



<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-sanchez29-2008aug29,0,5329210.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

## Linda and Loretta Sanchez 'Dream in Color'

The law-making sisters, rarities on Capitol Hill, reveal pivotal moments in their lives.

By Lynell George

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

August 29, 2008

So much of politics is about who you know -- strategic alliances, swiftly forged intimacies. There are the family dynasties, to be sure, as well as a few husbands and wives who have done their share of heavy lifting in the name of public service. But rarer still in American politics are siblings working shoulder to shoulder.

That's why much fuss was made when U.S. Rep. Linda Sanchez joined her sister, Loretta, on Capitol Hill in January 2003. Her swearing-in made history; the Sanchezes are not only the first sisters in Congress, but also Latinas, daughters of immigrant Mexican parents who set firm goals for their seven children.

Representing Garden Grove (Loretta) and Lakewood (Linda), the sisters, both Democrats, have led vivid, visible careers -- unseating long-time incumbents, contesting elections, simmering in controversy, fighting for immigrant rights, fending off critics, battling sexism -- all of it in front of the media's steady stare.

In "Dream in Color," their book that comes out Tuesday, the Sanchez sisters take it all on, from their tumultuous political journeys to the pressure and expectations of their Latino constituencies -- and at moments, even each other as they recall pivotal moments from their past. Part memoir, part how-to-succeed guide, the book is as colorful and outspoken as the sisters themselves.

"It was so much fun to write," said Loretta, via cellphone, while walking to an early-morning television interview this week at the Democratic National Convention in Denver. "We're almost like 'Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In' when we get together. I got my little digs in. She got hers. Some of the people who have seen early copies of it have said: 'Oh my God, did she say that?' But they don't understand our family."

Strong words and strong will are definitely central elements key to large-family survival. "With seven kids you're *always* negotiating," noted the 48-year-old Loretta. Over the years, as the family moved from El Monte to Anaheim, Loretta, the second eldest, came to be known as "The Warden" among the younger siblings since much of their care and discipline was doled out by her.

"She always had her soapbox," 39-year-old Linda, the sixth child, recalls early on in "Dream in Color," "and was preaching about eating the right food, doing chores, and taking care of ourselves to the point where sometimes I felt like I might as well be living in a convent."

The strictness, passed down from their parents, served its purpose. The idea was if the kids were busy with studies, chores and other family responsibilities, they couldn't get into trouble. Their parents, Maria Macias and Ignacio Sanchez, ultimately raised a family of high-achievers -- lawyer, businessmen, mortgage broker, civil engineer. It is that "strict immigrant work ethic," that Linda and Loretta fall back on.

Telling this story, about two focused, self-assured Latinas defying expectations, felt crucial at this moment, Loretta said. It was a way to place their own experiences against a contemporary backdrop that is also full of joys and contradictions -- Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton shattering the glass ceiling with her historic run for president joined, in real time, by a fervent backlash against illegal immigration. This is the world of clashing truths and sensibilities that the Sanchezes inhabit and battle through daily.

There was talk of doing a book a little while ago. "Actually we had a different book deal," Loretta explained Tuesday morning. "It was sort of a nuts-and-bolts 'how to win an election' for women, young people." People who have traditionally had trouble getting into politics and through the process. "We started with a ghost writer, but then he ran away. For good!"

"We didn't have a structure starting out," Linda said later the same day, moments after descending the podium after her convention speech. "But in recalling events, we realized that even though we grew up in the same family, we perceived things a little differently. So we decided to arrange it thematically."

Co-writer Richard Buskin, who has written several books about influential women -- Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana among them -- sat the sisters down and interviewed them, taping the conversations. "Sometimes the three of us would be in the same room. Other times I would write something up and then Richard would call and ask questions," Loretta said. "He was great because he knew how to organize us."

The back-and-forth flow of their voices creates a revealing, yin-yang portrait of two very different women -- Loretta the early riser; Linda the night-owl networker; Loretta the "neat freak," Linda the "leave-it-where-it-drops specialist." It's a diptych of siblings who grew up in the same household as their parents evolved and began to understand the country and its customs in ways they hadn't, or couldn't, in the beginning. Loretta couldn't go to sleepovers or Friday night football games. But by the time Linda came of age, they'd loosened their grip, attending Friday night games themselves, allowing a younger son to play. Loretta was not without resentment. She was the between-two-worlds daughter, navigating the landscape for her parents.

Loretta speaks candidly about the wear and tear of the process of unseating Bob Dornan from the seat he had held for 18 years, and Linda shares the emotional fallout of her first election in 2002 -- "nastiness in the press, other candidates telling half truths." In retrospect, Linda said, "They just didn't know me. They thought, 'Oh, she's just a pawn of Loretta's.'"

Yet in the process of revisiting the headlines of their careers, the sisters learned things about each other. Linda had no idea that when Loretta was "sick" during high school, she was actually struggling with anorexia as way to try to fit in. For her part, Loretta said she didn't remember that Linda had fought so hard through law school. "Then again, I was the one who was pushing her, telling her that she couldn't fail."

There's some dish: Linda shares her frustrations with the Hispanic Caucus and her verbal sparring with its chairman, Joe Baca, including the details of a 2006 face-off between the two of them, which involved Linda confronting him about him allegedly referring to her sister as a "whore." The dust-up surfaced in the media soon after, and Baca denied it.

"But the Latinas in Congress are still pulling their hair out," Loretta said. The answer "might be to start our own caucus," she added. "There's been some talk about that."

It's old news -- but in certain ways, not out of date. Limitations on the roles of women in Latin culture is something the sisters experienced in their own home. The rules were different for the sons; their father expected the mother to serve him -- even after a long day at work and a longer evening of night school.

"I love my father," Loretta said. "He's a great father. But was he a great husband? No. But that wasn't my relationship with him. It was something I had to come to understand."

But more than making waves or settling scores, the book is very much a handbook, a key to unlocking doors to a more expansive future.

Early in "Dream in Color," Linda shares an anecdote that could serve as a metaphor for their lives. Years ago, Linda would drive her grandmother, Amalia, to Sunday mass. After church, they would discuss the sermon over lunch, but, her grandmother, she noted, always made one crucial shift. "She would embellish the words of his sermon with the wisdom culled from her own experience. . . . Grandma told me *Mija* [my girl], the Bible may say that you should obey your husband, but God made you with a mind and spirit all your own. Do not squander the talents he has given you. . . ."

This book, in many ways, is their embellishment: two sisters who have taken the country's promise at its word and are working to tailor it, update it, for the nation of many interests,

desires and hues it has become. "It's all really about adaptation," Linda said. "You use your moral compass to guide you."

[lynell.george@latimes.com](mailto:lynell.george@latimes.com)

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at [latimes.com/archives](http://latimes.com/archives).

**TMSReprints**

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2008 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)  
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

