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My Grandmother's Passing

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This is a story about how my Mexican American grandmother, María Velarde, became an Anglo woman, Mary Douglas, and what it apparently meant to her to be perceived as "white." It's also a story about me and my mother and how my grandmother's determination to be seen as an Anglo lady affected our lives as well. And it's my attempt, after years of confusion and sadness surrounding the events in the story, to come to an explanation of what happened that finally makes some sense to me. I am also writing this because I think that my grandmother's story, while perhaps an extreme case, is not at all unique among Mexican American women, at least of her and my mother's generations. By looking at the concrete reality of one woman's story, I hope I can cast some light on the significance whiteness has for other U.S. Latina women as well.

My grandmother was born María Velarde in the border town of San Elizario, Texas, in 1881. Her mother, María Melchora Velarde-López, came from Mexico and is remembered by her grandchildren as a quiet, dark-skinned woman who dressed in black and spent most of her day in the kitchen cooking for her large family. My grandmother's father, Gabriel Velarde, came from farther up the Rio Grande Valley between Santa Fe and Taos. As is the case with many descendants of the early Spanish settlers in New Mexico, he had light skin and considered himself "Spanish" rather than "Mexican." After living with his parents in rural Northern New Mexico early in their marriage, the young family settled in the El Paso area in the 1870s to work for the Santa Fe Railroad; later the Santa Fe transferred them to the little desert town of Needles, California, where the Colorado River forms the border with Arizona.

It was certainly, at least in part, Gabriel Velarde's doing that his seven daughters grew up thinking that white was beautiful and darker skin tones were not. (My mother recalls how as a little girl she was the favorite among

his many grandchildren. He called her *mi rubia*—"my blonde"—and she understood even as a small child that it was her fair skin, blue eyes, and chestnut brown hair that won her favorite grandchild status. This valorization of whiteness and its concomitant devaluation of dark skin was—and often still is—the prevailing view of not only the dominant Anglo culture in the Southwest but of many Mexican Americans as well.) So the attitude that my grandmother and great aunts internalized as they grew to adulthood in their Mexican American home didn't just come solely from the prejudices of their father; rather, it permeated their world. And it's no wonder that four of the seven Velarde daughters married Anglo rather than Mexican American men. In my grandmother's case, it was a young Irish American man named Homer Sherwood from upstate New York whom she married. He was unusual among these Anglo husbands in that he had come to the Southwest already fluent in Spanish and he appreciated and made efforts to fit into my grandmother's family and culture. Thanks to him their children—my mother and her siblings—grew up in Mexican American communities in California and Arizona, if not exactly immersed in Mexican American culture, at least at home in it. They spoke Spanish at home and didn't learn English until they went to school, where the nuns promptly forbade them to speak Spanish, and it was a matter of sink or swim in English. (My mother's lifelong nickname, Nina, comes from her first teacher's misunderstanding when my mother told her she was called *niña* at home.) But Homer Sherwood died in 1924 and his widow María, with two teenage daughters to care for, soon married a man named "Shorty" Douglas, an oil tool salesman from Ohio, who came west for the oil booms of the 1920s and 1930s; he had no connections to or interest in Mexican American culture. And the transformation of María Velarde Sherwood into Mary Douglas began.

Years later, when I was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in the patchwork of segregated neighborhoods that made up southeast Los Angeles, my parents bought a home in a working-class subdivision in the shadow of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. Our house was on the first street on the "right side of the tracks" that run along Alameda Street and formed the line of demarcation between our white neighborhood of Firestone Park and the predominantly Black and Mexican American community of Watts. When I was about seven or eight, I learned that our subdivision was "restricted" to whites only when a Filipino physician and his family tried to buy a house there and were dissuaded from doing so when some of the residents went door to door asking their neighbors

to sign a petition demanding that the restrictive covenants in their deeds be enforced. That explained why no "Negroes or Mexicans" (as they were then called) ever tried to move in.

No one ever tried, that is, except my mother, but then with her fair complexion and the Anglo-sounding name of Nina McAlister (rather than her birth name Elena María), no one ever suspected that she was anything but 100 percent Anglo. Only a few very close friends knew otherwise, and they seemed to remember it only when they wanted her chili recipe or when their kids needed help on their Spanish homework, or someone wanted something translated. But my mother, despite her light brown hair, blue eyes, and unaccented English, is Mexican American—a fact that she doesn't deny but certainly doesn't call attention to except when there is some special reason to let her heritage be known. Even so, she has not entirely avoided the sting of racism. (A notorious piece of our family lore is the time my father's brother tried—unsuccessfully, I'm happy to report—to break up my parents' budding romance by telling his mother, "Mickey's dating a Spic!") But from the time she left home at seventeen and married my father (who was an Irish American from Oklahoma with one Cherokee great-grandmother), my mother has, in effect, passed for Anglo both in the eyes of the world and, to a large extent, in her own eyes as well. In doing this she has accomplished what her mother had tried and failed to do. And this brings me to the stories I want to tell here—my grandmother's and my own.

In 1957 I graduated from high school and was getting ready to go to college. Because my mother worked as a secretary at Firestone, I was eligible to compete for a college scholarship for children of Firestone employees, which, indeed, I won. (Small recompense, I think now, for my mother's years of devoted labor and the whole family having to listen, twenty-four hours a day, to Firestone's factory noises, smell its stinky rubbery smells, and breathe the air its smokestacks were constantly fouling. But at the time it made my family and me very proud and happy, and it gave me the precious freedom to go to college wherever I wanted.) I am the only person on either side of my family who has ever gone to college, and my parents, having been relieved of the expense of paying for my college education, decided to splurge and give me the most wonderful graduation present any of us could possibly imagine—a trip to Hawaii for me, my parents, and my grandmother, accompanied by our next-door neighbors and Helen Wilkes, the teenage daughter of some close family friends.

I was particularly happy that my grandmother got to come with us on the trip. She had recently been widowed for the second time, and she

was the person I loved most in the world. For as long as I can remember, one of my greatest treats was to stay at her house for a weekend or a week or, in the summer, even longer. I loved being around her as she did her daily chores, usually singing softly to herself in Spanish (and teaching me the words to her songs). I loved working with her in her garden, helping her cook, and doing the wash in the big old-fashioned wringer/washer in the garage. We often spent afternoons together pursuing another mutual interest, reading movie magazines, for she was avidly interested in the gossip about glamorous Hollywood stars (though I don't recall her actually going to movies). Best of all I liked to go with her to a little Mexican *mercado* in San Pedro where we bought freshly made *tortillas* and *ristras* of dried red chiles when we were going to make *enchiladas*—a somewhat rare occurrence since Shorty Douglas was a meat-and-potatoes man who wouldn't eat *frijoles* or *enchiladas* under any circumstances. She always had to cook separately for him when she made Mexican food for my family.

During the thirty years of her second marriage, my grandmother always called herself Mary, never María. In fact she rarely spoke Spanish at all, except for occasional habitual phrases she used with close relatives (to me: "*Ay, como friegas!*" when I got on her nerves, or "*Diga te fue bien!*" when she would give me a little gift or treat), or as euphemisms for bodily parts and functions, or when she was talking to my mother and didn't want me to understand what she was saying. I didn't notice it then, but I realize now that I never once heard her speak Spanish in public, not even when we would go to Mexico for an occasional Sunday outing. In fact, she became especially "the Anglo lady" when we went there.

One day when we were in Honolulu we hired a limousine and a driver to drive us all on a sightseeing trip to the far side of the island. My grandmother was sitting in the front seat while Helen and I were sitting together in the rear. Our conversation turned to the question of ancestry; Helen said she was a mixture of English and German, and she asked what I was. I said I was Irish and American Indian and, with a wave in my grandmother's direction I added, "Mexican."

I will never know exactly what went through my grandmother's mind and heart when she heard me say those words, but it must have caused her terrible pain because, from that moment on, she virtually never spoke to me again. At first, since she didn't say anything to me there in the car, I was oblivious to her feelings. But soon enough it became obvious that she was furious and I was the object of her fury. When my mother tried to find out what the trouble was, the source of my grandmother's anger came out. I had "called her a Mexican." To her that was such a grievous offense that she could not bring herself to let it pass or forgive me for it. All during the voyage home to California I tried, with my mother's help, to make amends. My mother understood perfectly that I had meant no offense, that I had been giving information, not hurling racial epithets, and she tried, with no success whatsoever, to convince my grandmother of it. I tried apologizing, but my apology went unheeded. Eventually it became clear that, for all intents and purposes, my grandmother had passed out of my life for good the moment those offending words came out of my mouth.

That fall I went off to New York to college, and by the time I returned to California my grandmother had had a stroke, making communication difficult. There was no sign that her anger at me had abated. In the years before she passed away, which she spent, frail and disabled, in a nursing home, she didn't speak much at all. Ironically, the few words that did pass her lips were in her mother tongue, Spanish.

As a young woman I didn't realize just how much the loss of my grandmother's esteem and love affected me. But years later, the effects of that loss can still surface in my reactions and behavior, in trivial things such as my total attachment to my grandmother's Spanish-style furniture that I inherited and not so trivial matters such as an abiding fear of abandonment. By now I have spent decades trying to understand this bewildering and abrupt passing out of my life of a person I loved so much, trying to figure out the elements that contributed to the vehemence of her reaction, and trying to find my own identity in relationship to my Mexican American heritage.

My first thought was that my grandmother had just misunderstood what was happening: she thought I was calling her a name when I was just giving information about her and my ethnic background. It's true enough that words such as "You (blankety-blank) Mexican" would have been understood by anyone as an ethnic slur. But those were not the words I used. The words I did use were uttered wholly without malice—more likely, they were tinged with pride, for the things that I liked best about my grandmother were the things that were reflections of her ethnicity. But if it had been a simple misunderstanding of this sort, it should have been easy to clear up.

Then I thought maybe she believed I was telling Helen that she was from Mexico and she was angry because she was born in Texas and had been a U.S. citizen all her life. This seemed to be a somewhat more plausible explanation because my grandmother had lived all her life close to the U.S.-Mexican border. She and her family lived in Bisbee, Arizona, practi-

cally on the border, during what she used to call "the Pancho Villa war." Frequent border incursions made it significant which side of the border you were born on. And she lived through the Depression when, in her part of the world, the U.S. government regularly rounded up "Mexicans" and unceremoniously deported them to Mexico, sometimes without bothering to find out whether they were U.S. citizens. It's interesting to note that from the time of the U.S. annexation of Mexican territories after the Mexican War, the same word, "Mexican," was used by Anglos to designate both Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans.[1] Even in 1957 we still didn't have the words "Mexican American" or "Chicana" to describe my grandmother; we were still using "Mexican" for everybody of Mexican heritage regardless of where they were born or their citizenship. We did have some less polite words, too, such as "*pachuco*," as some of the "tough" Mexican kids at school were called (of whom there were very few in 1957 and almost all of whom were completely excluded from the white mainstream high school culture).

But I have never found either of these two "misunderstanding" explanations adequate for explaining the intensity of my grandmother's rage. Surely if it had been just a case of this kind of misunderstanding, once things were sorted out we could have had a reconciliation. Since all attempts at reconciliation failed, it seems to me that the offense to my grandmother must have gone far deeper. My next thought was that her response must have been related to her internalization of the negative stereotypes and attitudes about Mexicans that abound in the dominant white Anglo culture of Texas and the desert Southwest where she grew up. Mexicans are supposed to be lazy, slow, stupid, greasy, and dishonest; the women are supposed to be either sexy and tempestuous or reserved and pious, while the men are stereotypically macho, domineering, beer guzzling, and violent. It is, I think, a sign of the extent to which my grandmother and her sisters believed these stereotypes about themselves that so many of them married outside their ethnic group and began to move, sooner or later, away from their original culture, language, and traditions toward those of the Anglo community into which they married.

One of my great aunts, Petra, did marry a Mexican American, a man by the name of Jorge Acuña; he was a *Californio*—a descendant of a family who had lived in California before it was ceded to the United States by Mexico. He was the town marshall in Needles as early as 1905 and one of the few Mexican Americans in a position of some power and status in Needles. But this only postponed the rush to assimilation with white,

Anglo culture for one generation. Every one of Jorge and Petra Acuña's daughters married Anglos and assimilated, as best they could, into Anglo culture. By the time I came to know my mother's first cousins, their last names were Boom, De Brask, McIntyre, Murray, Steele, and Walker; only their brothers "Pony" and Clarence Acuña remained unambiguously Mexican American.

Reflecting on the extent to which my grandmother and the other women in her family had internalized the belief that it was better to be Anglo than Mexican—better to be Mary Douglas than María Velarde—provides part of the answer to why she thought I was demeaning her by saying out loud, among close friends who already knew it anyway, that she was of Mexican ethnicity. But it still didn't seem fully to explain the depth and persistence of my grandmother's anger toward me. It did, however, serve to make me angry at her in return. In the 1960s and 1970s, when there was a great surge of Chicano political activism in this country, I became very judgmental toward her and my other relatives who tried to put as much distance as they could between themselves and the struggles of *La Raza* and the efforts of Cesar Chavez to unionize farmworkers. Either they ignored the whole thing, or they'd talk disdainfully about how awful "those Chicanos" were. How could they not see that the struggle had to do with them? How could they not say, there but for an Anglo last name go I? How could they not sympathize? How could they be so disloyal to their own people?

Almost as if to try to make up for what I saw as their betrayal of their cultural identity, I began to explore it. I'm barely a Chicana: I was not raised in a Mexican American community; my skin is white, not olive; my Spanish is halting and sounds (except for the swear words and bodily parts language) as if I learned it in school as an adult, which I did. Being an Anglo woman is no trick for me; all I have to do and say is nothing and that's who I am. But the awareness of the way in which racism causes the kind of internalized self-hatred that plagued my grandmother and plagues my mother still, and of the way in which it indirectly damaged me by causing my grandmother so abruptly and inexplicably to pass out of my life, made it increasingly impossible for me simply to ignore that part of me that is Chicana. I set about to learn about Mexican American history and culture. I took a job as dean of San Diego State's branch campus in Calexico, a 98 percent Mexican and Mexican American community directly on the Mexico-California border. I was there because I wanted to do what I could to see to it that kids raised, like my grandmother, on *la frontera* had a

chance to learn about and take pride in their cultural heritage and not learn to hate themselves for it. I wanted them to be proud of who they are.

Ironically, all the time I was making such a point about the need to be proud of who you are in terms of your ethnic and cultural identity, I was mired in self-hatred of a different kind, for I was a lesbian passing as straight in this little rural Chicano community. At the time, I didn't even see the inconsistency of being angry at the women in my family for pretending they were Anglos while simultaneously pretending to the world that I was straight. A few years later, after I was fired from another deanship when it was rumored that I was a lesbian, I found out that just because you think you're passing doesn't mean you are. And if you are passing, you're probably not doing so as thoroughly as you think, so it doesn't mean that someone won't out you at any moment.

It was that realization that finally helped me identify the missing piece of the puzzle about my grandmother, to figure out what else might have been involved that, when added to her internalization of bigoted attitudes toward Mexican Americans, might have caused her pain profound enough to explain her irreversible rejection of me. It dawned on me that even though my grandmother had dark skin, dark hair, dark eyes and spoke English with a pronounced Spanish accent, so that everyone who encountered her could tell she was of some kind of Latino—if not specifically Mexican—ancestry, *she thought she was passing* as an Anglo lady, Mary Douglas. So, when I told our friends in the car that day that she was "Mexican," I was not just reminding her and them of the whole set of negative characteristics she and they probably believed Mexicans have. I was also, in effect, outing her, revealing what she believed was her hidden secret. And so I was, in effect, committing an unpardonable act of betrayal.

I don't know if this is really what happened, but it might have been. For the first time, I have a way of looking at my grandmother's reaction that makes sense to me: because of her internalized self-hatred of her own culture, she had spent the last thirty years of her life thinking of herself as Mary Douglas, an Anglo lady (and quite a well-to-do one at that since the oil business had been good to Shorty Douglas). And she was the mother of Nina McAlister, clearly an Anglo lady, and grandmother of Linda Lee (for Robert E.) McAlister (even more clearly Anglo, for she didn't even speak Spanish), and she got to believing this so much that, in her mind, she thought she *was* passing. Only she wasn't. I knew that there was no way my grandmother could pass as an Anglo, so in saying she was Mexican I knew I wasn't saying anything that everybody in that car didn't already know.

And I was right about that. But it never occurred to me that my grandmother might have believed, mistakenly, that she was passing. I was wrong about that. So my unpardonable sin was to reveal what she believed was a secret, even though it was not, thereby outing her, even though she wasn't really passing, except in her own mind.

Actually, when I was working in Calexico, I encountered quite a few Mexican American women of my mother's generation who seemed to behave in ways quite similar to my grandmother. They were Chicana women who had married prosperous Anglos and who liked to drive around Imperial Valley in their big cars, join the country club, and serve on boards of various charities, thereby making it clear that they really thought they were somebody and lording it over other Mexican Americans who hadn't achieved this status. Some of these women sported platinum blond hair and made sure they were always called by their full name, Mrs. Smith or Jones or whatever the appropriate Anglo name was. It was quite clear that the spirit of *La Malinche* was alive and well in Imperial Valley.[2] The difference between these women and Mary Douglas was only that they were still living in the Mexican American communities where they were born and raised, so there was no way they could completely fool themselves into thinking that they were passing as Anglos. But Mary Douglas lived in an Anglo milieu for the last fifty years of her life and there was no one to provide her with the kind of reality check she would get if she still lived in Needles.

Once during my five years in Calexico, I had a business acquaintance who, like me, had one Mexican American grandparent, but in his case it was a grandfather, so his last name was Olivas and he was readily seen as a Chicano. Somehow it came up in conversation that my great grandmother's birth name had been López. The next time I got a letter from him it was addressed to Linda López McAlister because he mistakenly thought that my middle initial "L." stood for López. I liked it so much I started calling myself that, dropping my middle name Lee (an artifact of my father's family's southern roots), and eventually I changed my name legally to Linda López McAlister. I did so for a number of reasons. In Calexico it was a good idea to let people know that I wasn't "just an Anglo"—that is, that I wasn't totally identified with the Anglo hegemony that held virtually all the power in Imperial Valley. But even after I left there I continued to use it because it sometimes helps keep people from "whitewashing" me, as they're understandably prone to do.[3] It ensures that I won't pass as 100 percent Anglo myself.

What do these stories have to say to us about identity and the current debates about its fixity or fluidity? In the 1990s it became fashionable, at least in postmodern academic circles if not in "the real world," to argue that all aspects of identity are fluid and changeable. My grandmother seems to have thought so, too, in that she seems to have thought she had traded her original ethnic identity in for a new one. And, indeed, there may be no limits to the identity you may imagine yourself to have or no limits to the ways in which you can try to assume a new identity by means of language, culture, dress, behavior, and so forth. But, as in my grandmother's case (and in the case of my sexual identity), thinking you're passing does not make it so.

Well, maybe it's just that she (or I) didn't try hard enough. What if Mary Douglas had bleached her skin, lightened her hair, and taken classes to remove the last vestiges of a Spanish accent from her speech? Or what if I had entered into a heterosexual marriage and had children and never had anything to do with sexual or emotional attachments to women? Would we then successfully pass as Anglo (or straight)? Maybe so. But would those be our identities? I don't think so. To pass implies that you are successfully fooling people into believing that you are something you are not. But there is a world of difference between successful passing and *being* the new identity.

For one's identity actually to change you have to go beyond successful passing and become someone different from who you were. Here I suspect the parallel that I've been assuming to hold between ethnic identity and sexual identity may break down. Let's look at the two cases separately. What would have had to happen for my grandmother's ethnic identity to change? Would such a change really be possible? And if so, would it be within her power to effect? It seems to me that not only would she have to be able to do the things that would be required to pass perfectly, but she would also have had to come down with a case of amnesia so thorough as to eradicate all traces of the language and culture in which she was raised. She could still know Spanish, but she'd have to have relearned it as an adult, for example. And the same goes for all the cultural values she carries with her. Is this possible? Maybe in extremely rare cases. But even with severe amnesia people don't usually forget their language. At any rate, it's not something that's likely to happen very often and not something that one could intentionally bring about oneself. And though my grandmother actually spent more years as Mary Douglas and living in the Anglo world than she spent as María Velarde, and that clearly changed much about who

she was, what she was like, it did not make her stop being a Mexican American. Claiming the identity is not enough if you don't have the biological and cultural history to back it up.

Sexual identity seems to me to be somewhat more fluid, if no less complex a matter, than ethnic identity. If you're doing everything you need to do to pass successfully as, say, straight, but you know that your sexual and affectional needs could be better met by someone of your own sex, then you're passing. But sexual desire is itself sometimes an inconstant thing, subject to change in ways we don't always expect. Look at all the lesbians who thought they were straight for years and then began to desire women. Look at people you know who used to be lesbians but who now consider themselves bisexual or queer. It seems obvious that change is possible here and that thinking you've changed your sexual orientation is a lot closer to actually changing it than thinking you've changed your ethnic identity is. It's not clear that either of them is something one can change at will, but a change in sexual orientation doesn't seem to require the same wholesale change in language, culture, and tradition that changing your ethnic identity would require.

But if ethnic identities are nearly impossible to change, how is it that I have the right to identify myself as a Chicana? Am I justified in so doing, or is this merely a case of appropriation of an identity that I have no right to? Here I am, not visibly a Chicana, with English as my primary language, raised in an Anglo community. What right do I have to think of myself as a Chicana, given the fact that my childhood and most of my adult life have been in the Anglo community? Some might accuse me of appropriating this identity for the cachet that it might give me or for some possible advantages it might have accrued to me at a time when so-called "minorities" were perceived as getting preferential treatment in some areas (a practice that seems to be rapidly dying out as the twentieth century comes to a close). What would give me such a right? Clearly if I had been born to Mexican American parents, lived in a Chicano community, and spoke Spanish, I would have that right. Even if I didn't speak Spanish I would. Even if I didn't live in a Mexican American community or speak Spanish but had Mexican American parents, I would. So the question becomes what about having only one Mexican American grandparent and only learning a little Spanish, and only sharing in some of the cultural traditions? Is that enough? To which my answer is, "It depends." I think there has to be some biological connection to make the identity claim legitimate—at least some of your relatives have to be themselves Mexican American. A

Finn with generations of Nordic ancestry would lack the necessary biological basis for making such a claim, for example. But while a biological connection of some sort seems to me to be a necessity, that alone is not enough to sustain the claim. It justifies the possibility of making such an identity claim, but it doesn't ensure that's either how you will see yourself or how you will be seen.

What more is needed? I think it's some kind of an emotional and/or a political impulse. I have a second cousin in Needles who is actually "more" Mexican American than I am in the sense that it's her mother, not her grandmother, who is Mexican American. She, too, has an Irish last name and doesn't "look" Mexican. When she writes she signs her letters "Your Okie Cousin, Sharon," alluding to her father's side of the family. My father's from Oklahoma, too, so I could identify that way as well as she does, I suppose, but I don't. Nor do I think she has ever entertained the idea of trying to keep alive her Mexican American heritage in herself or her children. She doesn't seem to value it at all. Part of the difference between us is, I think, that she has had no experience such as the one that I had with my grandmother that would make it important to her to see herself as Chicana. But it seems to me that the difference is also a significantly political one. It's important to me, and apparently not to her, to express solidarity with the Chicano community. It's as though, in our situations, we both have the option of so identifying but one of us is politicized in that direction and the other one is not. So while it may be necessary to have some biological grounds for a claim to be entitled to identify as a Chicana, it's certainly not sufficient. Despite having less "Mexican blood," I'm a Chicana, while Sharon is not because she's not interested in being one. She's perfectly happy to be in the position my mother was—that is, to pass as an Angla. I don't make the claim of being a Chicana for any gain or advantage that might accrue to me from "minority status." I'm not doing it out of some romanticized notion of the exotic; I have lived in this community and felt at home there. So I don't feel I'm appropriating anything to which I don't have a right and a commitment.

What have I learned from these stories? At a very personal level I have found an explanation of my grandmother's rage that makes it comprehensible to me after many years of confusion, frustration, and sense of loss. I have learned how damaging it can be to yourself and others to try to pass as something you are not. I have learned that changing one's identity may be harder in some respects than it is in others and that each kind of identity needs to be thought about separately rather than lumping them all together. And it has made me want to honor and embrace all those aspects of my identity that are important to me while bearing in mind that some may change over time. I now identify as a lesbian of mixed race/ethnicity. Angla, Chicana, lesbian, Catholic—I refuse to deny or ignore any of them. I am grateful to my grandmother for giving me the occasion to reflect on these issues. I only wish I had been able to do this before her passing, which I still grieve.

ENDNOTES

1. See Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946).
2. *La Malinche* is the indigenous Aztec woman who became the lover of the conquistador Cortéz and is seen as both a traitor to her race and the mother of the new mestizo race of Mexicans.
3. As Marilyn Frye did.

> [I]t is the experience of light-skinned people from family and cultural backgrounds that are Black or another dark group that white people tend to disbelieve or discount their telling of their histories. There is a pressure coming from white people to make light-skinned people be white. . . . [A] friend of mine to whom I have been quite close off and on for some fifteen or twenty years, noticed I was assuming she is white: she told me she had told me years ago that she is Mexican. Apparently I did not hear, or I forgot, or it was convenient for me to *whitewash* her. ("On Being White: Thinking toward a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy," in *The Politics of Reality* [Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing, 1983], 114–15)

I am the friend she was referring to there.