Maria Christina Moroles (Águila), Interview Notes

Rose Norman interviewed Maria Christina Moroles by phone on Monday, October 27, 2014
There are two, 45-minute recordings, part 1 and part 2.

Website: https://arcoirislaclinica.wordpress.com/
http://earthcareproject.wordpress.com/

See also "Arco Iris, Rainbow Land: The Vision of Maria Christina Moroles," *Sinister Wisdom* 98 (Fall 2015): in press. Rose Norman condensed these interview notes (over 9000 words) into a narrative of about 3000 words. Águila edited and added to this for the final draft submitted to *Sinister Wisdom* February 14, 2015. At 3400 words, it is the longest single piece in *SW98* and may be further condensed before publication, so the uncut draft is included as an addendum to this interview.

Biographical Background
Maria Christina Moroles (born 1953) is president and executive director of the Arco Iris Earth Care Project (earthcareproject.wordpress.com), the non-profit organization that works to fulfill the Arco Iris mission of preserving and protecting 400 acres of wilderness near Fayetteville, Arkansas, and serving as a survival camp for women and children of color. Now known as Águila (formerly Sun Hawk), she is Native American, from the Coahuilateco Mexica nation, and she has been a *curandera,* or healer, since the age of seventeen. She grew up in a traditional Mexican-American family in Dallas, TX, in a barrio plagued by violence. After being raped and impregnated at the age of twelve, she was estranged from her family for several years, living on the streets, in and out of juvenile detention and foster care. She came to Arkansas in the 1970s as a result of a vision, and she has lived on reclaimed native land now known as Rancho Arco Iris (Rainbow Ranch) for forty years, much of that time without running water, electricity, or telephone. She and her partners built the dwellings and cleared land for organic farming. She is a master massage therapist, and also runs a spiritual medicine lodge at Rancho Arco Iris. She has a daughter Jennifer and a son Mario.

NOTE: *This is not a formal transcript. We hope to get funding for professional transcriptions, but at this point we are taking notes during the interview, excerpting pertinent parts of the interview, and then editing the result for publication. The interview notes often leave out repetitions, sometimes tighten syntax, and occasionally skip parts not directly on topic. The interviewee may change or add anything attributed to or about her in these edited notes, including completely rewriting the interview as a personal memoir.*

These edited notes will go to the archives at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University, along with the unedited audio interview.

Phone conversation 12-1-14 corrects and adds to the original notes. Bracketed information was added from this phone conversation.

Who We Were Back in 1976

It's important to know where I was living when I had the vision.

Family Background

I grew up in a West Dallas ghetto, in a large, traditional Mexican family. There's a lot of trouble living in the barrio, a lot of violence in that community, because it was a ghetto. It was common for there to be violence everywhere. My parents moved us to a better place, kind of on the edge of the barrio, but . . . things happened. Several things happened to me. I was raped at twelve and ended up leaving my home on account of that because I was pregnant. I was on my own from the age of thirteen. After I had the baby, I came back and realized that I couldn't live with my parents. Before that happened to me, they had been very loving, empowering parents. But in our culture when a young woman is violated like that, it doesn't matter what happened. And I think my parents were overwhelmed with their economic situation, and it just became very stressful. I realized that I'd gotten everything that I needed from them, and it was time for me to move on. Their way of being with me had completely changed. I had disgraced the family. I had always been very esteemed, as all my brothers and sisters were, and had been taught everything about independence and pride in our culture and who we were. So it was such a dramatic change that my spirit knew this was not going to work, and I left.

After that, I just lived on the street, and since I was so young, people kind of took me under their wing. I was very protected in that lots of things didn't happen. I felt protected and that this was better for me. I found a new freedom in living that way.

[**The baby that resulted from rape:** I was forced to give the baby up for adoption to relatives in South Texas. That's where I had the baby. My aunt and uncle who didn't have children took me in and took the baby. He was delivered in a bad situation, in a racist community. They were very cruel to me at the clinic. They did a forced delivery with forceps and injured the baby. He's been in a state institution since both his adoptive parents have died.]

About three years after I left, my 18 year old brother, who was a gang member, was murdered. I came back to my family then, after years of estrangement, and I saw how vulnerable and broken they were by what had happened. I realized, not only that, but how broken they were by my absence, and my not giving them forgiveness for the mistakes they made and how they treated me. I realized that I needed to forgive my parents and move on, and be of service to them, as a daughter, and to try to be a daughter again.
So I returned, somewhat, to my family.

After that tragedy, my family moved away from Dallas, back to where we came from in South Texas. Even though I was returning to the family, I was again alone and pregnant in Dallas. I was pregnant with my daughter Jennifer when my brother was murdered.

I got married at the age of fifteen, went to Mexico and got married, as a way to have autonomy because I kept being picked up on the street for vagrancy as a minor, and put in juvenile detention. I learned a lot of stuff on the streets! I had an arrangement with my husband before I married him. We were both very young--I was 15 and he was 16 [when we married]. [Would be 1968.] I told him not to ever, ever tell me what to do, or try to control me. And he agreed! He didn't have a mother--his mother had died--and his father was a skid row alcoholic. He became my best friend [while I was on the street that first time], and we decided that [getting married] was the best way for us to keep from getting hauled into juvenile detention every time the police would catch us. So we went to Mexico and got married.

The Vision

All that led to a vision that came to me. I began to have a dream during the time when I was recovering from my brother's murder and my own rape and all of that. It was a recurring dream that came out of the blue. In this dream, I was on a mountaintop, standing alone, looking down into a valley. The valley was like a city, but the city was in . . . like a war, and I could hear shooting and bombs exploding, people crying out. It was just a terrible scene that I was watching from a safe distance. I felt saddened by it, but I felt safe where I was.

So this dream kept recurring, that I was standing on a mountaintop looking out at this chaotic scene of the city, and I began to think and dream of leaving the city and finding that mountain. That mountain turned out to be this mountain [where I live now, Rancho Arco Iris]. There's a long a story to it, too long to tell now, [so I'll jump ahead to when I was in Austin, Texas,]. I was on the street again in Austin, when I needed a break. I was about eighteen, and had already had my daughter [Jennifer, born 1971].

I would leave [Dallas] when I would feel troubled. I would take a road trip to Austin to clear my head. I would hitchhike to Austin. And on one of those journeys, I got sick, and the people there who took care of people on the street (took them lunches), were a young couple, and they took me into their house. They told me about this land, this very land that I'm on now. They said, "There's a community that lives way back in the mountains. We're going to go live there. You don't have to pay anything to live there. It's an incredibly beautiful place." [This place they described was then a hippie commune known as Sassafras.] They described the land, and I was listening to their stories as they told me all about their trip. [I think they had been there before and were going back.]

They said, "If you ever want to go, we'll be there." They didn't know the address, but told me I could reach them at the natural foods co-op in Fayetteville (Arkansas). They said they would periodically be going into town to work. So I began the journey of saving money to move. I kept having that same dream, before they told me about that mountain and after. So I realized that must be the mountain I was supposed to go to.

How We Began (1973- ca. 1976)

[It was 1973 when I went to Arkansas. I didn't move onto the land until 1976.] After I went [to Fayetteville], it took me six months to run into them at the co-op, but I waited. I'm very good at waiting. I waited, and got a job, and one day they showed up and told me how to get there [to Sassafras]. My husband was with me at the time, and we were about ready to break up at that point. He had gotten to be a heavy drinker, like his dad, and was just not in a good way. He was the sweetest person—still is—but he became an endangerment to my daughter and I. One day he took off to get cigarettes with my two-year old daughter, and didn't come back. I waited up all night worrying, and they finally showed up the next day. It turned out he had gotten drunk, and he had our two-year-old with him. That was it. As much as I loved him, and as much as I cared for him as family, and we had been family to each other for almost nine years at that time. [When we finally got our divorce, it had been ten years. We separated at nine years. I told him I could not allow him to endanger my child. That was where the buck stopped. So I divorced him, and he went back to Dallas, and I stayed.

Before that happened, David and Jennifer and I had gone to Sassafras community, which is the land now owned by Arco Iris non profit. This land that I live on now. Rancho Arco Iris, where I live and have lived this whole time, is privately owned (the non-profit we started didn't own any property). It's all the same property, but we actually live on another mountain, across the creek from the 400 acres where the commune was. This land is very rough; it comes down steeply to the creek. There's bluffs and only trails where you can actually get to the other side.

When I came here, I saw the community that was living there, and it reminded me too much of the chaos in Dallas that I had left. It was a hippie commune, and they were doing drugs and alcohol, and playing Indian and playing witches, trying on all kinds of different hats. I was not interested one iota in that. But the minute I drove up to that mountain, my heart opened. I knew I was home. I never saw anything more beautiful than that road. It was a beautiful dirt road, lined with huge oak trees, every kind of hardwood tree. I was in love! But when I met the community. Ugh! [Question on phone followup: So this is the road into what was Sassafras? Not the 3-mile road to where you live? Correct. Tate Mountain Road.]

[More from phone followup: When it was a commune, Sassafras was a heterosexual community. Then the women rose up and threw out the men. So the hippie commune became a women's community in, I think 1976 or 1977, not long before I moved here. I wasn't really a part of that community. It was Brae who carried me from Fayetteville out to the land and tried to save my life. Later she tried to strangle me. We were young wild women! But I have no hard feelings toward Brae.]

I went back to Fayetteville, to cry about it, basically. There was no way I was going to live like that. They were still in the midst of the chaos. They just brought it out to the woods. So I went back to Fayetteville.

After my husband left, I got into a relationship with a woman, a dear friend. We had been friends for a couple of years, Shiner (Patti) Cardozo [she got her name from getting a black eye], and she told me the land had changed, that it was women's land now. Again, my heart opened. It had been about two years, and I thought I'd try it again. [It is about 1975 now.] I went out, and she wasn't there when I went. This woman, Esther Martinez, went with me. We were greeted at the gate by very hostile lesbian women who asked who we were and what we wanted. I told them we were friends of Shiner Cardozo, and that she had invited us to come there. They said, "Well, she's not here." So, once again, I saw that the land was not welcoming me, and I was very heartbroken again.

[From phone conversation 12-1-14: Shiner and I had reconciled, and she was planning to move back to the land from San Francisco, when she died. I was probably the last person she talked to, on the phone, before she died. I used to go out there and stay with her during allergy season (September-October). She had lung cancer. I noticed that the garage downstairs belonged to a landlord who owned a lot of houses, and kept all his chemicals and paints there. It had two vents that were right by Shiner's window. I felt like that was what made her sick. She had been very healthy.]

One woman who was there, named Berry, a young nurse from Germany, came up to me and said, "I was here when you came the first time, and I saw you leave heartbroken. Now I see you again, and I believe you do belong here." We talked, and I told her my concerns and my sadness. She told me that there was land on the other side of the creek from Sassafras, land that belonged to Sassafras, and I could live there, away from this community. So I went away with that in my mind, that maybe that was what I should do. She told me how to get there, and I decided to go on and take that walk. It was directions like go to this cabin, then walk down to the creek, and then cross the creek and walk up the other side of the mountain. This is a long journey, and I had a four-year old with me. [So it's 1975 now.] But I did it anyway, and again I felt my heart opening. I again began to allow myself to believe that this was the place, the mountain in my dreams. There was nothing here, but there was peace.

I went back to Fayetteville and told my girlfriend Shiner what had happened. She was very apologetic about the hostility we faced when we went out there, of course. A lot of lesbians back in 1975 went through that separatist stage. They were coming out, taking back their power, and they felt they needed to isolate themselves and protect what they had. It was part of bringing the pendulum back into balance, but it kind of went to that real extreme of being separatist, and hostile, protective. I understood it, but I didn't want that. I was tired of the racism and classism I'd lived with all my life.

What happened next was that in town [Fayetteville], there was an epidemic of hepatitis that went through our community like wildfire. Every woman in the trucking community got it. And we were driving deliveries all over Texas, Louisiana, etc. I was one of the last people to get it. It went through the alternative community. It started in a restaurant where someone changed a diaper of a baby who had hepatitis. Hundreds of people got it. I was a trucker at the time, and I hadn't gone back to the land since that last visit. My partner at the time, Shiner, was a member

of the collective that owned the property, and she would go out there, but I didn't want to go. It was in a trust, I think called Sassafras Women's Collective. At the time when I got sick, they had created different healing houses in the community, and the women had created a women's house at Sassafras, a house where women were being cared for. There were women on the land at Sassafras who were caring for the women there who had come down with hepatitis.

I told my partner, Shiner, "Please don't take me out there," but she came home one day to find me passed out on the floor, burning with fever. So I woke up here at Sassafras. [Shiner and Brae had taken me out there. We were all truckers.] That's another long story I won't go into, [but one key part was that], my partner freaked out [about it and left me.] I looked like death! I was completely yellow and emaciated. That was the second time I'd had hepatitis. I had it when I was really young, from a dirty needle when I was a kid on the streets, so my liver was already damaged, and I had it in my blood. When I got it the second time, it really hit me hard. My partner got scared and went off with another woman because she thought I was going to die.

[From phone conversation, 12-1-14: Ozark Women's Trucking Collective was all lesbian trucking collective for Ozark Food Coop Warehouse. A woman named Ocean started the trucking collective. We drove semi's all the way to Wisconsin to pick up cheese, and all the way to Texas and to New Orleans, and all in between there. Ozark Natural Foods still exists, but the warehouse is gone. Their building was built on a landfill and was leeching.]

At Sassafras, while I was sick, there was a woman named Saturn who practiced Satanism. She had put a spell on a woman there, and I helped her get rid of the spell. While I was sick in bed at the main house at Sassafras, I heard a woman come in and bring a glass of water and put it by my bed. I picked it up to drink, and I tasted and smelled it and knew it was kerosene, and I spit it out and pushed the glass away, and a lamp fell over and the liquid started a fire. That's when I knew it was unsafe to be there. So Berry took me out of the main house into a shed.]

It was during that time that the vision for this place became crystal clear. When I was very, very ill, Berry, the one who had told me about the land on the other side, took care of me. I sent my daughter home to Texas because I was so sick. I thought I was going to die. Berry (really all of the women at Sassafras) was afraid I was going to die and wanted me to go to the hospital. Because I had had a bad experience in a hospital, I had decided never to go to a hospital again. I decided I would just die on the land, on my mountain. I thought, maybe this is far as I get, I get to the mountain. During her care time, I died, and I had a vision in my death, all about this land and being on that mountain, here on this mountain. In the vision, I was told by a saintly looking young Indian woman with braids, a woman that I named Santa Maria, that I wasn't going to die. I was just resting. I was going to start my life anew, and that I had a mission, and the mission was that this land would be a sanctuary, a safe space, for women and children of color. That's where it began, when I came back from my death. After that, I wasn't in pain any more, and I wanted to live. I felt good. I just wasn't very strong for awhile. This is the abbreviated version of the vision. It kept going for a few days. I was in a blissful state. Berry said that when I came back, a light glowed around my body.

The women thought I was dying, so were drumming and chanting outside the shed. When Berry came out and told them I was dead, they kept doing that but more in a wailing kind of way. Then she went back in there and sat with me alone, and that's when, all of a sudden, she said I took a deep breath and a glow came to my body, a white light all around my body. Shiner had left a beautiful white caftan as a burial robe for me. When I didn't die, I asked for clothes so I could go outside, and she put that white caftan on me. There was snow on the ground, and it was cold, but it was a clear, blue day, bright. The yard looked over toward the mountain where I am now. I did not feel cold at all. I felt very warm. I was barefooted, and I felt that I wasn't touching any cold. I sat on a mattress outside, and asked them to leave me alone. I felt alone, but don't think I was. My vision continued, and I saw three Indians. What you see when you look at this mountain at this time of year is a bluff line. What I saw was three Indians on horses, and one was waving to me with a staff, waving me to come. I looked into the sky, and there were all these buzzards flying around. Then a hawk came flying from the north right down into the center of them and scared them off. As it flew down, it flew right in front of the sun. That's when I got my name Sun Hawk. I knew at that moment it was my name. I had a new life, and that was my new name. Even though it was just one hawk, it came and dispersed all those buzzards that were flying above me.

Berry had already told me about that land, but when I saw those three Indians, I knew that was where I would be going.

After I got well enough, I came over here, to Rainbow Land [now Rancho Arco Iris]. Maybe two years later, the land was put in mine and Esther's names, after I had counseled with the seven co-owners, the collective, and told them about the vision. I asked for a counsel, and I sat with the seven-co-owners, and shared with them my vision. They had been there when I died and came back to life, and they were kind of freaked out about me. So they decided they would turn over that land to me, because of that vision. So they turned over that land, this land that I live on. We put it in mine and Esther's names, even though Esther didn't have that vision, and never spoke up for the land.(I like to refer to the land transfer as reclaiming our native lands.) I don't believe in owning our Mother, and the vision was not that I would own it, but that I would be here to heal myself from my wounds up to that point, and to provide a sanctuary for women and children of color. So we became a survival camp for women and children of color. [**Question on the phone:** Do you know what became of Esther Martinez? Just curious. "She moved to Austin. Several of the women of color, one by one, moved to Austin or to California."]

It was very important that we began that way. As a woman of color, being a Mexican Indian was as bad as being Black in the South. There was the same kind of racism. All my teachers were white, and they were racists. Of all the teachers I had in grade school (I only went to the seventh grade), only my sixth grade teacher was not racist. She was very loving and kind.

I knew that in order for us to regain who we are, we needed to isolate ourselves. We didn't know who we were because of them bossing us and putting us down. We really didn't! I realized all of that, and felt that we had to be alone here to work that all out. So we did. So we did. We needed our autonomy to remember our true and sacred nature as women, as natives

of this land. When I say "this land," I'm speaking of North America, not just this land right here. My ancestors are natives of North America. My teacher told me that we emerged from the earth in Utah and migrated south by the vision of a medicine person that said we needed to follow the hummingbird south, and when we saw the eagle perched on the cactus with a serpent in his mouth, we would have arrived. That is now Mexico City. My most recent ancestors, over the last two hundred years, are Coahuilatecos, and there territory is the state of Coahuila and all of southern Texas, up to San Antonio. There are a lot of different tribes of Mexican Indians in that whole area of southern Texas. They call themselves Mexica's [pronounced muh-SHE-kuh] now, a general term for many different tribes.

Women came, at first many women came. In the 70s there was a big back to the land movement. Gypsy women, women of color who heard about us through different articles, word of mouth, and festivals. We used to go to Michigan [the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival], back in the beginning [first year was 1976]. There was a women of color tent, and I would always speak there. So women were coming, and they were all wounded. We were all so wounded. It was crazy. We didn't have any money. I was recovering from hepatitis. I went into liver failure when I died. I had a miraculous recovery, coming back to life, but it took my liver two years to recover, two years of not being able to work, and seven years total to really rebuild it. We lived on food stamps, out of tents and teepees, just lived here on the land without running water. It took us all the way back to the beginning. We had horses for hauling our stuff up the hill. We went to the store once a month, when our food stamps came in. The rest of the time we were here, learning how to grow a garden.

So that's how we began. Part 1.

What We Became (1976-)

We had women come and go. At first it was a lot, and then it got less and less as those women who had that dream of living on land—escaping the madness of the city life-- came and tried it, and found that it's not easy to live in a wilderness area. They were urban women escaping their traumas and tragedies. I began to take care of children because I had a little girl, and there were all these women coming here who needed to get themselves well, and they would come and go, and often leave their children with me. And I loved it because it gave my little girl someone to play with, and I actually preferred the children to anybody else. Because of their innocence. But they were also very damaged, from living with their mothers, coming from broken homes, many were latch key kids who were often left alone. I'd find out about it and tell the mothers to just leave them here awhile and go figure it out! The women would go home to their parents, or go home to their partner, or whatever. It wasn't easy living out here in tents, because they were used to living in houses, so they would leave their children.

The beginning of the second year I was here, my partner Shiner showed up. She came back dragging her tail behind her. She told me she was sorry, that she had gotten scared that I was dying and had run away from it. She couldn't face the death. So she came back, and she said she loved me, and we'd already been good friends for two years before becoming lovers, so she

came back and lived with me. We lived here for five years together. We were very different, though. We were from opposite ends of the economic scale. She was from an upper class Jewish family from Minnesota.

I told her the vision, and she was all for it, and we began to work on it, as stewards. I didn't believe the land was supposed to be mine, but to share as a sanctuary. We needed to get it out of Sassafras' name, so we had put it in my name, mine and Esther Martinez. Esther left, but Shiner stayed. During that fifth year, I met Miguela at Michigan. I wasn't looking for anyone at all, but here was this woman who was from a New York City ghetto, from a large Cuban family. She came here and was here about six months before we ended up falling in love. This was unexpected—I was in a relationship with Shiner. Her grandmother had been living with us for two years. Her grandmother was well off and needed total care. Her family were paying us $2000 a month for her caregiving, and were using the money to build a house and upgrade the road. We had her set up in a trailer, and my family were still living in a teepee. Others were living in tents.

At Michigan, I had asked Miguela to come here and help build the house I live in now, in exchange for living on the land. And one day Shiner was in town with her grandmother and the kids. When somebody went to town, they stayed a couple of days, doing all the chores, the laundry, the groceries, etc. So she'd stay with friends in Fayetteville while they got all that done. Miguela and I had never been alone together on the land. So we were working on the roof, with no shirts on, putting on the decking. All of a sudden, I swear to God it was like Cupid hit me with an arrow. I looked at this woman, and that was it. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in the world. I thought, "Oh my god, it's her!" The Creator sent her to me, and I hadn't even noticed her in months! We'd been working side by side, and I'm a very driven person, and very loyal. But it happened. I looked at her, and she looked at me, and she knew what had happened, because it hit her, too. We were working maybe ten feet away from each other. She said she knew when she went down to the cabin that night that something major had happened that had to do with us. So that's how Miguela and I began, five years after I first moved here.

She was all on board, and knew all about our mission to be a sanctuary.
It all began to change when we decided to have a baby, because we had a baby boy. Now we had been taking care of little boys [whose mothers brought them to the land]; we'd never been separatist in that way. I never was a separatist even with women coming here. Women would come who were white. It was known that this was women of color land, but I hired this German woman, Eva, who was a carpenter and helped me build the house. We had white friends who came here, they were not excluded, but this was known as women of color land.

Things began to change when we had Mario. We couldn't go to Michigan any more, and we weren't about to be separated from him. I delivered him in the very room I'm talking to you from right now. I delivered him because, during the last month, the midwife would not come because her husband forbade her because we were pagans. She'd already told us there was potential for a difficult birth, because of Miguela's narrow hips. And it was difficult. So after she

almost died on me having Mario, there was no way we were going to Michigan and be separated from our child.

I inseminated Mario here, and Miguela birthed him. He's related to both of us; his father is my cousin. We had a midwife, but about a month before she told us she wouldn't be able to come for the birth. Women of all colors were here for his birth—an Asian woman, African American, two white women, several native women. It was winter, February 1, and it was cold. There was no running water then, but we had a plan. Still it was very, very hard, traumatic. I didn't realize the impact it had on us for years. Mario almost died, and Miguela almost died. We had to go to the hospital after he was born. He was flown to Springfield and Miguela was treated in a very racist hospital in Harristown, AR. I was not with her because I went with Mario to Springfield, MO. My Asian friend was with Miguela, and he treated her horribly, told her she was rotten, she stunk. I didn't know what was wrong with her. She had come from New York, the Bronx, and had had a hard childhood. I didn't realize how much it hurt her. He was taken away from her when they were in two hospitals. She really clung to him after that, and blocked me out.

It was an incredible birth. It took all of us to bring them through alive. It was sheer women power that brought them through that near-death experience. She was not dilating, and Mario was stuck. I had the sense that he was going to die if we didn't do something right then. So I called everyone in, and we all pushed. It was like the whole room moved, and he was born. He had a knot the size of a golfball where he had been stuck, and Miguela tore and was very weak from 46 hours of labor. She started getting a fever, and he had labored breathing, so we decided to take them to the hospital. What I say to everyone is that we prayed him down. And he is the most loving, gentle soul. He drew our community—this Bible Belt Christian community—together around us. They were all so drawn to him. All the white people who would never speak to us before, somehow they just fell in love with him. "He's a dandy!" they would say. This little fat Indian baby in a cradle board—and everybody wanted to hold him and touch him and feed him. There was a shift in our community here. When I say we prayed hard for him, we weren't praying for a boy, we were praying for a baby. He was inseminated on the first try, and we did it in ceremony. That night, the owls all hooted when he entered the earth. He's a musician. He sang "Let It Be" for my mom, as the opening song for our Thanksgiving dinner this year, he and my niece. He's our firekeeper at the ceremonies for the men. He runs men's lodges for men, and I do women's lodges.

Our lives changed. We became more inclusive than we had been before. Now, we'd never been separatist

Once we stopped going to Michigan, the flow of women to the land began to lessen. That was where we let women know we existed. Sometime, maybe 1984, we incorporated as a non-profit. We had decided from the start that we would not include the land in the non-profit. We had programming for women and children of color, at first, and then it began to include rural, disadvantaged children, because local children would show up who needed a place to be. There was a white woman who showed up with three half white, half black children, and left them here and disappeared for two weeks. So we incorporated hoping to get more help.

We didn't have a phone. The closest pay phone was nine miles away. No electricity, three miles to the mailbox. The non-profit didn't actually help us that much, except for when we went to the co-op. They would give us food and stuff for our events, camps for the kids and for women. That's how things began to change.

Now we had a child of color of our own, a boy, and we wanted him to have other children around, whatever he needed. And I had a daughter, who was 17 when Mario was born [he was born February 1, 1988].

An article Miguela wrote for *Maize [*"On the Precipice of Beauty," published winter 1990] reminded me of how things were changing then. Miguela began to get very, very disheartened by the way things were turning out. Our dream didn't seem to be coming true the way she had hoped. Women would leave, they wouldn't stay, and she became more and more disheartened. I felt it, too.

People were in awe of our love. We were kind of the cornerstone for lesbian love. We wrote each other love poems. We loved each other so much, went through so much in those 28 years.

Miguela gave it a good go. We were married 28 years. Miguela left January 1, 2011. She did her best, but something was missing, and she needed to go find it. She wanted me to go with her for years, go back to town, and then retire here. She began to see this place differently. She'd given so much, she felt like the land should give back to her. She saw the land more as a resource, and talked about things I didn't want to do, like selling some of the land. We struggled more and more.

[Recording 2 begins here. Some of this goes back chronologically in the narrative.]

The reason we named ourselves Arco Iris

Arco Iris means rainbow in Spanish. Rainbow to indigenous people is the rainbow goddess, the goddess of healing. She is all the colors, meaning all the colors of all the peoples. This land has always been about all colors living together. We as indigenous women are the stewards of the earth. As indigenous daughters, we should maintain the stewardship of the land. It didn't mean that many people always wanted to go there, or that it's exclusive of other people, only that we must, must, always remember that the people of color are the most disenfranchised, that we must maintain a space. We must remember that this was put in our trust, that we maintain that leadership. There's a misunderstanding that this is women of color only space. I hope that the leadership will continue to be indigenous women of color. That's why we are called Arco Iris. That's a a very important piece that is misunderstood often. Last night a woman came whom I've known since she was eleven. Her partner just committed suicide. She's a white woman with some Indian blood, Cherokee. A lot of the people around here have Cherokee blood because

the Trail of Tears came through here. But for all intents and purposes she's basically a white girl. I embrace her and love her and anyone who comes to me as my sister or brother. I do not turn away men or white people. I don't turn anyone away, if they come and ask me for help. That is my vow as a healer, to help as best as I can with what I know. This land is a sanctuary to all, but I must maintain this space for those displaced and marginalized indigenous people.

When Shiner Came Back

When Shiner came back, I was here alone with my daughter Jennifer. Shiner told me that her grandmother was very ill and dying, and that her grandmother had played a very important role in her life. We ended up going to visit her grandmother [in Minnesota] and found that she wasn't dying. She was a survivor of the Holocaust, and she thought she was in an internment camp [in a nursing home] . I suggested to Shiner that we bring her here, from that nursing home. Her parents objected that we didn't have any place to take care of her, or any place for her to live. They had her in a very nice nursing home. First we went to Minnesota, took her out of the nursing home and took care of her in an apartment for nine months. Then they let us bring her back in a travel trailer. She lived here on the land in that while I built the house that I live in now. The fact that she came to live with us helped financially build this place. They helped us with the initial costs of building the house, $5000 that got us started. It was a full-time job for Shiner, taking care of her grandmother. She was bed-bound and all that. It was a lot of work for us, but it did enable us to upgrade, since we got $2000 a month for that caregiving.

Because I do talk about experiences of racism that still go on, and that I lived through, people will take that too personally. I say if the shoe fits wear it, if it doesn't throw it away. There have been misunderstandings about that.

About the Land

There was no road, no water, no cleared land. We didn't have a truck for a year, until I traded my motorcycle for a little black Ford pickup that lasted about a year. One day, we lost our brakes coming down Cave Mountain, and I totaled it. There was a washed out three-mile long hundred-year-old logging road that hadn't been used in almost forty years, I think. It had trees growing in it. We walked in. There was nothing between us and the national park. There were two one-room unfinished cabins on the land that we worked on so that women could stay in them. One has gone back to the earth. The other one is now Jennifer's cabin and has been completely reconstructed from bottom to top, and added onto.

We had been living here, building our garden, building our home. We put in everything that's here now, irrigation, a garden, a pond, we finally got an antenna phone (when Mario was three or four, 22 years ago). There was no phone service for three miles.

[*The following is in answer to a question about improvements to the land since the articles in* Maize *when there was no electricity, no running water, a 500-foot well that didn't work.]*

Our first source of water was carrying one-gallon jugs an eighth of a mile from the spring. The second source of water was putting in a pond in 1980. That provided us swimming, fishing, irrigation for the garden and water for the animals and wildlife.

Then we did a hand dug well. The men, well-diggers, put an explosive in the ground without my knowledge. So that ended that way of having a well. I didn't want them setting off bombs here of any sort. Then we had well drillers drill down into the earth, which seemed more gentle. They didn't hit water for 500 feet, and we didn't have any way to get it up. The only pumps at that time were only guaranteed on regular power, not generator power. I'm sure they did that for commercial, but not for homeowners. We still have a 500-foot well that doesn't work.

Instead, we developed a water spring as our main source of water, and we have spring water. That is still our main source of water. I haven't had the money to invest in a different kind of water pump for our well that would use our solar power, and that might work. But I haven't investigated that in decades, since we rely on our spring. Until about ten years ago, the spring ran three seasons. We have two 1000 gallon tanks, and a 300-gallon settling tank to hold the spring water. So we never went back to that other well.

Miguela and I hand dug a cistern next to our house, and built a cement tank in the ground. It holds 900 gallons of rainwater, or whatever you want to put in it. It has a hand pump, and we don't use that for drinking water because we mostly fill it with rainwater. We had a drought a few years ago that was so extreme that ponds went dry. Our irrigation pond, a three-quarter of an acre pond, was one of the ones that didn't, but it went down from about 8.5 feet in the deepest part to about 3 feet. We water our animals from the pond. This year we had three seasons of rain again, enough to fill those tanks enough to last us through the three or four months without rain. When the tanks run out, we have to haul water from a spring in Boxley, five miles away. This is the first year that we've had three seasons of our spring running in about five years.

In 2000, we decided to ask for the land that had been the Sassafras community. The land had been abandoned for ten years. Poachers were vandalizing that property next to us and shooting, hanging out there. It's right across from us, so we asked for that property. It's a long story, but I'll just say we asked the owner for that property. I actually became one of the owners when my ex-partner Shiner was the last one of the collective owners to be asked to sign off of that land. When they asked her to do that, she put me as her power of attorney, so legally it was owned by me and the original purchaser of the property. We decided to put it into a non-profit.

I had no idea what I was doing at that time, I just followed the lead of the guidance I had asked for. It's a great responsibility, a great burden to take care of that 400 acres. That is the only land that is owned by the non-profit. It is wilderness land. Homesteaders used to buy land in 620 acre plots. The original owners had that much land. They sold off a little of it, and, when the women took over, the collective gave one heterosexual couple 40 acres because they were living there with their children.

Aguila confirmed that the following paraphrase by Rose is accurate.

Rancho Arco Iris is the original land that you asked to reclaim for indigenous women of color, originally 120 acres, and you bought another 20-30 acres where the spring is (funded by LNR). This is where you still live. When Esther left, you removed her name and put Miguela's name on that land.

Arco Iris, the nonprofit, owns the 400 acres across the creek. [Legally, it's 390 because Diana Rivers and Path Walker still own a life interest in 10 acres. On their death, it goes to Aguila and Miguela. There is a one-room cabin on that 10 acres.]

Altogether, the land that you steward is about 530 acres.

Our Mission Today

Our mission today is still for all this land to be a sanctuary, not only for people, primarily women and children of color, but for this land itself. It's an incredible forest with elk and bear and wild turkey and wolves--we even have panthers here. We have deep woods, deer and all the small animals, and incredible wild medicinal plants that are rare, ginseng and goldenseal and Echinacea, and black cohosh, and blue cohosh—so many basic medicines grow here. I went to the University of Arkansas law school for help a couple of years ago to get the land protected. They started trying to help us, but at that time, this land was in dispute with Miguela,[1] and there were other issues, and they said they couldn't work on it any more until all that was settled. We lost our IRS non-profit status because, after Miguela left, the person who took over that paperwork didn't send in the form for two years. In the third year, we got a final notice, and she sent it in, but we lost our non-profit status for awhile. We have been reinstated as a 501c3, since the problem was due to an error. The land dispute has been settled (it's not paid off, but it's settled). I, since the land is now solely in my name, personally owe her $15,000. Then the land will be free again, and I can put it in a trust.

I do hope to return to getting legal help to putting this land into a trust as a sanctuary for all those things I mentioned. We are one of the most pristine areas that has not been logged. Some areas were never logged, some areas were logged in the last hundred years, some areas were selectively logged. So having the land protected is a major, top of the list item. Without protecting the land, those who come here are not protected. We want to create a stewardship agreement to hold the land in perpetuity. I've written a draft that says that indigenous women

[1] There's information from our first conversation on the phone (not recorded) as follows. When Miguela left in 2011, she sued Maria Christina Moroles for a share of the land, now called Rancho Arco Iris. That lawsuit was settled through mediation, and Moroles is fundraising to pay off the settlement in installments. In 2011, Miguela transitioned to Miguel. The settlement was $27,500, and Moroles raised enough to pay the lawyer and $12,500 toward the settlement amount. Another $15,000 is still owed.

will live on the land and work on it. The draft gives guidelines for how to care for these lands for future generations.

It's a very complex thing that I've taken very seriously as a sacred responsibility. Our mission now is to heal our community, our local community, our Ozark community, and our indigenous community, and to bring all the colors into sacred union again.

I know that's quite ambitious, but these ancestors have been quite insistent with me. The ancestors called me back, and they knew exactly who they were dealing with, what kind of person would persevere, despite all the obstacles I have faced. I have always maintained that we as the indigenous daughters of the earth would maintain that leadership role, and do whatever we have to do in this white world that we live in, this society that we live in. It's very hard for me as an uneducated woman. I only went through the seventh grade. I got my GED by going to night school when I was very young, but I don't have the same resources in the academic area that are required. But I do have the perseverance and the vision. I pray that if this is what these ancestors called me back to do, that I will be able to do that. I see the importance in it, when I travel.

We as women, we are the daughters, we know more about the sacredness of life. I've given birth. I know the pain and the love that it requires to have a child. We are more like Mother Earth, because she births us every day. In the matriarchal indigenous way, it is the women who are responsible for the care and the stewardship of the land. That's important right now, when we see the destruction that has come from making the earth a commodity to be bought and sold and raped and pillaged for her resources, I think that men will never have as great an understanding as great as women will of the sacredness of the earth, our mother.

Medicine Names

My medicine name is now Águila. After I died that first time, I was given the medicine name Sun Hawk, through a vision. But about three years ago, this changed. I earned my eagle feathers, so now my medicine name is Águila, which means eagle. So many people still know me as Sun Hawk, over thirty-five years, I let them call me . . . whatever.

I have a teacher, an Aztec woman, and she gave me an eagle feather and a headdress, and she told me to put all my eagle feathers in the headdress and wear it, that it would give me strength. In our tradition, eagle feathers are like badges of honor, and I've received many over the years. Eagle is spirit, and it brings a message from spirit to the earth.

Spanish was my first language, until first grade. My English sentences are often reversed, because when you write or speak in Spanish, you begin sentences almost the opposite of how you would in English.

Looking to the Future

The vision now is to get some young blood here! My son is here now. He was in the Coast Guard for three years. He came back, and now it's just the two of us living here. My daughter

lives about 25 miles away. She recently told me that she and her partner are thinking of moving back here. I also have an apprentice who is thinking of moving here, a young woman.

I am a lodge keeper. This is a spiritual land, we do ceremonies here year round. People come here for spiritual healing. I run a spiritual medicine lodge (white people call it a sweat lodge), and my apprentice is going to start pouring water for me this Saturday, in my place. You've heard of Día de Muertos? Day of the Dead. On November 1, we are having a ceremony, and we'll have a lodge, and she'll begin pouring then. I still do it, and probably will continue to do it, but it requires strength, and you're sitting on the ground, so it's time for her to start. I'm a master massage therapist, so I use my hands quite a bit. I need to be more gentle with my body as I go into my 60s.

Timeline

This is just to help keep things clear, and also to help us place Arco Iris correctly in the timeline of Southern womyn's lands we're publishing in Sinister Wisdom. The special issue is organized chronologically by when land became womyn's land.

1953 Maria Christina Moroles (MCM) is born

1965? MCM raped, age 12

1966? MCM leaves home age 13 and lives on the streets of Dallas

1968 MCM marries, age 15 (marries another street kid, a man aged 16)

1971 MCM's daughter Jennifer Jo born

1976 Sassafras becomes women's land

1976 MCM comes to the land with her daughter Jennifer and friend Esther Martinez (date based on 1986 *Maize* article that says "Jennifer has lived on the land since she was six"--also implies article was written in 1985). The deed is in the names of MCM and Esther, until Esther left. Miguela's name was put on when Esther's name was taken off.

1979 Arco Iris land deeded to Maria and Esther

1982? Miguela DeColores [Michelle Borges is her birth name] comes to the land (MCM has been there 5 years)

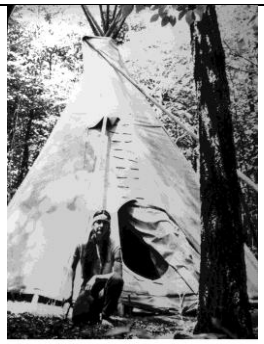
1984 or 1985 gets non-profit status (based on 1986 *Maize* article that says "last year we were granted non-profit status"--but if this was written in 1985, as Jennifer's age implies, then "last year" would be 1984).

Feb 1, 1988 MCM & Miguela's son Mario born on the land (Miguela gives birth, MCM delivers)

2000 MCM asks the collective who still own Sassafras to give Arco Iris the land, 400 acres. They sign it over and in the name of the non-profit, Arco Iris. (Diana Rivers retains a life estate in some acreage, 10 acres? I take it Diana's and Shiner's names were the only ones remaining on the deed?)

2011 Miguela DeColores leaves the land after 28 years

Photos provided by Maria Christina Moroles for *Sinister Wisdom 98.*

Filename: Arco Iris beginning SunHawk.jpg **Caption:** In the beginning, SunHawk with the tipi **Credit**: Courtesy of Águila Included in a collage of "Landyke Dwellings" for SW98	 In the beginning SunHawk with the tipi she built from canvas and self gathered pines
Filename: Arco Iris Mario Solano.jpg **Caption**: Mario Solano, named after his bondmother, Maria Christina Moroles (Sun Hawk), in the cradle board she made for him, 1988 **Credit:** Courtesy of Águila Águila asked us to use a photo of Miguela with Mario instead of this one.	 Mario Solano named after me his bondmother, in the cradle board I made for him
Filename: Arco Iris Miguela and Mario DeColores 1988 B&W.jpg **Caption:** Miguela and Mario DeColores, 1988. **Credit:** Courtesy of Águila. **We have not been in touch with Miguel/a and will need his permission to use this.**	

Filename: Arco Iris Shiner and partner Sun Hawk 1978.jpg **Caption:** Shiner and Sun Hawk, 1978 **Credit**: Courtesy of Águila	
Filename: Arco Iris Sun Hawk and Miguela mountaintop 2003.JPG **Caption: Sun Hawk and Miguela looking over their vast and Sacred Responsibility, Arco Iris Sanctuary, 2003.** **Credit: Courtesy of Águila.** **Will need to get Miguel/a's permission.**