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Mexican American Mountaineer

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I have heard people say that there are few truly untouched and beautiful places left in the United States. Industry and the mad capitalistic crush to convert wilderness into real estate have wrecked many of the once lovely areas of the country. I have the privilege of living in one of the most unspoiled states in the Northeast. Only 1.8 million people inhabit this unusually shaped, dual panhandled area of lush green rolling hills, flowing trees, and acres of farmland. "Breathtaking" only feebly describes wild and wonderful West Virginia (W.V.) where I am a native. Born of a Mexican and a hillbilly, I am a curious mix of *chicana* and mountaineer. I grew up in this state, and have now settled here as an adult. But let me back up and explain how a *Latina* woman would come to be a part of this community so far north of the Mexican border.

It is probably safe to assume that my maternal ancestors would never have left their homeland of Mexico to come to the United States had it not been for their tent show, *La Carpa Garcia*. In the days of vaudevillian entertainment and the excitement of circus performance, my family traveled all through Mexico with their rendition of trapeze and musical acts. Upon coming to the United States, *La Carpa* soon made a permanent home in the beautiful city of San Antonio, Texas, in 1914. Gorgeous chorus girls, dangerous tightrope acts, uproarious comedy, and the lively music of their circus made them renown as versatile performers in the Alamo city. Until about 1947, *La Carpa Garcia* maintained celebrity fame but decided to retire after finally succumbing to local fire marshals who questioned the safety of their tent.¹ The vaudeville era had long since passed, and the Garcia family found it easier to disband the show and seek other sources of income. Some aunts, uncles, and cousins went on to bigger entertainment fame in Hollywood or the *Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey Circus*, while others proudly became policemen, teachers, and artists in their beloved city.

Today, many of my family members, the former *La Carpa Garcia* performers, are still alive and well, residing in San Antonio, Texas. My immediate family is almost intact except for a couple of relatives who drifted from that central area or ventured beyond Texas borders. My mother is one of the offspring who let marriage and a career take her all the way to northern West Virginia. In 1972, my parents moved to West Liberty State College (WLSC) where my father began teaching geography and my mother started work at the college library. They made their home in faculty housing on the college campus situated in the northern panhandle of the state.

For more than twenty years they have lived and worked at the college. The quaint little town of West Liberty, which is more than 100 years old, still exists today because of the stable and thriving school. Since most of the people who make up the 1,000 plus residents are affiliated with its operation and maintenance in some way, the townspeople are dedicated to its success and quality. The town itself is not really an ethnic sampling of the melting pot of the United States, but West Liberty does have a unique acceptance of diversity uncommon in most small towns. Foreign students and professors from various parts of the United States and world have helped to make this small community accepting of and accustomed to people of color and diverse cultures. When I was growing up on this college campus, its welcoming climate allowed my parents to celebrate our Latino heritage in many ways. In our own household, English is the language we speak, but my mother is fluent in Spanish (her first language) and always intermingles words or phrases in both English and Spanish. We learned to understand and answer her in our own "*Spanglish*," but sadly, I am not fluent even though I have flawless pronunciation. My father, who is not Mexican but was born in Bluefield, West Virginia, is predominantly of Scottish and English descent. He also does not speak Spanish, but as a cultural geographer and eclectic person, he embraced the culture and language, promoting any activity that tied Latino experiences into our West Virginia lives. Both parents surrounded themselves with the people of the campus and the neighboring city, Wheeling—people who were from all different countries in Latin America: Bolivia, Cuba, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Columbia, and Argentina. These people had something in common other than their language and cultural ties: they were living in the United States—in West Virginia, of all places! They had managed to find each other and

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band together in friendship and their newly adopted American citizenry.

My childhood and teen memories are filled with lively parties where guests played guitars and sang beautiful traditional songs in Spanish. With my dear Cuban *padrinos* (godparents) only four houses up the street, gatherings were frequent. Their tables were often spread with a myriad of dishes ranging from *arroz con pollo*, Cuban-style, to *menudo y tortillas*, Mexican-style. There was always lots of laughter and much dancing—sometimes until dawn. While adults discussed politics of beloved lands on several continents, the children of these different lands found ways to comprehend and enjoy each other. In fact, my best friend as a child was a charming Argentine boy named Flavio. At first, he did not even speak English, but with a few of my grade school Spanish words and a few of his broken English words, we understood one another and managed to be the best of friends.

My childhood was unique. I know that few of my peers in West Virginia would ever experience this sort of extended contact with individuals from other countries. As a result, I feel privileged to have had what amounts to a rare and special opportunity. Oddly, I also feel that this same exposure and ready acceptance of other cultures did not completely prepare me for the ignorance and discrimination that is commonplace in many other areas of the state. It is the geography of West Virginia that makes West Liberty and Wheeling atypical Appalachian locales. Our northern panhandle—a lengthy strip of river bottom separating parts of Pennsylvania and Ohio—is in close proximity to the major metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh and Columbus. Only 11 miles wide at its smallest point, the panhandle border situation is a direct influence on the cultural makeup of our northern panhandle population. Pittsburgh, for example, is only 47 miles from Wheeling, West Virginia, and is famous for its numerous ethnic populations which include Italians, Germans, Lebanese, Poles, and Greeks. These families trickle over West Virginia borders, making their homes in our cities and towns. Even when not celebrating the Italian Festival or Oktoberfest, you can be sure that somewhere in most panhandle cities and towns you can still find splendid *gnocchi*, *pierogies*, or *gyros*.

With all this in mind, imagine how shocked I was to encounter discrimination firsthand in graduate school. Since I attended undergraduate school at a university close to West Liberty, the culture there was consistent with my life experience. In 1989, I attended the University of Kentucky (UK) in Lexington to pursue a master's in

library science. Suddenly, I was deeper into Appalachia than I had ever been—uncharted territory for me. Despite the large university in Lexington, there were very few ethnics outside the academic setting. Becoming more aware of my minority status every day, I consulted the *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* out of sheer curiosity. My suspicions were confirmed when I read that there were less than a thousand Hispanics total enrolled in *all* of the Kentucky two- and four-year institutions.² Obviously, I would be a minority as a member of that tiny facet of the total population. The local population breakdown was even more grim as I discovered that out of 300,000 residents, Lexington is home to only a thousand or so Mexicans—1,058 to be exact. Also according to the *1990 Population and Housing Census Tapes*, there are less than 38,000 Blacks, only 700 Native Americans, and 4,000 Asians residing in the bluegrass city of Lexington.³ On the campus, there were enclaves of numerous international students and professors, but few long-term city residents who were of color or diverse background.

Fully aware of the lack of ethnic population on the campus, how did I decide to become a librarian; and why the University of Kentucky (UK)? In my first job after graduation, I stayed on the campus where I received my degree and secured employment as a library technical assistant in West Virginia University's main library. The decision to go to graduate school was also financially motivated since I was just a lowly library clerk barely making ends meet three thousand dollars below the national poverty level. The idea of becoming a librarian was not new to me. My mother is a library technical assistant in the WLSC library and often took me to work with her when I was growing up. Maybe I was pretty impressionable, or just easily amused, but I actually had my own discarded library books with call numbers, date due stamps with pad, and pretend card catalog sets for playing library in my garage or back porch. There really was no question about my career choice. The question was where to go for a competitive education at an affordable price, regardless of demographics.

The University of Kentucky's excellent reputation in library science lured me. As a graduate of a West Virginia college or university, I qualified for reciprocal tuition in a southern state that carries an accredited master's program not available in West Virginia. There was no discussion as to what program I would pursue. An already multidisciplinary life and eclectic interests geared me up for a career

that would allow me to explore many topics and also work with people on the college level. Having parents in higher education helped me see the gratifying and stimulating life in academe that I hoped to secure. The assistantship I received at UK to work as a graduate assistant in the reference library was more than enough to whet my information professional appetite and to help me develop into a competent library professional.

When I dropped into Lexington for my graduate school adventure, suddenly I was uneasy, observing for the first time that people stared at me while I was shopping at the local mall or in other environments off the college campus. At a downtown tourist trap, Festival Market, during my first month at the university, a strange man began following me through the shops. If I went down an aisle, he soon followed. If I picked up an item, he watched me carefully. I saw him speak intently to several store clerks near where I was browsing, directing their attention to me. He was not discreet, and I became anxious. Panic setting in, my next guess was that he would follow me out to my car. When he did not, however, I realized he had been following me because he was a plainclothes policeman! Because I was a person of color (and very brown, so soon after summer) he had obviously thought I was in the shop to steal rather than purchase. Feeling thoroughly insulted and embarrassed, I could not bring myself to return to that shopping plaza for a long time.

After this incident, I began to suspect that I was simply paranoid until I went to another mall during November's Christmas-rush shopping. The line at the counter of an upscale clothing store was quite long. I stood patiently as the clerk waited on each of us. When it was my turn to be helped, the clerk looked right at me and deliberately turned to a Caucasian woman near me, asking, "May I help you?" I was a bit dismayed, but let it pass. I could not believe that I had just been slighted, even though I was directly in front of the clerk. Perhaps I was imagining. Perhaps the clerk made a simple mistake—she forgot her glasses or had difficulty seeing under the flickering florescent lights of the store. Not so. The clerk looked up after assisting that woman and asked again, "May I help you?" to *another* Caucasian woman, this time *behind* me in the line! Now I was aghast and aware that I had been passed over purposefully. Fortunately the second customer took charge. She leaned pointedly around me, gestured in my direction, and firmly responded, "No. She was here first." The clerk responded

curtly, "Oh, O.K. May I help you?" Avoiding my eyes and with no hint of friendliness or even courtesy, she brusquely accepted my money.

I relentlessly pondered what had happened as the episode played over and over in my mind. Until I came to Lexington, I had never endured this kind of rude treatment. Over and over I replayed the look in the clerk's eyes when she was resigned to helping me. My brown hands and my blue-black hair were suddenly things that made me feel very self-conscious. For the first time ever, I caught myself feeling almost ashamed of my ethnic features. Is this how people of color are made to feel when they are treated with scorn? I scolded myself for my attitude; the clerk was the one who should have felt remorse for her insensitivity. It was clear she had fully expected me to go away, and she would have been happy to sacrifice her commission to avoid serving me. I just did not understand it at all. For a long time, I struggled with the incident. Sadly, these two occurrences would not be the only times I would feel discriminated against because of my ethnicity while living in Lexington.

Even graduate school evinced an apathy to minority concerns. In library science classes at the University of Kentucky, students and professors treated each other with mutual personal and professional respect. At the same time, however, major issues of ethnic discrimination were inconsistently addressed within the context of librarianship. While public library courses dealt with the hot topics of multiculturalism and free access to diverse materials in adult services and children's literature, multiculturalism was not stressed in the reference and public service courses provided for academic librarians. As a result, I did not even become accustomed to the titles of major works or the use of reference materials for minorities until taking my first job. Since the topic is covered in some of the courses, my curriculum was lacking as I pursued public service and reference.

Professors were very helpful in other areas. I did not have a mentor of sorts, but I did have a couple of professors who helped me get started and advised me very well when carving out my future as a professional. In my management classes, one extremely prolific professor stressed the importance of *unconditional positive regard*. In our sessions at our weekly night class on the fifth floor of Margaret I. King South Library, a small group of students met to discuss the nuts and bolts of management and organizational behavior. This was actually a heart-wrenching course where we bared our souls and

explored on levels higher than textbooks or lectures can invoke. Dr. Arthur prodded each individual to reveal their true selves and to work through baggage. Even though the group did not touch on racial or ethnic differences, this is where I did realize that positive regard for all human beings is essential and must be applied to my recent incidents. Despite having been treated so abysmally by people in the local stores, I did not yet view education as an avenue toward dispelling the gross misconceptions and stereotypes which people adopt in ignorance. This class allowed me to put many things into perspective and see that I had learned a lot about myself in order to become a better manager, coworker and certainly, a better librarian. Because of my own history, I did not recognize the necessity of academic librarians to go beyond providing patrons with materials that explain and celebrate various cultures. Now I had valuable insight.

In the summer of 1990, when nearing the completion of my library science degree, I saw a posting for a circulation librarian position at West Virginia State College (WVSC). Until that moment, I had honestly believed it would be necessary to move away from my home state to find employment in an increasingly competitive field. Many of my classmates had leads in places such as Colorado, New York, Wyoming, and California, and I fully expected that my first professional position would be unbearably distant from family and friends. Luckily, I landed the WVSC position and began my employment at this well-regarded and beautifully maintained historically Black college in Institute, West Virginia.

Institute is adjacent to the state's capital city, Charleston. Situated in the south central Kanawha River valley, the area is quite different than that of my hometown West Liberty, which is north of the Mason-Dixon line. Despite Charleston's vastly larger size, there is not the overriding celebration of ethnic cultures one experiences in the small panhandle towns near Pittsburgh. It did not take long for this realization to sink in. After moving into my new apartment and getting my bearings, I began to notice Rebel flags on trucks and cars. While driving around, I saw a landscape of grindingly poor families and homes in severe disrepair. In the stores and malls, people appeared as one of two extremes: either rough looking and dirty, wearing flannel shirts and sporting gun racks on their trucks, or painfully manicured, wearing tailored three-piece suits and driving Cadillacs. Politicians and paupers were living side by side. It was a disturbingly fascinating mixture and setting that would lead to events similar to my Lexington

experience.

West Virginia State College has a long, proud tradition as an outstanding historically Black institution. Since integration in the 1950s, however, the school's racial makeup has shifted and most of the 4,500 students who now attend the college are White. Largely a commuter school, WVSC currently claims only about a 13 percent Black student population, while Black faculty and staff number a little over 35 percent. At the time of our campus-wide North Central self-study project (1995), of 156 full-time staff members, the actual breakdown of ethnicity is 61 percent White, 38 percent African American, .3 percent Hispanic, and .7 percent Asian American.⁴ The .3 percent number represents one person—*me!* Nonetheless, I felt secure in my own minority status, and knew I would be embraced as a woman of color. The director of the spacious and newly renovated library, a knowledgeable African American professional of long standing in the collegiate community, immediately made me welcome; my fellow librarians and paraprofessionals were also congenial and accommodating. After working in two marginally equipped libraries in the state as a student and paraprofessional before graduate school, I was pleased to be in a superb facility with outstanding technological equipment. The library has over 200,000 volumes and a periodicals collection of more than 1,500 titles. With a fully automated book catalog, there are also more than six CD-ROM periodical workstations and a plethora of CD databases at the students' disposal. An impressive and regionally well-known collection of Asian art work plus new carpet and tables in the main lobby area made for a very inviting and pleasant place to work. For a first job, the library and situation were excellent.

During that first year, I had the pleasure of participating in the centennial celebration of the college's historic land grant institution origin. From the perspective of my personal history of diverse cultural experiences, it was exciting to embrace the ethnic influence of African American culture. With an event occurring almost every week, I quickly jumped into faculty and staff functions such as the Homecoming dance on the sternwheeler West Virginia Belle, cocktail parties at the president's home, and college football games. I even joined the college's concert and jazz bands to help the director bolster the brass section. I felt valued and accepted, and thought that my enculturation on the campus was going extremely well. Then, a strange thing happened at the student union.

George Cameon and I often went to the union for lunch. George, a full-blooded Italian from the Italian-settled city of Fairmont, West Virginia, was the assistant to the president. He was a longtime college friend helping to smooth my first months on the job, but my frequent contact with him precipitated an unsettling event. On one occasion when I was at the union alone, a young Black woman came up to me and irately poked me in the arm. She launched into a frustrated pontification on the necessity of ditching the White boy and getting myself a brother. Interrupting her scolding, I wondered aloud, "Why would you be concerned with who I dated?" Incredulously, it hit me: "Do you think I'm Black?" "Aren't you?" she answered. She did not, however, apologize for confronting me. Shocked, I listened blankly as she detailed the absolute importance of "looking out for my sisters." But her vehement opposition to racially-mixed couples was confusing and perplexing. She had accosted a complete stranger, obviously feeling it her duty to deter the crossing of color lines. This was discrimination from a new perspective, no longer isolated to White against Black. Now it was Black against White, and—never having experienced it before—I was flabbergasted.

I discussed this incident with close friends. The campus does celebrate diversity and act as a forum for change, so I was not afraid to voice concerns to members of my peer community there. George was my best sounding board. He had also experienced the same kind of dismay when witnessing a similar argument between a White football player who dated a Black woman, and a Black male student who did not approve. Although the men had discussed the situation at great length, they could not come to a consensus and thus agreed to disagree. George had begun at this point to understand just how strongly Black students felt about their solidarity and unity. After all, many of the students and their families have been directly affected by the ignorance and cruelty of people who have discriminated against them in all walks of life. Nonethnic Whites can never fully grasp what it must be like to know this frustration. Having recently been on the receiving end of discrimination in Lexington, I too was empathetic.

But in listening to George's story, I was struck once again by the issue of separatism. In both instances Blacks had upheld a "keep-to-your-own" philosophy identical to the one perpetuated for generations by the White majority. I was upset that the message was not peace and harmony, but separation and suspicion. Then again, it was unrealistic

for me to expect the persecuted minority to uphold everyone else's values for them. If an individual is defeated enough times, he or she could easily lash out in a separatist manner. Even though the student union incident was probably not an isolated event, I rationalized it as something that would not happen to me again. I was so wrong. An even more poignant situation would occur the following semester. Making the usual social rounds, I befriended a wonderful Black man named Carl Ferguson, who had come into the library to do research many times during the fall. Our relationship began with, "How are you?" and "Have a nice day," and eventually deepened into discussions of politics, religion, and the meaning of life. Carl was delightful company, and I was overjoyed when he asked me out to lunch, thinking that this exceptional friendship would continue to grow.

My parents are involved in the athletic happenings at West Liberty State College. As members of the same athletic conference, West Virginia State and West Liberty often meet in many sports. On the weekend of the annual WLSC and WVSC basketball match, my parents arrived to see the game. Carl was taking tickets, which provided the perfect opportunity for me to proudly introduce my undoubtedly Mexican mom and my indubitably White father to my new friend. Oddly, Carl seemed aloof and uninterested. No problem, I thought. Like many young men, he might be shy or embarrassed to unexpectedly meet the parents of a lady friend. But the next time I saw Carl on campus, it was evident that something was definitely wrong. He pointedly looked past me when he walked by, and for the first time he failed to say hello. In the following weeks, Carl never came to the library to chat with me again. Knowing that I did not do anything to upset him, I asked the library director, my friend and confidant, why she thought this was happening. She knew all about Carl: a self-avowed hard-core separatist who would probably never speak to me again since learning that I am not African American. In fact, she affirmed that Carl was notorious for vocal disparity of Whites and non-Blacks. As a Black woman, happily married to a White man, she herself had been the object of similar wrath on many occasions. She had survived campus gossip after her marriage in the 1970s, but was forced to continue dealing with people like Carl and his feelings of disapproval in the 1990s.

I was deeply saddened, both for the director's situation and my own. My friendship with Carl had held great promise, but Carl had felt compelled to simply end it upon discovering that my brown skin was

of Mexican rather than African origin. The pain of his rejection runs deep, for I am still also a person of color. Mexicans and other Hispanics are a persecuted minority in this country striving for equality and the right to the American Dream. To Carl and the community of Black separatists, however, these common goals are not enough.

This rationale is not acceptable. When I think of African slaves of plantation days before the Civil War, I am angered too. But when I see how Blacks have banded together and fought for equality, I am filled with joyous admiration at the unity and conviction of a people who finally said, "Enough!" Look at much of the Hispanic population in the United States today: unorganized, sharing little direction, or—in many cases—pride. You need not go far to see countless Latinos working for less than minimum wage in horrible conditions. The recent Proposition 187 in California banning public services to illegal aliens is just the beginning of a predicted tidal wave of legal exclusion. There are already ordinances pending in heavily Latino-populated areas that would ban Spanish from work environments, stores, and even schools. This sort of discriminatory treatment should sound familiar to Carl. He described many times the same kind of ignorance that impacts him every day. Yet Carl is not remotely interested in the plight of the Latinos in America today. That is unfortunate. The adoption of separatist ideals from any minority contingent further removes all minorities from the mainstream and prevents them from banding together for common goals of dignity.

A sidebar to this event is a revelation. Perhaps some of the separatist resentment stems from the integration of the college. Prior to integration in the 1950s, WVSC was a flagship institution in many areas touting many famous and renowned Black instructors, visitors and students. It is a proven fact that when Whites infiltrated the college, the standards did drop and the educational quality slipped. The institution is still a noteworthy four-year college, but it has never been able to regain or surpass the quality and reputation it had prior to its integration. If I were among the 13 percent Black students who may have alumni family members or friends who remember the *good old days*, I may also be quite indignant toward any non-Black group attending or working at the college. After all, their presence is directly related to the college's decline in eminence.

Regardless of my personal conflicts with minority issues, that first year was very successful professionally. By spring, I had already

branched out into teaching for the community college division on campus. Our director, who is completely dedicated to professional development, had encouraged me to attend several workshops and conferences. Faculty and staff members were seeking me out, and I had already built a steady flow of regular students who requested me when needing assistance. Things were wonderful, but I was still concerned about the separatist atmosphere which pervaded part of the student population. Having these first-hand experiences helped me see that my own general education curriculum at West Virginia University and other college campuses I attended avoided various aspects of color issues altogether. Now, as a librarian in the academic community where these issues are presented daily, I cannot assume that it is up to somebody else to resolve them.

The graduate library science curriculum had provided no preparation for Carl's snubbing; nor for my downtown Lexington experience. The task was to find a way to overcome that deficiency and educate myself. In both environments I had been a victim of discrimination and disdain. I have not been harmed physically, but I do know the frustration and anger of poor treatment, and that realization prepared me for action. The next time a Black student made disparaging remarks about interracial dating, I spoke up, encouraging him to see all angles of the situation. When another indicated that I too should adopt a more separatist attitude for Latinos, I tried to illustrate the counterproductivity of fractured groups—how any actions promoting continued separation of the ethnic groups and cultures are not conducive to the peace or harmony of any community. This was a personal victory. During my first two incidents of racial conflict, I would have let fear and ignorance deter me from opening a dialogue about the experience.

Among my peers in the library, I now openly discuss events taking place on campus. After the Carl scenario, my colleagues provided advice on how to handle subsequent situations and what I could do to learn more about separatism and discrimination in the Black community as well as the White. Speaking to both Black and White coworkers helped bring perspective and new approaches to my internal resolution of the problem. I gradually became more at ease with WVSC's ongoing racial dialogue and accepted it. In turn, my Latino experiences have helped our Black student population become more aware of ethnic diversity. Few were even aware that I was Hispanic and asked questions about Mexican culture, food, and traditions. Happy to answer

any queries about my family's origins, I always oblige. One summer, I even brought the staff and patrons authentic *tamales* from the *tortilla molino* (factory) in San Antonio, Texas. I managed to get most of my colleagues to sample a little piece. My director presented me with a Santa Claus *pinata* that I promptly displayed in my office even though it was the middle of July! Many long conversations about various cultures and traditions of each of the ethnic staff members ensued in later months. It was clear that the lines were opening to comment and inquiry.

In a personal effort to educate peers and students about Mexican and Latino culture, I formally adopted my mother's maiden name, *Garcia*, as my formal middle name, knowing people would wonder at my decision. This indeed took place. As friends and acquaintances asked about the change, I was able to talk frequently about my heritage and Mexican culture. People seemed genuinely interested and usually wanted to ask questions or talk about their experiences in the Southwest and south of the border. It has been a change that I have not regretted.

As a public service librarian, I am the first contact person for any patron who enters the library. I have instilled a friendly and helpful atmosphere among my staff members. We maintain the lobby area which contains several display cases and a large bulletin board. One way that we attempt to educate our library users is to showcase new books dealing with various issues of race and culture. Each semester, we will choose a theme and gather materials illustrating the topic. Over the course of my first couple of years, we prepared bulletin boards highlighting African culture and the individual countries in Africa. Many Black students on campus were not even aware geographically of the large continent and its peoples. Other countries and cultures have been covered, and any new books we buy on diversity and multiculturalism are showcased each semester. A significant number of students look at our displays carefully and inquire about charging out the materials we exhibit.

As a member of the faculty community, I always speak out in faculty meetings and gatherings when appropriate. The diversity issue is often addressed during faculty development lectures to educate and sensitize campus professionals. This lecture series brings assorted topics to life with speakers and presentations. They are open forums where faculty members can speak their minds and ask questions about anything. In discussions of race and ethnicity, I have asked the faculty

to engender a broader sense of multiculturalism when teaching or researching topics for their classes. Publicizing the library diversity materials as a wealth of tools for both faculty and students promotes our collection. Playing Devil's advocate for diversity on committees opens our faculty to suggestion and dialogue. The big challenge is conveying the message coherently enough to influence a student population with such deeply instilled opinions.

The personal agenda is important to me as I seek efforts to reach students. Multicultural issues creep into my night classes. As an instructor of a basic college success skills course for nontraditional students in the community college division, I have an opportunity to develop an instructor-student relationship which most librarians do not experience. Multicultural issues are covered only briefly by the departmental syllabus, but my lesson plans incorporate as many different cultures and ethnic groups as possible. When the lesson calls for a reading or a writing project, I make sure the examples I use are topical and diverse. If students wish to divert attention away from the lesson and delve deeper into multicultural issues, I always promote the exchange, attempting to be as informative as possible.

My colleagues and I agree that the library on a college campus is the best possible place for promoting diversity to the greatest numbers of people. To achieve this, however, librarians must become proactive rather than reactive. As a motivated library professional, I am committed to bringing continued attention to this issue by keeping abreast of new materials and information services. In the future, I plan to gear my personal professional development toward multiculturalism and learn of new materials and sources that will assist our faculty and staff. I jump at the chance to attend any workshops presented by our local and regional library associations. When there is a cultural event I feel I can draw from, I make arrangements to attend or send an ambassador from the library. Recently, I was appointed to the West Virginia Cultures Institute Task Force, a regional group dedicated to enhancing multiculturalism in the area elementary and secondary schools. My involvement in this organization has provided me the opportunity to meet individuals from many different countries and backgrounds with the common goal of promoting education of ethnic diversity. When this group presents a project or circulates information, my colleagues are privy to what is happening.

While the education I received in graduate school was excellent, I had to expand my own horizons beyond my Latina life experience and

become an advocate of general multiculturalism. WVSC, with its historically Black tradition, is beginning the same sort of exciting expansion as it embraces the experiences of all its students. During this academic year, the topic has been introduced in the faculty lecture series. A committee was formed to assist in the creation of certificate study in Black, women's and Appalachian studies. An overwhelming response to the idea from our students has reassured the group and helped us to work harder to realize this goal. The general education curriculum at WVSC incorporates a very aggressive look at race and gender. Students are teeming to get into these classes each semester. A shortage of instructors to teach them is always a problem, but is usually resolved before more sections have to be created due to high enrollment. Happenings such as these help educate not only the faculty and staff, but also the students and community. Those who are willing will have many opportunities to better understand themselves by understanding others. The means to this end is diversity.

NOTES

1. Kanellos, Nicolas, editor. *The Hispanic-American Almanac*. Detroit: Gale Research Publications, 1993.
2. *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*. Washington, D.C.: The Chronicle, 1 September, 1994.
3. United States Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 3A*. Kentucky and West Virginia. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).
4. Dr. R. Charles Byers, and others, *West Virginia State College Self Study, 1995*. Institute, W.V.: West Virginia State College, 1995.

Ésta composición ésta dedicada a la memoria de mi abuelo, Alfred H. Brooks, que siempre cautivo a sus nietas con su sonrisa, son sus chistes, y con sus historias maravillosas. También ésta dedicada a mi tío, Clyde Garcia, que con su alegría alborotaba y hacia reír a todas las almas que tocaba. Las memorias sigan viviendo con mucho cariño en nuestros corazones.