



**M**ichelle Quintana is someone who must balance her life between two worlds—the world of her Native American heritage and the world of her job in the Anglo world. “It’s hard,” she says; “it’s very hard.”

During the day, Quintana, 27, is a floor attendant and slot person at the Santa Ana Star Casino. That means she walks around the casino making sure the slot machines have money or she handles payouts that are too large for the machine to make. She also does paperwork required by the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, she supervises as many as 20 people.

At night, though, she goes home to the Santo Domingo Pueblo north of Santa Ana on Interstate 25, where she becomes a granddaughter, daughter and mother of two, and where the spoken language can just as readily be Keres as English. In fact, when she speaks to her children in English, her grandmother chastises her for not speaking to them in Keres. (Keres is spoken at seven of the 11 southern pueblos.)

Quintana represents a modest but indeterminable number of Native Americans who were raised in one culture but now find themselves working in a much different culture. Instead of existing within a group and not calling attention to themselves, Native Americans such as Quintana now find themselves in a business world where they

must make decisions, supervise others and seek help from others. The Santa Ana Star casino is a rarity among Native American casinos. Of its 550 employees, 40 percent (or 220) are Native Americans, according to the casino's manager, Phil Gonzales, a native New Mexican who lives in Albuquerque. Nationally, according to the National Indian Gaming Association, 25 percent of all tribal-owned casinos employees are Natives, ranging from 10 percent in California to 80 percent in North Dakota and South Dakota.

Gonzales compares his being raised in a Hispanic culture and sees similarities with Native Americans.

"We were raised to respect our elders and authority figures," Gonzales recalls. "We never asked for anything. My elders were extremely proud, and felt it was a sign of weakness to ask for help, almost akin to begging. So with that we also didn't speak unless spoken to."

But he points out that as he and his siblings got jobs, they had to change. In the business world, Gonzales points out, "one must ask for help and advice. In soliciting business, one must ask for the opportunity to perform one's task or profession. My siblings, cousins and friends who were raised under similar circumstances all agree that it made it difficult for us to be out-going. I almost had to become a different person from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Quintana can relate to that. She attended Head Start and elementary school at Santo Domingo and then went to Bernalillo Middle and High School, which is not that far from the Santa Ana Star Casino. She has three sisters—two older and one younger—and her father is a former Marine. Santo Domingo Pueblo claims on a web site to be the most culturally conservative of the 19 pueblos (so does San Felipe Pueblo). In high school, Quintana says she kept to herself and "was very shy."

But she did change because she had to. On her first job at the San Felipe Casino, she worked in the cage handling money. Then she became a mother and she and her boyfriend moved to Albuquerque. "That was my first time living away from home," she says. Eventually, she had a second child, she and her boyfriend split, and she moved back with her parents and went to work at Santa Ana Star Casino, where she has prospered and has been cited by Gonzales as a valuable worker.

Quintana believes that she adapted slowly to, as she calls it, "the white man's world—outside the reservation." No doubt, that first job working in the cage at San Felipe Casino helped her begin to adapt, she admits.

But if she still lives in two cultures, she has changed in other ways. For example, most of her current friends are for the most part people from the casino and are Hispanic. She no longer hangs out with the friends she grew up with, many of whom are now self-employed making and selling jewelry from their homeland at Santo Domingo.

Michelle Quintana's story of adapting to a very different, almost contrary, culture from the one in which she grew up while still respecting the culture of her birth is one that will be told again and again. Economic necessity became the agent of change in Quintana's life, as it has and will continue to do in the lives of other Native Americans as they seek employment outside the reservation.