



Santa Clara black-fired, carved pottery by Sally Gutierrez (formerly Tafoya), Eugene Gutierrez, Effie and Orville Garcia, and Ethel and Wayne Yazza.

NATIVE AMERICAN ART

ALL IN THE FAMILY

*From generation to generation . . .
the Gutierrez family carries on
a Santa Clara pottery-making tradition.*

By Robert F. Nichols

Santa Clara Pueblo has long been known for its burnished black pottery. The tradition has been passed down from generation to generation; entire families are known for their pottery.

This is the case with Victoria and Celestino Gutierrez. Although all their children learned to work with clay, three daughters and a son—Effie Garcia, Sally Gutierrez (Tafoya), Ethel Yazza, and Eugene Gutierrez—produce more or less full time. In addition, sisters Inez Tapia and Julie Gutierrez

occasionally make pottery.

Although Victoria and Celestino were raised by potters (Rosita Velarde and Faustina Gutierrez respectively), they did not practice the tradition while their children were small. Celestino worked for an army depot in Utah where the children were raised. When the family moved back to Santa Clara Pueblo in 1969, Victoria made pottery full time and Celestino made clay dinosaurs. In addition, they encouraged the youngsters to participate—making little animals they could sell

for spending money. Effie, who at 15 or 16 was the oldest, could also polish the pieces their mother made. Sally, a year younger, made and polished her own objects. Ethel, who was about nine, made the *animalitos* but she was too young to polish them. Eugene didn't start until years later.

Marketing was a team effort. The entire family would set up a table at the plaza in Santa Clara to sell to tourists—young Ethel, who is still very outgoing, practically chased down cars to get them to stop and buy. Or,



Left to right: Ethel and Wayne Yazza, Effie and Orville Garcia, Sally Gutierrez (formerly Tafoya) and Eugene Gutierrez.

with their aunt Terry Gutierrez, they would sit under the portal in Santa Fe. But within five years of the return to New Mexico, both parents had died and the family dispersed—Sally was already married, Ethel went to live with foster parents in Utah, and Eugene attended the Indian School in Albuquerque.

Each has developed a distinctive style of carved black pottery derived from that of their parents. Their mother carved her clay more deeply than most of the other potters at Santa Clara. Although she rounded the edges of her incisions, she outlined the carving with matte paint—a technique the three sisters follow, each in her own way. Eugene makes dance figures and animals.

They all use Santa Clara clay, volcanic ash temper, and red slip from Santo Domingo that produces the very high polish on Santa Clara pottery. They all fire with wood for fuel and manure (cow, sheep, or horse) to turn the pieces black. Because the clay and temper are difficult to gather and prepare, they accumulate enough in the late summer or fall to carry through the cold season. Even wood and manure must be obtained. Sally laughs, "All of us are like squirrels, gathering stuff before winter."

Effie married Orville Garcia from Acoma Pueblo soon after her parents died. Orville, who was not then a potter, worked at the mines near Grants where the couple lived. Effie continued to use Santa Clara clay. During this time she refined her polishing and carving techniques. In 1981 Orville began making pottery decorated with incised

designs. The following year, when he quit his job and the couple moved permanently to Santa Clara, he began to help Effie with her pottery. Orville makes the pots, Effie draws the design which she first works out on paper, and both work on the carving before the clay dries. Orville sands the pots smooth, Effie polishes, and Orville recuts the carving so that it has a very smooth edge. Effie outlines the incisions with paint and Orville finishes the pot by painting in the carved area. Both work on the firing (they agree that Orville does the work while Effie "supervises").

Shortly after Sally was married she began carving pots, which were her sole source of income. Her objects were similar in form to those she is known for today—rounded below with a flat or tapering shoulder ending in a small mouth. She remembers, "My mom said I made the closed shape because I was lazy. . . I didn't like to sand the inside." A few years ago Sally decided to fire some pieces red, instructed by her aunt. Although she was very nervous that first time, they came out beautifully and so she still occasionally fires red. But so much can go wrong that she will do it only on a completely windless day.

Ethel married Wayne Yazza of Picuris Pueblo where they now live with their children. Wayne had never made pots, but became interested by watching Ethel. He took a class at Picuris, learning about sources and materials for the traditional micaceous work of northern New Mexico.

Today he makes cooking ware and helps his wife. Ethel produces her own small pots while Wayne shapes the larger ones. Ethel lays out the design, Wayne does the rough carving, and she polishes. Next Wayne begins the recutting of the carved edge which Ethel refines. Finally, Ethel outlines the cut design and Wayne fills in the paint. While both work on the firing, they also acknowledge that Wayne does most of that hard work.

Eugene began to work seriously with clay the year after he left the Indian School. He started making dance figures after he began dancing at Santa Clara, creating the animals he was representing in the dances. As he feels the clay, the idea for the figure emerges. Because his objects are not hollow, Eugene must take extra care that no air is present in the clay; and he must pull the arms, antlers, wings, etc. out of the single lump of material. Being solid, each piece must dry very slowly, often taking a week or more. Although he lives with his wife and children in Albuquerque, Eugene returns to Santa Clara for his clay and to fire his results.

Each has at least one child interested in making pottery, assuring that the Gutierrez family tradition will continue.

Pottery by the Gutierrez family may be seen at the Robert F. Nichols Gallery, located at 419 Canyon Road. Hours: 10:00-5:00 Monday-Saturday. (505) 982-2145.