



Janet Quintanilla

Portrayed next to Luis Quintanilla, with a small bird on her head and their son in her arms

Jan Quintanilla, born Janet Christine Speirs, was originally from Terre Haute, IN. She was working for Nelson Rockefeller in New York City when Luis Quintanilla arrived in the United States. She was a highly intelligent and a worldly person who greatly admired writers and artists. After graduating from high school in 1929, she expressed a desire pursue her higher education in Spain. To pay for her trip, she worked at the local Woolworth's. In 1932, she enrolled in the University of Toulouse in France and, a year later, she attended the University of Madrid to study languages.

When Jan needed additional funds to remain in Spain, she went to the U.S. embassy seeking employment. She was offered a position under the diplomat Claude Bowers for translating and organizing early nineteenth century archives of the former ambassador to Spain, Washington Irving. In 1934, while working for Bowers, Jan met Luis Quintanilla for the first time. After Quintanilla had finished a portrait of Bowers, Jan and Luis briefly shared an encounter in the lobby of the embassy. However, to the dismay of Bowers and his wife, nothing came off their first interaction. After her time in Spain and before Franco became Spain's dictator, she moved to New York City. In January 1939, when Luis Quintanilla arrived in New York as an exile, mutual friends quickly reunited the pair. Shortly after, on February 21, 1939, Janet and Luis Quintanilla married in Connecticut and returned to New York City where they lived near Washington Square Park. They eventually settled in Greenwich Village after living in various locations throughout the U.S. In January 1940, they welcomed their only child, Paul.

Jan's family in Indiana often supported the Quintanillas financially. Many of her relatives bought pieces of Quintanilla's art and her parents sent them money when Luis did not find adequate income. Additionally, Jan translated many of Luis's plays and writings into English although he insisted that she did not need to work but wait until he found the right opportunity to support his family with his art and his writings. Eventually,

Jan took a job at the University of New York in the office of student activities to help support the family.

In 1958, searching for a new avenue in his career, Luis Quintanilla left New York for Paris to re-establish his name in the European artistic world. Janet and her family continued financially supporting him, as it took time to organize and prepare his Parisian exhibitions. However, in September of 1959, Janet separated from Luis by correspondence while he was still in Paris and moved back to Terre Haute, IN to take care of her parents. In the 1970s she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where she spent the rest of her life. Jan and Luis kept on corresponding throughout the rest of Luis's life in Europe and, despite their separation, there never seemed to have been irreparable bitterness between them. Even after she had become a widow, the couple's son, Paul, remarked that she would often say to others "Who can I marry after Luis Quintanilla?"

Source: Paul Quintanilla, *Waiting at the Shore*.