



Marlen Esparza's
fighting spirit

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An Olympian's fighting spirit



Twenty-four-year-old Marlen Esparza has been "married to boxing for about 14 years." Photos courtesy of Acacia

Born to a family that adored boxing, Marlen Esparza has long been on a path toward pugilistic greatness. Her introduction to the sport came when she was 11 and appointed to babysit her younger brother when he worked out at a gym in her hometown of Houston. Eventually, Esparza's father and the gym's trainer, Rudy Silva, yielded to his daughter's pleas to let her try the sport.

It's a good thing that Silva acquiesced. Esparza grew up to not only become a formidable flyweight boxer but a bronze medalist at the 2012 Olympics – the first time that women's boxing was included in the venerable international contest.

Aside from her father, Esparza says she drew inspiration from myriad boxers: "Salvador Sa'ches, a great Mexican fighter that died young in 1982. Sugar Ray Leonard, Sugar Ray Robinson, Andre Ward, Roberto Duran, Alexis Arguello, Lucia Rijker, Aaron Pryor, Oscar De La Hoya, Juan Manuel Marquez. In this time, Gennady Golovkin and Sergey Kovalev."

Now a resident of Colorado Springs, Colo. – home to the U.S. Olympic Training Center – and "married to boxing for about 14 years," Esparza is focused on winning the gold at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. A partnership with Nike, she says, "is very beneficial to my training."

In Colorado, Esparza is under the tutelage of USA Boxing coach Pedro Roque Otano, who has coached athletes from multiple countries to 35 Olympic medals, including 11 golds, and 43 medals in World Championship competitions.

Unity magazine recently interviewed Esparza about a host of topics, including her career and her influences.

Q. Where are you in terms of training for the 2016 Olympics?

A. I'm right on track. I feel great about my performances, but more about my mentality. I feel stronger in all ways and have learned how to surround myself with honest, loyal people. I'm on my way and see nothing but greatness in my future.

Q. Did the movie "Million Dollar Baby" have any impact on you?

A. Yes in a way, because it gave women's boxing more exposure and without the movie that exposure would have been nonexistent. Not to mention Lucia Rijker was a main character! I also feel the movie was more about the relationship and bond an athlete makes with a coach and how important it can be. I don't think it did women's boxing justice, but overall the exposure did affect all women boxers.

Q. Are you still taking online college courses?

A. I am taking online courses at Devry University. I switched my major to entrepreneurship/business administration, minoring in cognitive science after my interest grew once I had more exposure to the business world with my current and previous sponsorships. Most importantly, I chose this major because my ultimate goal is to start a nonprofit for awareness on mental health that will be named after my best friend in high school.



"I battle myself every day, in and out of the ring, as we all do," says Marlen Esparza.

All wrapped up in quilting

Americans' love of quilting has reached new heights.

In 2013, International Space Station Expedition 37 Flight Engineer Karen Nyberg of NASA, a lifelong sewing enthusiast, finished a star-themed quilt block during her limited free time in space. Nyberg invited other quilters to sew star-themed quilt blocks to help celebrate her 5 1/2-month mission and her fervor for quilting.

"The avid quilter brought sewing supplies including fabric, scissors, thread, five needles (but no pins) to create a quilt block in space," the Los Angeles Times noted in an Oct. 31, 2013 article. "To keep her supplies from floating away, she attaches them to a Velcro pad and stows them in a Ziploc bag when not in use. To cut strips of fabric, Nyberg said, she has to tape the material down. ..."

Videos of Nyberg quilting about the space station were featured in a NASA exhibit at the 2014 annual International Quilt Festival in Houston (<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10152730307672626.1073741836.112718052625&type=1&l=21d617731c>). And Nyberg made an appearance at the event.

Of course, long before Nyberg's quilting odyssey in space, Americans were stitching up a storm. It started with the colonists in the 1600s, all but disappeared in the 1950s and 1960s, and was "reborn" following the nation's centennial in 1976.

The U.S. has more than 21 million active quilters, says Quilts Inc., whose interest drives quilt shows, workshops and conferences.

Quilting has been the subject of at least one company's research that started in 1994. Conducted by F+W, billed as a content and e-commerce



company, "Quilting in America 2014" provided the company's latest thorough assessment of the industry and its predominantly female enthusiasts:

Size of U.S. quilting market

- Estimated total dollar value of the quilting industry stands at \$3.76 billion.

Dedicated quilters (Defined as households that spend more than \$500 annually on quilting-related purchases)

- They represent 12.2 percent of all quilting households, and account for 60.4 percent of total industry expenditures.
- In 2014, dedicated quilters report spending a total of nearly \$2.27 billion.

The fact that "dedicated quilters" are overwhelmingly female and roughly 64 years old might not be a shock. But did you know most quilters (79 percent) attended college and are considered affluent (\$101,080 household income)?

Virtual communities and instructions

Quilters still connect with each other in "quilting bees" and other face-to-face gatherings. However, enthusiasts are increasingly comfortable with online education platforms such as craftsy.com. In 2012, according to Forbes.com, [Craftsy's](http://Craftsy.com) most popular class was a quilting course. In late 2014, the site offered at least 80 quilting classes – taught by men and women – with the most expensive class costing \$44.99 (Some classes were free).

This jibes with *Quilting in America 2014's* statistics on today's tech-savvy quilter: "The data indicates that quilters spend 3.5 hours per week watching quilting-related online broadcasting to learn new tips and techniques; get inspiration; purchase fabric, tools, and supplies; and to search for free patterns."



Collective adoration

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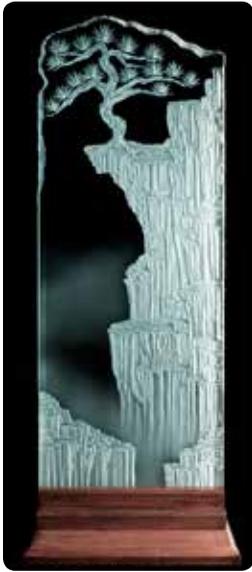
Nature is the driving force for the artists featured in the Women's History Issue of *Unity*. Their ability to draw from their communion with nature yields work infused with grace, style and sincerity.

BARBARA BOECK

Barbara Boeck received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She traveled to Europe and South America and returned to her native New Jersey, where she specialized in graphic and package design. Shortly afterward, she found her love in the art form of sand carved glass.

Each piece featured is sand-carved glass of multiple, deeply carved levels with tonal shading for texture and depth. The outer edges are contoured to create a frosted, uneven bevel effect and each piece is set in a stepped African mahogany base.

"My art flows from my life experience and love of nature and ancient cultures and civilizations," says Boeck.



"Cliffs and Pine" by Barbara Boeck



"Orchid Dance I" by Barbara Boeck

Inspired by ancient Chinese scroll work, "Cliffs and Pine" show cliffs rising upward and a lone, entwined pine tree perched near the edge symbolizing perseverance of nature. The needle clusters glisten like stars, yet seem to easily prick a finger if touched. Boeck's meticulous etching, "Orchid Dance I," is delicately subtle with veined leaves that twist and turn as a single stem rises from their center offering a new orchid at the top. Three deeply carved orchids cling to the stem, appearing to dance as the varied sizes of bubbled circles float and join in.

"Scarab," inspired by Egyptian ancient culture, is a head portrait of a pharaoh replete with strikingly bold eyes, braided hair, facial and ear ornamentation and a head crown emblazoned with mystical symbols of a serpent and scarab.



"Scarab" by Barbara Boeck

Boeck remarks that the ancient use of glass was to create objects of art and that tradition continues through her work. She has created large-scale custom, carved glasswork for residential, commercial and public spaces as well as one-of-a-kind limited edition pieces of glass and crystal. Her work can be found in varied commercial establishments as well as numerous private collections.

ELISE BLACK

Elise Black has always been drawn to the creative process. As a young child, she loved to paint still-life and collect interesting objects. As a teenager, Black painted intricate birds on eggs and sold them at a gift shop in New York. Black attended the Fashion Institute of Technology and received associate degrees in advertising and communication, and fashion and illustration, and she engaged in post-graduate studies in clay sculpture.



"Offerings" by Elise Black



"Over a Rainbow" by Elise Black

Black says her inspiration comes from a multitude of sources, including nature and man-made materials and objects. "Offerings" was created in the spring after a particularly difficult winter on the East Coast, Black says. She remarks that this piece is about renewal and promise. The bold orange sun and the images of



"Scribbles" by Elise Black

soaring birds represent her longing for warm sunshine and clear blue skies.

Fused colors, both bright and subtle, come alive in the abstract work "Over a Rainbow." Black regards this tapestry of rugs, fabrics and metal on canvas as "reconstituted abstraction," a reference to her use of found and unconventional materials previously employed for a different purpose. She states that its features of rings and circles speak to the cyclical nature of their journey.

Even the shadows emanate a playful nature in Black's piece called "Scribbles." Black says she chose that name for the whimsical steel-welded sculpture because it reminds her of childhood drawings made with a brand new box of crayons.

Black's work appears in corporate and private collections worldwide and is included in the Permanent Art Collection of the town of Westport, Conn., and the Lower East Side in New York City.

ROSALBA SAENZ

Born in Bogota, Rosalba Saenz studied fine art at the Feminine Institute for Superior Studies in Guatemala City, Guatemala. She continued her studies at the National Academy of Belles Arts in La Paz, Bolivia, and received a fine arts degree in painting.

Saenz has always been exposed to nature and colorful landscapes of the Andes, India, Peru and Guatemala. She says her interaction with nature and its purity has made her more attentive to color and light and she strives to translate those colors into her artwork. Saenz's watercolor, "Jar With an Apple," is a composition she arranged highlighting the softness of yellow and lavender satin draperies. The elongated narrow neck of the pitcher and the red of the apple give the viewer a sense of calm.



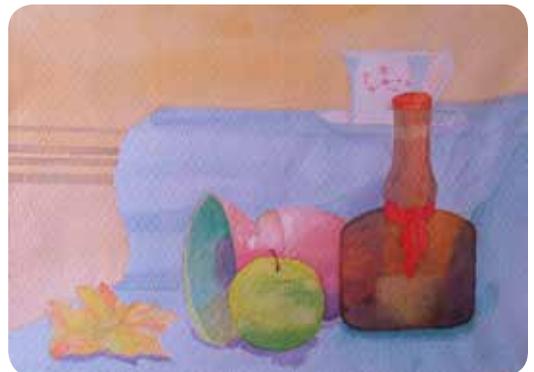
"Jar With an Apple" by Rosalba Saenz



"Bodegon 1" by Rosalba Saenz

"Bodegon 1" illustrates variations of planes and colors that interplay with lights and shadows ..." Saenz's says "A Cup of Te" is an inspirational invitation to have a cup of tea. A symbolic apple of desire, a bottle of wine, an autumn leaf and the cup of tea culminate the complementary colors of pastel blue and soft pinks, oranges and yellows.

Saenz's paintings have been included in multiple exhibitions in the United States and in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, France and India.



"A Cup of Te" by Rosalba Saenz

Healthiest fruit for women

Let's face it: When it comes to issues like diet and health, women are often far more attuned to the latest trends and news. That includes the annual list of so-called "super foods" – meat, fish, poultry and produce brimming with life-sustaining nutrients. Apples, oats, salmon, spinach and the like always make the cut, but if you're looking to diversify your arsenal of powerhouse foods, consider adding these less-talked-about fruits to your shopping cart.

Asian pears

One large Asian pear has 10 grams of cholesterol-lowering fiber, about 40 percent of your daily need. People who ate the most fiber had the lowest total and LDL cholesterol levels, according to a recent study of Baltimore adults. The same researchers found that people who ate the most fiber also weighed the least and had the lowest body mass index and waist circumference.

Serve Asian pears by dicing them into a salad of Boston lettuce, crumbled goat cheese, walnuts and mandarin oranges. Or make them into a dessert: Add peeled and cored pears to a saucepan with 1 cup white wine, 1 teaspoon honey, 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger and enough water to cover the pears. Cover and simmer 40 minutes or until the pears are soft.

Asian pears are harvested starting in late August, but they're really coming into prime season in late fall. You can cook Asian pears, but they are probably at their best eaten out of hand, to appreciate their delicate flavor.

Guava

Native to South America, this tropical fruit is an excellent source of skin-healing vitamin C, with 250 percent of your recommended daily allowance per serving. One cup of guava has nearly five times as much C as a medium orange – more than five times your daily need. It's also loaded with lycopene (26 percent more than a tomato), which might help lower your risk of heart disease.

According to research by microbiologists in Bangladesh, guava can even protect against food-borne pathogens such as listeria and staph. You can buy guava juice, or simmer chunks in water as you would to make applesauce. Guava also makes a delicious smoothie: Blend one-half banana, one-half ripe guava, a handful of strawberries, one-half cup soy milk and a few ice cubes.

In the U.S., guava is grown in Florida, Hawaii and coastal Southern California. The season lasts from February to April.



Figs

When you think of potassium-rich produce, figs probably don't come to mind, so you might be surprised to learn that six fresh figs have 891 milligrams of the blood pressure-lowering mineral, nearly 20 percent of your daily need – and twice as much as in one large banana. In a recent five-year study from the Netherlands, high-potassium diets were linked with lower rates of death from all causes in healthy adults age 55 and older. Figs are one of the best fruit sources of calcium, with nearly as much per serving (six figs) as one-half cup of fat-free milk.

Serve by chopping and adding to yogurt, cottage cheese, oatmeal or green salads. Or enjoy them as a snack: Cut a slit in the side and stuff with one-half teaspoon of a low-fat version of a soft cheese such as chèvre or Brie. Fig season lasts through June and July, with another crop from August to October.

Lychee

A French study published in the Journal of Nutrition found that lychee has the second-highest level of heart-healthy polyphenols of all fruits tested – nearly 15 percent more than the amount found in grapes (cited by many as polyphenol powerhouses). The compounds might also play an important role in preventing degenerative diseases such as cancer.

Serve lychee peeling or breaking the outer covering just below the stem; use a knife to remove the black pit. Add to stir-fries or skewer onto chicken kebabs to add a sweet, grape-like flavor.

Lychee season is during the summer, May and June, in South Florida. On average the season lasts about six weeks at the most.

Lychees are most commonly hand peeled and eaten fresh. The translucent white flesh is firm and very sweet, much like a grape. In the center of the fruit is a single seed that should not be consumed. For cooking, they are best suited for desserts.

Nifty containers for condiment staples

Novelty salt and pepper shakers might be lacking in terms of monetary value, but they make up for it in appeal among their rabid collectors.

Take Andrea Ludden, for example. Her collection of more than 40,000 pairs (half in the family museum called The Salt and Pepper Shaker Museum, <http://thesaltandpeppershakermuseum.com>, in Gatlinburg, Tenn., and half in its museum in Guadalest, Spain), started accidentally, when Ludden bought a pepper mill at a garage sale in the mid-1980s.



Ludden's museum is brimming with shakers: Coca-Cola cans; Dolly Parton's photo on a souvenir from Dollywood – "The Smokies most fun place"; Mickey and Minnie in chefs toques and aprons; the Beatles with the cropped hair and collarless jackets of their early days (George Harrison and John Lennon joined together as salt and Paul McCartney and Ringo Star as pepper); a turquoise TV with Lucy Arnaz and her neighbor, Ethel Mertz, on the screen (the salt) and a sofa with an "I love Lucy" heart-shaped cushion (the pepper); alligators with sunshades from Florida; bullfighters and bulls from Spain; kangaroos from Australia; a bobby and double-decker bus from London; and before-and-after versions of Mount St. Helens made from the actual volcanic ash.



A former archaeologist, Ludden worked many years in South America, where her main interest was how people traveled and communicated. After moving to the states, Ludden couldn't find work in her field so she turned her attention to social anthropology, studying everyday life since the early 20th century as seen through her growing collection of salt and pepper shakers.



Those who can't make it to Ludden's museum can find camaraderie with fellow shaker fans. The Salt and Pepper Novelty Shakers Club (www.saltandpepperclub.com) comprises members from around the world who share a love of novelty and figural salt and pepper shakers. Members represent collectors in 47 states, Australia, Canada, Belgium, Germany, New England, New Zealand, Russia and the Netherlands.



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Q. Of all the competitors you've faced in the ring, who has been your toughest opponent?

A. My toughest opponent has always been myself. I have won against extremely talented opponents and lost against ones who were not worthy and vice versa. The beauty of boxing is finding that medium that allows your instincts to flow. If I lose or win, my biggest competition is my own mindset. I battle myself every day, in and out of the ring, as we all do.

Q. Have you had the opportunity to mentor young female boxers?

A. Yes, I do every chance I get! Mostly through social media networks, but I try to do a lot of hands-on (mentoring) when I do public speaking to young girls, boys, athletes, and Hispanics.

Q. What advice do you have for young female boxers?

A. Be true to yourself. Be you and never let any man, woman, peer or athlete make you feel that you are not worthy or deserving of the dreams you have for yourself! You are capable of all things. Never talk negative to yourself and if people try to hurt you don't let them. Pray for them, forgive them, forget them and keep moving forward. No one can make you feel inferior unless you let them! Stay focused!

Q. How long do you think you'll box as an amateur and what do you plan to do after retiring?

A. I plan to stay in boxing until 2016 where I will be going for the gold medal. After 2016 I will still stay involved in the sport and make sure that women, and all boxers, have opportunities and equal rights. I will consider going pro only to say that I did. Maybe one or two pro fights at the most.



Marlen Esparza's career highlights

- Boxing Hall of Fame inductee
- 2014 Women's World Championships, first place
- 2014 Pan American Olympic Festival, first place
- 2014 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- 2013 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- Houston Fighter of the Year, 2010-2013
- 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials, first place
- 2012 Olympic Games, London, first place; first-ever Olympic Bronze medalist in Women's Boxing
- 2011 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- 2009 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- 2008 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- 2008 Pan American Games, first place
- 2007 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place
- 2006 Women's World Boxing Championship, third place
- 2006 U.S. Women's National Championship, first place

On the cover: Marlen Esparza, featherweight boxer and Olympic bronze medalist. Photo courtesy of Acacia. *Unity* is a celebration of food, art and culture. Published six times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com. ©2015 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by Final Edit, www.finaledit.net

