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## **Fotonovela Creator Gets Graphic About Health Awareness**

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*[Albuquerque Journal](#)-- By Polly Summar*

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SANTA FE— Ana Consuelo Matiella grew up in a home on the Arizona/Mexico border where fotonovelas were forbidden.

"My mother thought they were trash, pulp fiction, like soap operas," says Matiella of the illustrated stories with titles like "Extraña Pasión" (Strange Passion). "When I was a kid, if she found them around the house, she would throw them away."

The twist of fate that finds Matiella now making a living from producing public health fotonovelas, as part of her social marketing consulting work, doesn't escape her.

"She died the year I finished my first one, and she couldn't believe I was writing one, that someone was actually paying me to write one," says Matiella.

It was the early 1980s and Matiella was working for the Southwest Arthritis Center at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

"They gave me a pamphlet to translate that was so complicated— it didn't work in English and it was going to be dismal in Spanish," says Matiella.

So choosing a fotonovela format— a passion-filled, easy-to-read story with photographs— seemed a logical choice.

"Diseases can be very devastating to your life— they cause a lot of drama," says Matiella. "We named the fotonovela 'Dolores y Esperanza.' There were two characters, Pain and Hope, and Hope taught Pain how to manage her arthritis."

Today, Matiella can count a range of fotonovelas in both English and Spanish to her credit, from encouraging library use to offering information about AIDS and promoting walking as a form of exercise. She's also worked with various teen groups in doing fotonovelas about teen pregnancy.

Matiella, 55, does the health research, writes the stories, lines up the actors and arranges the photographs.

## **Natural storyteller**

As one of the first people in the country to produce public health fotonovelas, Matiella gained enough success that she could chart her own career.

And so, after a number of years working for ETR Associations, a health education publisher in Santa Cruz, Calif., Matiella decided to move her family to Santa Fe.

She wanted her daughter, Sara Naegelin, now 23, to be raised in a town "where Hispanics weren't just poor— they could be mayor or lawyers or doctors."

Her childhood with her extended family encouraged storytelling.

From the summers she spent at her grandmother's house on the Mexican side of Nogales, she still remembers the flavor of life, and how it flowed through and past her grandmother's house. "There was the baker who carried his table on the top of his head and then set it down and opened up a beautiful white tablecloth filled with all his breads," recalls Matiella.

The washerwoman came to the house, too, setting up tubs outside to wash the clothes. "There was the vegetable guy and the grease guy, who came around to pick up the grease from cooking," says Matiella.

"My Tia Paqui would say to me, 'Each one of those people has a story— write what their story is,' and then she'd give me journals and pens to make up a story."

## **Social marketing**

Today, Matiella, who lives in Eldorado with her partner, furniture maker Dan Stubbs, is enthused by new aspects of the public health work she's doing. "I just got certified to do business as a minority business with the federal government," she says.

"I'm hoping that will lead to other things."

She began doing social marketing consulting in the mid-'80s, shortly after starting her fotonovela work. "It's about using

marketing principles to promote social causes," says Matiella.

"Ana is very skilled at finding out how people think about things," says Nancy Jane Heilman, who works for the New Mexico Department of Health in the public health division.

As an example, Matiella and Heilman cite the research Matiella did with older Hispanic women about mammograms. Matiella found that the mention of breast cancer actually frightened women away from getting mammograms.

"We had to do a campaign without mentioning breast cancer," says Heilman, so the theme became "Mammograms save lives."

Social marketing is never done in a vacuum, says Matiella: "If you're not talking to the people you're going to be sending your message to, you're not going to be effective.

"I pride myself for doing innovative work," says Matiella. "Anything I've done in my career, I'm always a little ahead of the curve."