



**Family:  
Micaela Sanchez**

**Artist:  
Larry Gawel**

Larry Gawel says that when he began preparing to create his Stories of Home sculpture, he was overwhelmed by the Sanchez family, which includes Micaela and more than one hundred children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren. The task became more manageable when it dawned on him that Micaela's story encompasses that of the whole family. So he and his bi-lingual UNL intern, Diana Sanchez—who is not related to the subject family—began to meet with the 91-year-old matriarch.

Through these meetings, Larry learned that Micaela had been born in Texas, a descendent of Hernando Cortez, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish conqueror of Mexico. He found that she had married Jesus Maria Sanchez, a migrant farm worker who eventually brought her and their children to Nebraska, where they became the owners of an asparagus farm. The artist discovered first-hand that Micaela's daughters were sincere when they characterized their mother as strong, intelligent, gentle, independent, determined, wise and stubborn.

“We had wonderful conversations in her apartment,” Larry says. “One of Micaela's many jobs on the farm was to feed her family and she became skilled both in the garden and in the kitchen.”

Larry and Diana found that many of their discussions with Micaela touched on food. They visited several of Lincoln's Mexican restaurants; yet, the highlight came when they made tortillas in Micaela's kitchen.

“When Micaela taught me to make tortillas, she produced a small wooden rolling pin that she called a *palote*. . . Looking at it, I could see the history of its use in the raised grain of the aged wood. I became obsessed with that *palote* and all of the lessons it had witnessed as she taught her children to cook, and make tortillas. When I asked her about any heirlooms that she would pass on to her children, Micaela spoke not of materials things, but of recipes. This is what is important to her. Her family's understanding of their culture, their history and their language all come together in these recipes.”

Larry's sculpture is based on the trunk that Micaela's husband made for her to move her few belongings. It contains the ingredients to make tortillas, along with 11 *palotes*, each carved with the most important things Micaela taught her 11 children. The lessons are written in Spanish and become apparent when the *palotes* are pressed into rolled tortilla dough.

Visit our blog at [http://www.journalstar.com/blog/stories\\_of\\_home.php](http://www.journalstar.com/blog/stories_of_home.php)



**Family:  
Micaela  
Sanchez**

**Artist:  
Larry  
Gawel**

A relative says Micaela Sanchez has always been the backbone of her family. She bore 12 children, who have had children and grandchildren. She has served as midwife for family births, as disciplinarian for grandchildren, and as caretaker of the ill. Mrs. Sanchez and her husband, Jesse, began their married life as migrant farm workers, starting on the Texas/Mexico border and working north with the crops. While working in Lincoln in 1950, they were offered land on the western edge of town. They purchased it, settled here, and their business and family thrived. Like their parents, the children seized opportunities in business and education. Mrs. Sanchez's daughter, Carmela Sanchez de Jimenez, says her mother has had challenges and heartaches during her 90 years, but she accepted them with the same love that she gave the successes. "My mother is very strong," she says. "To me, she has the strength of a thousand angels."

*Photo: Larry Gawel, & Micaela Sanchez*

*Photo Credit: Diana Sanchez*

Visit our blog at [http://www.journalstar.com/blog/stories\\_of\\_home.php](http://www.journalstar.com/blog/stories_of_home.php)