



Unbreakable: My Story, My Way

By Jenni Rivera

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A *New York Times* bestseller, this is the official biography from the beloved Mexican-American singer who lost her life in a tragic plane crash.

The only autobiography authorized by Jenni Rivera

"I can't get caught up in the negative because that destroys you. Perhaps trying to move away from my problems and focus on the positive is the best I can do. I am a woman like any other, and ugly things happen to me like any other woman. The number of times I have fallen down is the number of times I have gotten up."

These are the last words that beloved Mexican American singer Jenni Rivera spoke publicly before boarding the plane that would crash and cut her life short on December 9, 2012. However, they are not the final words that La Diva de la Banda had for the world. Those are found in the pages you hold in your hands, Jenni's own account of the highs and lows of her extraordinary journey.

She became the most acclaimed Spanish-language singer in the United States and sold more than 15 million records worldwide. A single mother of five and grandmother of two, she was also an actress, a television producer, the star of her own reality show, and an entrepreneur. But for all its immense success, Jenni's life often seemed to be a series of personal battles in which perseverance was her only weapon. As her fame grew, she made it her mission to speak about her struggles, forging an intimate connection with her fans. She became a figure of strength and a source of encouragement to women of all ages.

In *Unbreakable*, Jenni recounts the crucial moments in her past, revealing her experiences with domestic and sexual abuse, divorce, body image issues, making her way in a male-dominated industry, raising her children as a single mother, and learning that she could depend only on herself.

Though she is no longer with us, Jenni will always be the "Rivera rebel from Long Beach," the girl who maintained her sense of humor and fighting spirit in every circumstance. In this remarkable memoir, Jenni leaves behind a legacy of inspiration and determination that will forever live on through her precious family, friends, and fans.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Winner of fifteen gold records, fifteen platinum records, and five double platinum records, with more than fifteen million records sold in all, Jenni Rivera (1969 – 2012) was one of her or any generation's most popular and in-demand artists, not only in Mexico but also in the United States, selling out performances at such prestigious venues as the Staples Center, the Kodak Theatre, the Nokia Theatre, the Gibson Amphitheatre. In Mexico, she held a sellout performance at the *Auditorio Nacional* and performed a concert for 80,000 people in Querétaro. Jenni was also one of the decade's most award-winning artists. In 2009, she earned a record-breaking eleven Billboard Award nominations, becoming the first female regional Mexican performer to be so honored.

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Unbreakable

1

Aren't You El Cinco's Lady?

Ahora estoy, entre luces hermosas

mas cuando estaba sola, sé que Dios me cuidó.

(Now I am among the beautiful lights,

but when I was alone,

it was God who took care of me.)

—from “Mariposa de Barrio”

Sunday, January 26, 1997

The night began at El Farallon, a popular nightclub in Lynwood, California. El Farallon was where you went to hang out with your friends and get lost in the music, forgetting everything else for just a few hours. It was where I met Juan López, my second husband, after locking eyes with him across the dance floor. Most important, it was where many regional Mexican singers launched their careers. And it was where I decided to shoot my first music video, for my song “La Chacalosa” (The Jackal Woman).

My father had done business with the owner of El Farallon, Emilio Franco. Franco said we could shoot the video before the doors opened at 9:00 p.m. At the time, my dad, known to many as Don Pedro Rivera, was one of the biggest producers of regional Mexican music. He had always been my biggest supporter, especially in those early days when I was struggling to break out. He had plans to buy commercial airtime for this video to promote “La Chacalosa.”

I wasn't making much money with my music. It was difficult to get my songs on the radio because I refused to fit into the mold of the typical Latina singer. I should have been younger, thinner, softer, quieter, dumber. In the Latino community, female singers were supposed to be beautiful and superskinny, and their music was supposed to be silly. Latina singers were meant to be looked at and not really heard. But I wasn't eye candy. I was considered overweight. I was considered not to have vocal talent. And I was singing strong, ballsy corridos (folk tales, often involving drug dealers). I probably intimidated the men. No other women were singing corridos. It was like a woman rapping. Women weren't thought to be tough enough, or real enough, to be singing about the gritty world of drug dealers. The people in the industry tried to make me change. If you want to make it in this genre, they said, you have to do this or that. A lot of women had to do sexual favors to get played on the radio. Fuck that. I wouldn't do it. I wanted to make it based on my talent or not at all.

At the time we shot the video for "La Chacalosa," I was working as a Realtor to support my three children and myself. Music was secondary. Juan López, the man I later married, was serving a seven-month prison sentence after being charged with smuggling immigrants. He was set to be released in three weeks. Because I didn't want to be alone, my sister, Rosie, and her friend Gladyz came with me when I would go out at night for a music gig. On this night they sat in the nearly empty club watching me do several takes of the song. I thought we would be done by nine, but by the time we finished taping at around nine thirty, a few customers had started to trickle into the bar area. Before we left I went to the ladies' room. As I exited the restroom, a man grabbed my right arm to make sure he had my attention. "Aren't you El Cinco's lady?" he said. El Cinco (The Five) was Juan López's nickname. I distinctly remember looking into this man's green eyes as he tugged roughly at my arm. He was making me upset and he knew it. "Leave me the fuck alone," I told him as I broke away, wondering how he knew Juan and why he cared if I was Juan's lady.

I picked up my things and walked out of the club with Rosie and Gladyz. I was in a bit of a rush because they were both still in high school, and this was a school night. I wanted to get them home as quickly as possible so we wouldn't get in trouble and they would be allowed to hang out with me whenever they wanted. I was never one to have many friends, especially since Juan scared many of them away with his temper and his rude behavior. Now that he was incarcerated, I was a loner. Hanging out with the girls was fun and helped keep me busy until his release.

First I dropped Gladyz off at her house on Walnut Avenue in North Long Beach, then I dropped Rosie off at our parents' house on Ellis Street, just a few blocks away. It was only 10:30, so we were in the clear. Once I made sure Rosie was in the house, I turned up the music and began the drive back home. I was living in beautiful, gangsteriffic Compton. Being a Realtor, I had bought a house there as an investment and decided to live in it for a while. It wasn't the best neighborhood, but I was happy to have a place to call my own. I couldn't wait to get to my bed that night. I was singing along to my all-time favorite CD, 15 Éxitos, by Marisela, as I drove down the 91 freeway west.

As I exited right onto Central Avenue, I noticed the car behind me flashing its high beams. It got closer and closer as I slowed down to see if I knew who it was. I didn't recognize the small white sports car and I couldn't see who was driving. The driver flashed his high beams again. What the fuck? Was I driving too slow? Did I forget to turn on my signal? Suddenly, the car sped up alongside my green Ford Explorer, purposely trying to sideswipe me. That's when I realized not just one but three men were in the car, and I started to get scared. I sped up, hoping that they were just messing around with me. They weren't. They would drive behind me, then speed up and try to run me off the road and into the parked cars on Central Avenue. "Shit. What the hell am I going to do?" I said to myself.

I was approaching my house on Keene Avenue and didn't want these men to know where I lived. I was

living alone with my three young children. Our house had been broken into just two months earlier, and everything had been stolen. That's how the neighbors had found out that my husband was locked up and wasn't there to protect us. All of this was running through my mind as I kept driving around the block, hoping these guys would magically disappear. My whole body was shaking. Finally, I stopped close to my house, though not in front of it. "Maybe they'll just leave," I kept saying to myself. How foolish.

Their car stopped behind me and I could see that the men were ready to step out. I didn't know what to do, and fear took over. I decided that I would make a run for it. I would run as fast as I could, the way my brothers had taught me to when we played baseball as kids.

I opened my car door and started sprinting in my high heels, screaming at the top of my lungs. I did not look back. I could hear the sound of their boots running after me. I ran, I screamed louder. I cried. I prayed that someone would hear me. If they did, nobody came to my rescue. The boot steps were gaining on me. My high heels were slowing me down. Suddenly I felt two pairs of strong arms grab me. I had been caught. I tried to fight back. I kicked and screamed. I wasn't going out easy. I was the gangsta bitch from Long Beach. The Rivera rebel who never lost a fight.

But I was outnumbered. One man had stayed in the car. One covered my mouth with his huge hand. One dragged me by the hair and pulled at my arms until I was thrown in the backseat of the car. That's when I saw those green eyes again. The prominent chin. The man from the club.

He raped me in the backseat of the vehicle. Over and over he repeated the words I had said to him at the club: "Leave me the fuck alone. Leave me the fuck alone." He mocked me as he raped me. As the tears streamed down my face, I decided not to fight back anymore. All I could think about was my kids. I was so afraid that I was going to be killed and they would be left without a mother. Maybe the men would let me live if I "behaved." I felt that I was losing myself. I could feel the strength seeping out of my body and mind. I was afraid that they were going to take turns on me, but when the man was finished, he told his friend, "Throw this bitch out my car." I silently thanked God as I was slammed onto the sidewalk, realizing that it was finally over. But the damage was done.

I sat on the curb, numb. I couldn't cry. I was just relieved to be alive.

I vowed that I would never tell anyone of my shame. They say that when you keep a secret, it eats you up inside, but I felt that it was better that way. I wanted to appear strong in front of my children and my family. I didn't want anybody to know. And I wanted to maintain my persona as Jenni, the Rivera rebel who had never lost a fight. But deep down inside I knew I had lost a piece of myself that I would never recover. My soul had been shattered, but to the outside world I did just as I had been taught since I was a little girl: I kept my head up and continued forward. It is, after all, the Rivera way.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Francis Dawson:

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Laura Crabtree:

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Henrietta Belcher:

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