

Lupe Anguiano

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Sent: Monday, February 19, 2007 10:00 AM
Subject: Your legacy

Dearest Primeras,

I spent this weekend helping my cousin Maria with her research for her doctoral thesis. The subject is Language, Literacy and Culture and focuses on how the differences/challenges of culture can create issues in the learning process. At least this is my rudimentary and less than academic understanding of what she is doing (smile).

We spent the weekend interviewing 'at risk' Latinas that were success stories as all had recently graduated not only from college but a small, Catholic, liberal arts college of some prestige, St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana.

It has been 25 years since I graduated from college and one would think that after all that time, the issues of classicism and racism would be less, they are not. However, what seems to have changed is/are the sensibilities of these young women to persevere and succeed despite the challenges.

Some of the stories I heard about the hurdles they've overcome left me speechless. Stories of sacrifice, determination, disappointment and yet always concluding in triumphs, large and small. Some of the girls came from homes with single mothers, from families on welfare, from the barrio, from homelessness, or from parents that were functionally illiterate.

Even with those challenges, nothing prepared them for the world college would present. At this school with a majority of white, upper class, women of legacy and privilege they were met with isolation, pointed out as different and made an example of when subjects like welfare and cultural differences were addressed in classes. What they did do, was find a way to one another, bond as a sisterhood in defense of the classist world in which they were expected to succeed. They all shared one common thread--there was no way they weren't going to get that degree. They also knew they couldn't do it without each other.

At the end of the day on Saturday Maria had planned a small dinner for the girls at which time she nudged me to talk about our film and the gathering of last July. I told them each of your stories and a few of my own, especially about my observations that while many things may have changed in 25 years, many had not. It was their turn to be stunned, not just at the challenges of your lives as activists, but that they had no idea that these stories existed. They wanted to know more. They also realized that they were not alone in this struggle and that they were standing on the shoulders of

so many that had come before.

The best part of this story is that my other observation of these young Latinas was that each of them left college with just a degree but an understanding of the important role they now played as legacies themselves. Each one of those Latinas continues to recruit for St. Mary's so that other 'at risk' Latinas attending will be able to create what they were able to, a sisterhood.

This is an exciting time in my life and in each of our lives as Latinas. It is stories like those of these young Latinas that I believe, give us all hope for the future.

Much love,
Linda

Linda Garcia Merchant

Voces Primeras, LLC

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Because we all have a voice.

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