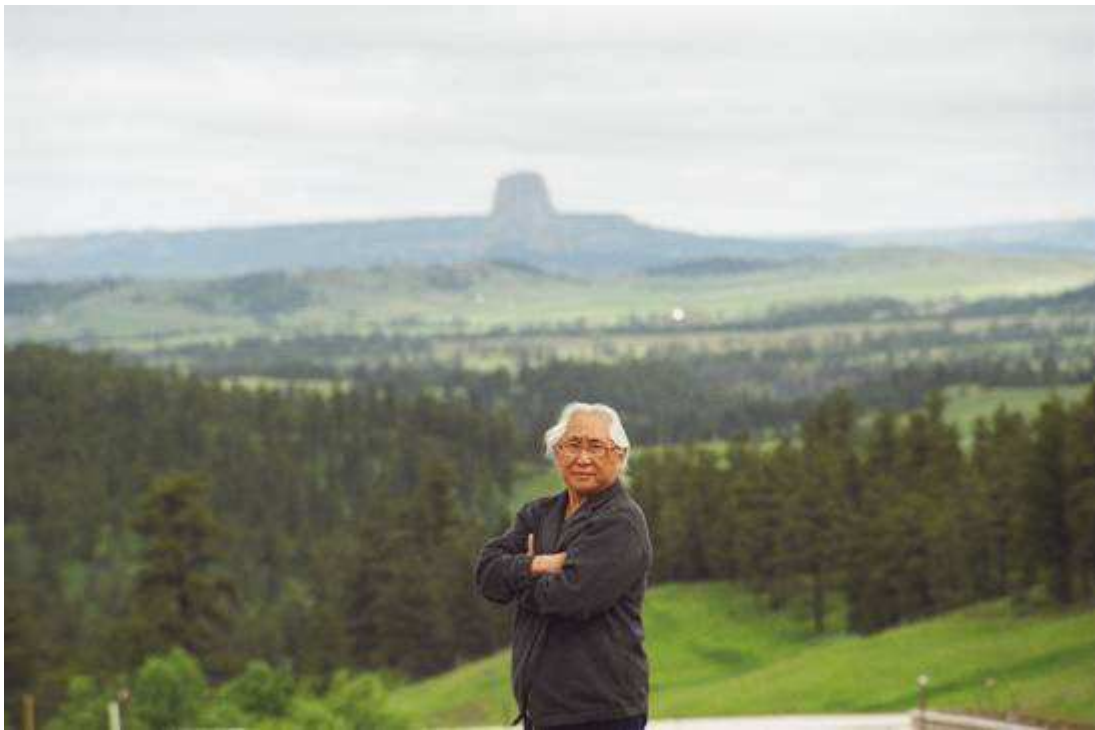
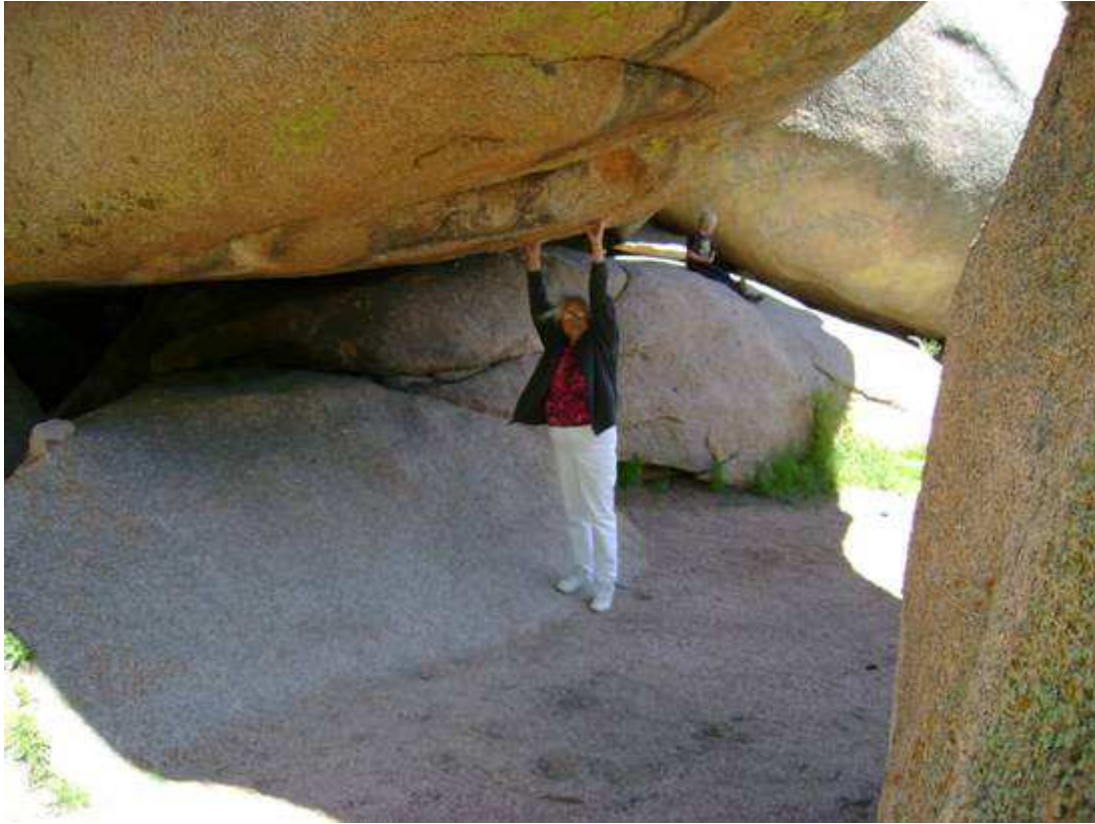




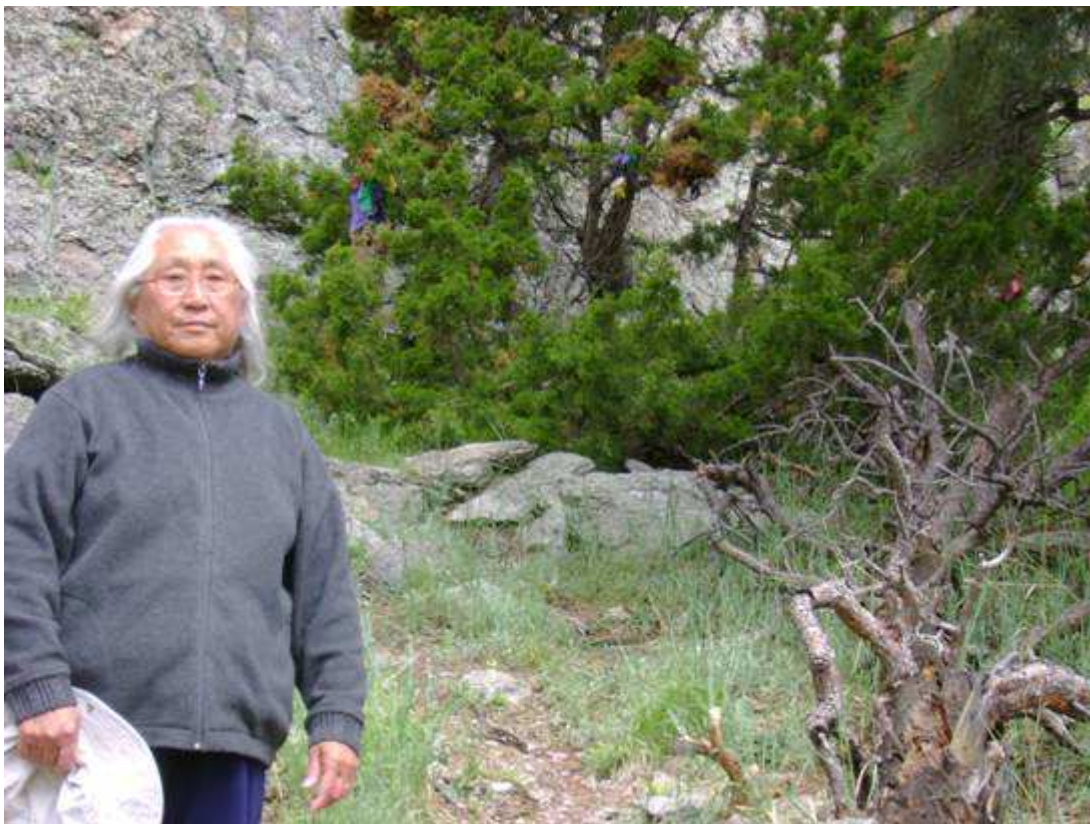


With Regina and David Koch in Rocky Mountain National Park.





At the Devil's Tower.



In the Badlands National Park,



On the Sioux Reservation.



In Chicago with Annie Bert.



In Chicago with Annie Bert.



With Patsy Pipier-Smyer in Lockhaven, Pennsylvania.

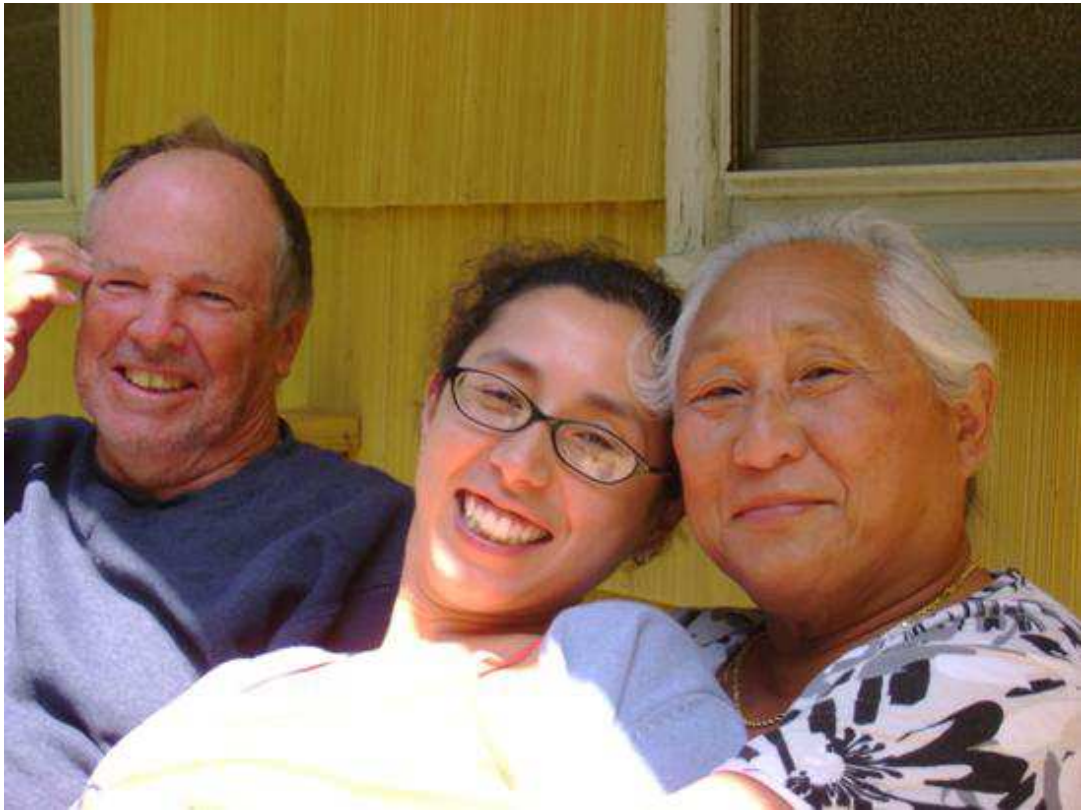


At Steamtown in Scranton, Pennsylvania.



AT HOME IN MILFORD







With the Gringo, Emilia and Mucuy.

IN KOM CHEEN



With Geraldo selling pibil cochinito,



With X-Mech and the vegetable stand in Kom Cheen.



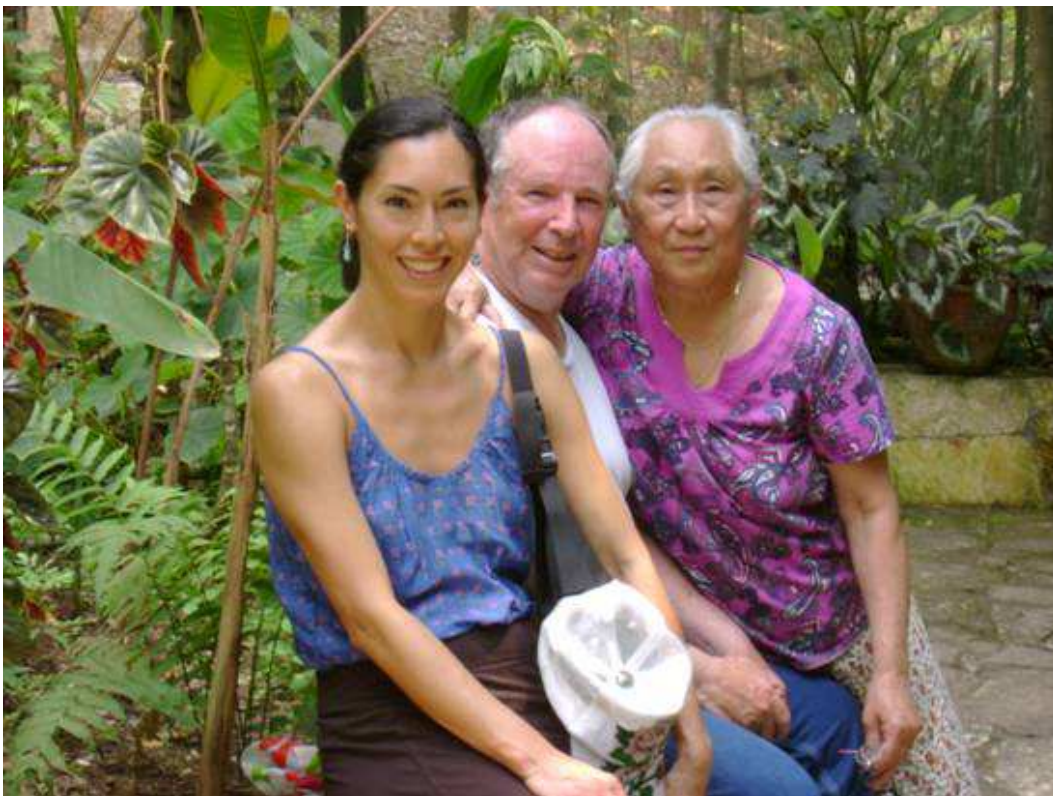
With X-Lydia and X-Nicol at the molina.



With Mam Goya and a neighbor.



With Mam Goya, Don Lio, Lydia and Ángel.



With Mucuy and the Gringo in Copan.



Trying on traje in Antigua.



Preparing the warp.
With Doña Delfina Pérez Santos of San Antonio Aguas Calientes.



With Paula and Mucuy in Chichicastenango.



Alejandra's last photo, with Emilia and Mucuy
at the Larchmont Yacht Club Star Centennial Regatta.