

## Growing up in Susanville

Jean LaMarr is the middle child in a family of six girls, who were all born and raised in Susanville. Her siblings include: Phyllis (born 1943), Patricia (born 1944), Jean (born 1945), June (born 1947), Janet (born 1949), and Cynthia (born 1951). She attended Washington Elementary School, where she and her siblings were the only Native American children enrolled at the time.

LaMarr was inspired to be an artist by relatives and family members dedicated to beadwork and other traditional arts and recalls her grandmother weaving and sewing blankets out of reclaimed fabrics and other materials. She also has fond memories of her uncle, Joe Ruize, a talented artist who she'd watch draw stories of Coyote during visits at her family home on Saturday nights.

LaMarr graduated from Lassen High School in 1963, where she excelled in art classes, was elected to the student council, and was president of the high school art club. She also performed in the school play, *Curious Savage*, and was typecast as the antagonist because of her Native ancestry.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque 775.546.1464 y presione 1960#

1. Jean LaMarr, 1946
2. Leonard and Esther LaMarr with daughters Phyllis, Patricia, and Jean
3. Jean, Phyllis, Patricia LaMarr
4. Patricia, Jean, and Phyllis LaMarr
5. Phyllis, Jean, and Patricia LaMarr
6. LaMarr's elementary school class at Washington Elementary School in Susanville, California (top row, third from the right)
7. Medallions designed and beaded by LaMarr, 1975
8. High School graduation, 1963
9. LaMarr rides bareback in an annual parade in Susanville
10. Rory Shaw, LaMarr's son, 1965
11. Cindy, Jean, and Esther LaMarr, with Jean's son Rory Shaw at Philco-Ford Technical Institute graduation, 1970
12. LaMarr's husband, Leroy "Spence" Spencer, in 1969
13. American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz, 1969
14. *American Indian Music Festival* poster designed by LaMarr, 1982
15. *Support Wounded Knee* poster designed by LaMarr, 1973

## A Burgeoning Activist

Before enrolling at U.C. Berkeley, LaMarr lived for a short time in Sonoma, and then San Pablo, California before enrolling at San Jose City College and Philco-Ford Technical Institute. Her son, Rory Keith Shaw, Jr. was born in 1965. While navigating school, motherhood, and working as a product painter at a Treasure House, LaMarr was the student coordinator of the Native American student club at San Jose City College, where she organized and participated in protests during the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz in the San Francisco. She also followed the efforts of the San Francisco State College Third World Liberation Front Strike calling for reform of the state educational system and participated in protests during the Pit River Occupation in Shasta County

In 1969, LaMarr met Leroy “Spence” Spencer at Philco-Ford, who she later marries. Spencer served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War from 1967-69 and worked for Philco-Ford following graduation. Eventually he works for Pacific Gas & Electric as an electromechanical design engineer.

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# Murals: Art for the Community

While living in the San Francisco Bay Area, LaMarr befriended many artists and professors within the Chicano community who were engaged with political causes and activism. At this time, she became committed to making public murals. “That’s where I started learning about how art should be for everyone,” she said. She especially admired “the idea that the art was for the community...not just for one person.”

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## *The Ohlone Journey*

### Ohlone Park, Berkeley, California

In 1995, LaMarr was invited to design a large mural dedicated to sharing the legacy of the Ohlone people, who were the first peoples of the Bay Area. During the process she worked in collaboration with Ohlone community members. The Berkeley land where the mural is located was dedicated as an official park in 1979 and renamed Ohlone Park, inspired by the 1978 publication of Malcolm Margolin's book *The Ohlone Way*. The project was undertaken with support from the City of Berkeley's Civic Arts Commission, the Department of Public Works and City Council, the Alameda Civic Arts Council, and the LEF Foundation. Each wall of the four-sided mural celebrates different stories—both past and present—as told by the Ohlone tribal communities of the Muwekma, Amah-Mutsun, and the Costanoan Esselen Nation.

1. Preparatory drawing for *The Ohlone Journey*
2. East Wall: *The Coyote Creation Story* tells of the region's abundance that sustained Indigenous People for millennia.
3. North Wall: The Ohlone people dancing in elaborate regalia as they initially welcomed *European Entry into the Bay*.
4. West Wall: *Modern Life Transitions*, honors individual Ohlone people based on historical photographs passed down through generations. Portraits include depictions of Muwekma elder Angela Colos, as well as Ascencion Solarsano de Cervantes (died 1930) and her mother Barbara Serra. The anthropologist C. Hart Merriam collected their baskets in the early 1900s.
5. South Wall: *The Strong Walk Back to the Future* depicts the Ohlone people's determination to thrive without sacrificing their traditions or cultural identity. Among the people depicted are Rosemary Cambra, the former chair of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, and her mother Dolores Sánchez.
6. Preparatory drawing for *The Ohlone Journey*

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## Lassen School District Mural

### Susanville, California

In 1999, LaMarr worked with students between the ages of eight and twenty-one to complete a multi-panel, portable mural dedicated to the Maidu and Paiute people of the region surrounding Susanville. The initiative was not only a mural project, but an undertaking designed to encourage youth to interact with their elders and to record their oral histories. While at first many elders were reluctant to share, the students persisted and were rewarded with hours of interviews.

For many weeks, thirty-five participants gathered Creation and Coyote stories, Bear Dance traditions, basket histories, and information about other Native American ceremonies from their elder family members and friends.

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# Our Ancestors, Our Future

## Susanville, California

LaMarr was invited to design and paint a mural on the corner of Lassen Street and Main Street in downtown Susanville, which was unveiled for the city's centennial celebration in 1987. She undertook the project with Jack Malotte, an artist of Newe (Western Shoshone) and Wa·šiw (Washoe) ancestry.

After significant research, LaMarr selected seven past and present Paiute and Maidu people and worked with local youth to incorporate their likenesses into the mural. "I want to show the faces of Indians, to get beyond the stereotypes of Indians."

Against a backdrop of petroglyphs and three large seasonal mountain landscapes, LaMarr and Malotte depicted: Tommy Tucker (1894- 1921), a Maidu man and the first soldier from Lassen County killed in World War I; Wilis-Kol-Kold also known as Susie Evans-Jack, a matriarch, storyteller, basket weaver and medicine woman of the Maidu people; Maude Sailors, a traditional Maidu storyteller with many descendants in Susanville; Grace Mike Gutiérrez, a lifelong Susanville resident who was active in Susanville Rancheria tribal government; Gladys Servillican Mankins (1912-1985), who carried on the Bear Dance tradition in Janesville for many years; Sau-Weep "Old Man Joaquin" (1825-1935), the chief of the Wada Tukadu Numu (Paiute); and Chief Winnemucca (1820-1882), a Numu (Paiute) leader during the Pyramid Lake War of 1860 who brokered a peace treaty with Nevada Governor Isaac Roop.

## Native American Graphic Workshop

### Susanville, California

LaMarr relocated to Susanville permanently in 1994, where she established the Native American Graphic Workshop, a non-profit organization for elders, youth, and Native artists to learn and experiment with printmaking, papermaking, painting, video and new forms of experimental art.

Housed in a new studio that her husband Spencer built on the rear of their property on the Rancheria, the Graphic Workshop became a dynamic social hub that brought a community together to make art.

With support over the years from the California Arts Council, the Fund for Four Directions, the Seventh Generation Fund, the Vanguard Fund, and the Lassen County Arts Council, LaMarr hosted numerous groups at the workshop, often providing food and overnight accommodations to her guests. While enjoying lots of laughs with her visitors, LaMarr channeled her talents as an educator to teach different printmaking processes.

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## The American Indian and the U.S. Constitution

In 1987, LaMarr travelled to New York to participate in an exhibition called *We the People*, organized on the occasion of the bicentennial of the signing of the first draft of the U.S. Constitution. She contributed a large temporary mural featuring a map of the United States demarcated by various treaty borders showing how Native American people were forcefully and systematically removed from their land. Fighter jets, military tanks, and barbed wire flank the edges of the map. LaMarr's trip to New York led to her renewed interest in America's political history.

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Left:

Preparatory sketch

1997

mixed media

Right:

***Coyote's New Hairdo***

handmade book (select pages)

Written and illustrated  
by Jean LaMarr

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1. **Coyote and Cousin Stump**, handmade book by youth at Native American Graphic Workshop
2. LaMarr, circa 1990s, image courtesy Judith Lowry
3. LaMarr and her niece Regina Ruiz Ellenwood with the 1981 Bear Dance poster
4. LaMarr, circa 1991
5. LaMarr's husband, Leroy "Spence" Spencer
6. LaMarr in her studio, 2017  
Image courtesy Susan Mantle
7. Native American Graphic Workshop, Susanville, 1994
8. LaMarr works in the Native American Graphic Workshop, Susanville, 1994
9. **December 74**, no date  
Collection of Terrence Wright
10. Jean LaMarr in the studio
11. LaMarr's family
12. **Coyote's Curiosity**, handmade book by youth at Native American Graphic Workshop

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