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## **Recording the rich history of Latino culture in L.A.**

**More than 100 interviews of everyday people will be conducted as part of the national Historias initiative. 'Our reality is very different from what is portrayed in the media,' one participant says.**

By Anna Gorman

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In a mobile recording booth Thursday morning outside East Los Angeles Library, Luz Herrera told her longtime friend about how her parents met just miles away, about growing up as the daughter of immigrants and about how she helped her family by selling toys at the nearby swap meet.

"That's what we did on weekends," she said, laughing as she recalled inheriting her father's entrepreneurial spirit.

The conversation between Herrera and Alma Marquez was the first of more than 100 interviews of everyday Latinos and Latinas that will be recorded in Los Angeles over the next six weeks by StoryCorps, a national oral history project. The interviews are part of an initiative called Historias, which aims to capture the history and culture of Latinos throughout the United States.

StoryCorps Supervisor Anna Walters said that the response in Los Angeles has been overwhelming and that she expects the interviews to encompass the diversity and richness of the region.

"I'm hoping to get a sense of this place and what is a long and multi-layered Latino history," she said.

Though Latinos are now spread across Los Angeles County, East Los Angeles still holds a unique place in history as the hub of Latino culture in the region, said Chon Noriega, director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

"Symbolically, it continues to be important as the heart of the community," Noriega said.

As Herrera, 37, and Marquez, 35, sat down across from one another, StoryCorps facilitator Chaela Herridge-Meyer adjusted the microphones and reminded them that this was an informal conversation.

"You can laugh. You can cry," she said. "You can interrupt each other."

And with that, the pair launched into a discussion of politics, family and friendship. Herrera described how her parents moved from East Los Angeles to Montebello to Whittier, trying to find the best place to raise their children. She explained what it was like to be one of the few Latinas at Harvard Law School and why

she chose to open a practice in Compton and start a nonprofit organization to mentor and train community-based lawyers.

Marquez told Herrera she admired her for using her education to make a difference, even though it was a financial strain at times.

"I've never really told you this before," said Marquez, who lives in South Gate and runs a public affairs company. "I just want you to know how beautiful I think that sacrifice was."

And Marquez asked her friend a question she had long wanted to ask: How have you learned to be fearless?

"Being fearless is about hope and having faith, having something that grounds you," said Herrera, now a law professor in San Diego. "I have to credit my parents again."

Outside the recording trailer, Herrera said that she used to play in the park near the library and that she was glad to take part in the project.

"Everybody has a story," she said. "Sometimes Latino stories are told by people afraid of Latinos. Our reality is very different from what is portrayed in the media."

In the afternoon, Cindy Mosqueda, 29, interviewed her father, Carlos Mosqueda, 56. Before entering the booth, Mosqueda said she planned to ask him about the band he played in as a young man and about his own father, known throughout Boyle Heights as a community healer.

Mosqueda said her father has told her many tales of his upbringing and she wanted them to be preserved.

"I've always cherished these stories," she said. "I want to tell them to my children."

Many of the conversations will be archived at the Library of Congress and aired on National Public Radio stations, including KPCC-FM (89.3). Participants leave with a CD of the recording.

Bill Davis, president of Southern California Public Radio, which operates KPCC, said that this region is the nation's new "port of entry" and that recording Latinos' stories here is critical.

"Immigrant narratives are often lost in subsequent generations," he said. "This project, making sure that those stories are preserved and become part of our cultural heritage, is just so important."

The interview slots are full, but to be placed on a waiting list, call (800) 850-4406. To learn more about the program, go to [www.storycorps.org/historias](http://www.storycorps.org/historias).

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