

My Story: Connie Mesquita



Connie Mesquita celebrates her college graduation and bachelor's degree from UO, 1974. Connie Mesquita celebra su graduación de la universidad.

Concepción Marín Mesquita was born in the Marcos De Nisa neighborhood of Phoenix, Arizona. Both her parents had grown up in the state. Connie remembers, "During the time that government agents were gathering all the Native Americans and forcing them into reservations, my great-grandfather Francisco Marín was kidnapped by Comanche Indians along with his twin sister and brother...He was fifteen when they let him go. His Native American mother took him to a road and pointed the way, saying, 'Now it's time for you to go back to your people.' So he walked back into the mining town his family was from."

In Connie's immediate family, her mother had a sixth-grade education; her father made it to third grade. "My father's family was so poor, they couldn't afford new things," Connie explains. "His school provided used shoes, but they were too big for him. It embarrassed him. He went home and said he was never going back to school, and he didn't."

Connie had four brothers and one sister. She remembers walking to church with her siblings and cousins and watching movies on Saturday nights, sitting on blankets and eating popcorn at a local park. Friday nights were for families at the park. Connie's extended family traveled to San Jose, California every summer to earn money as migrant farm workers. "We piled in trucks and cars, the whole family, even the cousins, you know, we all gathered together. We always went to the same farm.

The family was Italian. We picked practically everything...strawberries, peaches, plums, onions, tomatoes. All the families [in the migrant camp] knew each other. We all got together in the summer. We stopped going when I was eight or nine years old."

When Connie attended Phoenix Union High School, her teachers never suggested that she attend college. As a senior, she decided to follow her brother Carlos to California. "I wanted to graduate from a California school because it was cool - surfing, and the music - it was more exciting than Phoenix," she explains.

After graduating from Andrew Hill High School in San Jose, California, Connie joined the Job Corps. To her and her parents' surprise, her first assignment was at Tongue Point in Astoria, Oregon. She remembers flying into Portland and being amazed at the greenery. Connie's Job Corps post provided a diverse group of students: "Mexicano, African-Americans, Alaskans, Native Americans, Chinese, Hawaiians...we were all girls." Connie completed a course in mechanical drafting, dental assistant, and worked in numerous business and clerical positions. She also experienced social discrimination: "In Astoria was the first time I really felt any prejudice...We took a trip to the Seaside...people were just looking at us as troublemakers, because here we were in a group and we were loud because we were having a good time. We were young. We weren't troublemakers...but that's how we were looked at. [Merchants] always warned us, Keep your hands off...or move away...or, some of you will have to stand outside I'm afraid. That type of thing."

In 1969, the Upward Bound program at the University of Oregon brought Connie to Eugene, Oregon. Connie earned her undergraduate degree in Community Services and Public Affairs, in 1974. She earned a master's degree in Counseling for the Hearing Impaired at the Oregon College of Education in Monmouth (now Western Oregon University). In 1979, Connie went to work at Lane Community College. Her son, Mario, was born in 1982.

Connie was instrumental as one of the founding persons of several concerns significant to the Latino community, including establishing Adelante Si, a group of Latinos in Eugene who worked to promote political, cultural and educational events. Adelante Si established the first Fiesta Latina in the area, which has become an annual tradition. Connie has been active in the sanctuary movement, supporting Central American refugees fleeing the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Connie recently retired from Lane Community College but continues to support the work of youth through the Puertas Abiertas Program at the college. She believes it is important for people within the Latino and European-American community to understand the struggles and contributions of Latino immigrants.