

StoryCorps Interview from the Los Angeles Public Library

Sylvia Galan-Garcia and Lupie Leyva

Lupie Leyva: What inspired you to become a librarian? What did you see as the value of public libraries that made you want to become a librarian in the first place?

Sylvia Galan-Garcia: I had been involved as a young woman in the Chicano Movement and become very aware of the needs of the people that lived in my community. My sisters and I were certainly the first in our families that ever went to college, and I wanted to do something meaningful.

When I was first a librarian there were very few, I think probably two or three librarians that were Spanish speaking at LAPL.

There was no multi lingual collections. I remember ordering books in Spanish and the quality of the bindings were horrible and they fell apart very easily and to see where we've come to this point where English language publishers are doing direct translations of recent Spanish titles - we have been able to provide books on unlimited number of subjects and good quality bindings, so we have come a long way there's much more to be done.

Lupie Leyva: I know you were instrumental with the beginning of the Citizenship initiative; can you speak a little bit about how that is helping the community?

Sylvia Galan-Garcia: This is Los Angeles Public Library partnering with the Federal Government to help promote citizenship because LA has one of the largest, if not the largest, Spanish speaking community outside of Mexico. There are like a million people eligible to become citizens and we are doing work that is so profoundly needed for people who are here, many undocumented, to live full lives and not have to hide.

Lupie Leyva: What to you think are the biggest challenges for the librarians of my generation? What are your words of wisdom for the rest of us? What do you think we need to do?

Sylvia Galan-Garcia: You have to keep the flame burning for equal access and improved Spanish collections that are going to bring them in and keep them. In a multicultural society all people should be represented in some way in the collections or, especially, in the personnel.

Lupie Leyva: I would like to say thank you to you because you've taught me the resilience that's necessary. You still carry that flame 40 years later for the community and for serving the community and that you've done such a good job

and mentoring those of who've come after you and inspiring us and pushing us, when necessary.

Sylvia Galan-Garcia: It's been a pleasure serving the city of Los Angeles in this role and I'm proud to say that we have never bent to filtering our access to the public. We pride ourselves on maintaining first amendment rights and it is one of the only institutions that is built on that. It is a very noble profession.

Being a librarian, you are teaching, you are showing people how to find information themselves. And when you're working with children and you're doing that, it's going to help them for the rest of their life. So you are contributing to the intellectual maturity of this young person in front of you, you are reconnecting an older individual who hadn't had time to read for years when they were raising their children or working full time, and you're reconnecting them to their intellectual curiosity and cultural treasures that are found at every single library.