

LINDA
(Expanded version)

By

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A super bad ass story of finding your inner hero.
A long monologue for a young Chicana.

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Cast of Characters

La Linda:

A young Chicana woman dressed
in a Wonder Woman costume and
carrying a guitar.

Time

Sometime in the early '80's

LA LINDA:

A young woman enters singing "Los Laureles" from Linda Ronstadt's "Canciones de Mis Padres." She ends with a loud Mariachi cry.

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.

You can't go home again, que no? Que no! Especially when home is getting so gentrified, the local paletero is a 20 year old white dude with wax in his mustache.

(As if to the paletero)

--Ay! No, I don't want a locally sourced sugar free Jasmine and Lavender! I want una de tamarindo, sour sour. Four dollars! Whatever--

(Back to the box.)

Abuelita kept all of my stuff. Look--

She picks up a moving box labeled "Mi Linda", opens it, takes out a pair of gold bracelets and admires them. Puts them on.

I thought I'd lost these!

I saved for months for these gold Wonder Woman bracelets. I sent off the coupon from the back of "Retroactive Wonder Woman" #13. The ad swore they were gold but they left big welts on my wrists. That was OK tho'. I liked the scars. They made me feel tuff.

Keeps going through the box. Takes out Linda Ronstadt's "Living in the USA" record.

Aw. I wanted to BE Linda Ronstadt. Look at her. She's so dang pretty. Linda. Everything I'm not. Delicada. That big eyed face. Una muñequita. I was never a muñequita. Clomp, clomp, I was always the big, noisy, loud girl that yelled to get everyone to pay attention. I had to yell. I was the only girl in a family of men. Three older brothers. Antonio, Ricardo and Rogelio or Roger as he calls himself now-- he's so gringafied! They all used to sit on me and fart on my head. There's no way I would've survived to adulthood being demure and ladylike!

Linda Ronstadt. For such a tiny little thing, she had such a big sound! I LOVED her god-so-beautiful voice. I also loved her cheesy, sexy look. Remember wearing the tube socks and short shorts? I wish I had been smart and put my hair in a chignon, like hers. I cut it and tried to get it to flip into perfect Charlies Angel's waves. With my hair I looked like a poodle caught in a windstorm.

Pulls a pair of rollerskates out of the box. My skates! (Tries them on). Que patas tan grandes! I begged and begged for them for my 13th birthday, I also got a red satin jacket. 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 goooood..."

until Mr Gonzalez came out and begged me to stop. He said I was flat. I said "So was Linda!" He said "I meant your voice". "I'll say it again..."

Sings a bit more of "You're No Good" to a Mr. Gonzalez in the audience. We hear a door slam. That man wouldn't know good music-- Linda Ronstadt sold out stadiums! Like a dude--(corrects herself.) No, like a girl. She had LOVERS. She did! I loved that. She wasn't no groupie. She had groupies. Including a Governor of California. I read in her autobiography that he was so cheap, he used to steal her flowers to give to people. Cabron, Governor Moonbeam!

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. I loved Lynda as Wonder Woman, but I loved her even more as Diana Prince. Hiding behind those glasses-- remember, when she would go back to the island, she'd get all soft and pretty. But in the USA she'd have to dress tough.

La Wonder Woman gave me hope. Once, in the 4th 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 nothing. When the bell rang, he whispered, "Wetback." in my ear. I knew what it meant. Even at 9 years old. It wasn't the first time I'd heard that word. I didn't tell my bros. Ricardo would have killed his ass. He had a terrible temper. But I didn't want a man fighting my fights for me. I was Wonder Woman.

Men totally underestimated her. And whammo, pow! She'd have them in her golden lasso and they would be forced to their knees. I asked my Abuelita what a 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 him, but I ended up whipping him hard in the face with the end of

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the rope. He yelled like I shot him, then told on me to the playground lady. She looked at me all stern, crooked her finger to follow her. We entered the hallway. She turned to me-- and smiled! She said, "Good for you mija. Don't let no boy treat you like crap." Then she turned and walked away.

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

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

"Wonder Woman... Where the world is mine, where I'm fighting crime, on the BlueEEE Bay-ouoooo"

Yeah. Rockin' the short shorts without fear.

When you got a name like Linda, people assume things about you. They assume you're meek, because you're "Pretty." They assume you don't mind being chatted up, don't mind being touched. But you know what? If somebody said to Wonder Woman, "Girl, you're so pretty, and the way you're dressed? Pffftt--you're asking for it." She'd've bopped them straight in the nose. And if you wolf-whistled, you'd get a red boot (Kicks.) to the face.

Inside, I was Wonder Woman. And when my dad would yell at me 'cause I spoke my mind, or was defiant I'd go inside. I'd imagine my life as an Amazon princess, in a world of powerful women. Being Linda was my protection.

Las Lindas were fly. I put their posters all over the walls of my room. My brothers teased me a lot, for not having any boys on my wall, like a normal girl, but whatever! I wasn't a "Normal" girl.

I was a Linda! A super-hero badass singer who could do whatever I wanted. Mujer Maravilla/La Cantadora Dorada!

She does a little bolero. Going further into the box, she pulls out a program.

Ah. Middle school. Quite possibly the worst time of any girl's life. Lucky me. 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. No friends, no one who even sounded like me! (Imitates valley-style) Oh Mah Gawd Tayy-lor-- Wh-a-t did djeu djo to djou're heeeeeiiiiiiiiirrrrrr? (flips her hair vacuously)

Right before Christmas vacation, that first year, I signed up for the school talent show. I had to do SOMETHING, you know? I needed an identity. 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, sat me down with a champurrado, and we watched her novelas together until I fell asleep.

That was a tough Christmas. The family mi 'Ita worked for had a lot of parties, and Abuelita was there way late every night. She would wake us up to pray the Novena with her. We'd try to sing along but Rogelio always fell asleep and snored through the villancicos. She'd let me sing "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus." all by myself. She told me I had a beautiful voice.

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 Nordstroms, tissue paper and everything. The fabric was so shiny and thick.

I had to wait to try it on when my brothers were outside playing a pick up game of Basketball. I put "Simple Dreams" on the record player. I took the whole outfit out of the tissue and laid it on the bed. 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 my self in the mirror. My brown, bossy, bighearted self. I was her. She was me. I belonged in that superhero costume. This was feminista armor.

Linda's sweet voice sang in my ear as I looked myself up and down in the mirror. And 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. They picked it up maybe once, pretended they were Elvis, and then dumped it in the corner. I snuck it up to my room and played along to my records.

I knew I was out of the box. Look, all the other acts were basically a bunch of cheerleaders doing stupid dance moves to canned music. Seriously. There were like 7 of those acts signed up to go. Two of them were dancing to "Play that Funky Music White Boy." Which should tell you all you need to know about my stupid

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school. There was a kid signed up to beat-box. He was black and looked as out of place as me. I was sort of hoping we could team up, but he didn't show up on the night of the talent show.

I was #12, really close to the end. AFTER the 2 "Play that Funky Music" teams. I figured that was a good sign. 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. It was like something possessed me to keep going, to humiliate myself totally. 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 no ABC Family Movie, where all of a sudden I was accepted for my differences. They were laughing in that mean way kids have. Like in relief that it wasn't them, and in joy that they would have something new to torture me over. 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 wore my bracelets to school every single day of 7th grade. The teasing never died down. Ever. That teacher though? The one that gave me the thumbs up? One day, right before school let out for the summer, I ran into her in the hall, "Hey", she said, "I wanted to give you this." She smiled and handed me this book.

Pulls Ana Castillo's, "Women Are Not Roses" out of the box. The book is dog eared and the cover is about to fall off.

I looked down to read the title, and when I looked up. The teacher was gone. (Reads)

"Women are not roses

they are not oceans or

stars."

The book was used, a college course book. From a place called CSULA. When I got home that day, I showed it to my 'ita. She asked me if she could read the book, I was a little scared that she wasn't going to give it back, maybe it was too adult? I peeked into her room that night, and she was reading the books, mouthing the words, ignoring the telenovela.

The next day, she handed me the book, and told me I would be going to CSULA. "Ita, I'm 13."

"Si, pero vas a ir. Yo te voy a mandar."

No one in my family had ever gone to college. I don't know what she was thinking, but from that day on, it was a fact of life. I was going to CSULA and that was that. Mi Papi thought she was completely coocobirds.

I thought about it. I decided it was a very good idea for a professional superheroine to have a good education. I kept my head down and my grades up.

For high school, I continued in the rich white hood school district. Things got easier, I guess. I grew, I grew out of the Wonder Woman costume. Replaced the gold bracelets with black rubber ones, started listening to Madonna, and Siouxi Sioux. Linda Ronstadt quit singing rock and roll and Wonder Woman went off the air. I had friends, finally. I played my guitar in the band. I even got bleached highlights. In the end I fit in really well. I was working hard to get good grades, so that I could get a scholarship. I graduated at the top of the class.

I got into CSULA. When I showed the acceptance letter to my 'ita, she took it like, "of course." 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. A band of avengers!

My Xicano Studies class was so intimidating. Holy crap. I looked at myself, in my shoulder pads and leggings,

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LA LINDA: (cont'd)

having gone to my fancy High School. I was such a poser. It took about half of the semester for me to feel comfortable, almost till the end of the year to actually speak up in class. But I took it all in. I really did. I found out so much about myself, about my family. About where I came from, and who I was. About why so many of my friends said they were "Spanish." to white people. 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, I had a stack of books from the Library, but it was slow going. I was stalling, bored with the book I had in my hand, and I looked up at the wall of my dorm room. My friend Tonatzin, who wanted to be the Aztlan Marilyn Monroe but feminist, had put up a poster, from a theatre company in Hollywood. It was a bunch of faces, tons of them, of Latinos, Hispanics, Mexicans, who had worked in the movies and TV. I had seen it before, but that day, I really looked at it. I saw Rita Moreno, Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, and-- I looked closer-- there, in the middle about 3 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 guide lights. Both of them.

I ran to the library for confirmation. The librarian was as excited as I was, but she was way skeptical. It took some digging, but Wonder Woman's real name was Linda Jean Córdova Carter. Linda with and "I". Her mother Juanita was "of Mexican descent." And La Ronstadt? It was her dad's side. She was even recording an album with a Spanish title. Both from Arizona. They never hid it. The facts were there, in press releases and newspaper articles. But the wider public didn't hear it, or didn't want to. Las Lindas were talented and beautiful and adored by millions of people.

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-tu-tional rights"

I wrote about Las Lindas for my graduate thesis on Latinidad in popular culture. When I read the paper, some jerks in my Chicano studies classes were ranking on them, 'cause they were all, like "passing". What did

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LA LINDA: (cont'd)

that mean? Passing. Was I passing in High School? Did I not embrace who I was enough? No. I never said I was "Spanish", like some people did, because I never thought being Mexican was somehow less.

I graduated with honors. First person in my family. Dad moans about the cost, but I think he's proud. Mi 'ita-- She read every book I brought home. We talked about our culture, our heritage. What it meant to be women in our culture. 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 Masters. She was really young. I mean, at my age she had a grown up kid. She really could've blossomed.

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

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

I've got a teaching job across the country. In Minnesota, te imagines? Can you roller skate on a tenure track? It snows there. A lot. But I'm not scared, not at all. I'm packing up my guitar and my roller skates, my gold bracelets and my Abulita'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. Soy Linda!

LIGHTS OUT