

StoryCorps Interview at Waukegan Public Library

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AD: I was raised here in Waukegan, and so in either kindergarten or first grade, we had a field trip to the Waukegan Public Library, and I did not like the library so much because it was really quiet back then. You couldn't talk, the children's area was filled with books, and that was really, really nice, but I do remember that you had to be really quiet, and the librarian was really strict, and so I do remember thinking that I wasn't really enjoying my time at the library. I think my love for books didn't come until after I had graduated high school. I barely made it through high school, I was really surprised when I graduated, and so after I graduated high school and I got into college, that's where I began my love for books because I was studying Latin American studies and it was a major that I was truly interested in learning more about, and so I wanted to read and read and read more about my culture, my history, my ancestors, the contributions that the Latinos had to the United States. This was all new to me. I wasn't exposed to any of this before.

JC: And here you are at the library volunteering for many different activities, such as tutoring kids and tutoring adults for their GED. So how did that come about?

AD: After I went to college and I realized how important it was for the Latino community to be educated. I think once I realized how important that was and how far you could get, I thought it was my responsibility to give back not only to the adults, more importantly, to the children, because I was that child who maybe the parents wanted to help them with their homework but couldn't. Being first generation Mexican American in the United States, my parents didn't speak fluent English. They couldn't help me with my homework. I was that child that was living that dichotomy between the American mainstream and the Latino culture and the Spanish and the English and the Latino versus American Caucasian American life and trying to balance those two worlds was very difficult for me. Now that I got as far as I did, and I'm not saying that I got very far, but I got farther than my parents did and I want children in the Latino community, or any community for that matter, to have those opportunities to know that it's okay, to know that they can make it. If I made it, anybody can make it. And so I think it's a sense of responsibility of having to give back.