

Margarita

*A native of Oaxaca, Mexico, Margarita will forever treasure the words of her daughter's teacher at Midland Park Primary School in North Charleston: "I'll tell you a secret, your daughter is very intelligent, she has the potential to be in the honors classes; do not say this to the other mothers, but your daughter is going to go very far." Margarita, was about forty at the time of this interview.*

M: That's where they welcomed us, they gave us a place to live for a while.

ML: And your daughter was old enough to go to school?

M: Yes, my daughter was six years old. She was entering into kindergarten because she was traveling with us when she went to preschool on CD in California. In Ohio I took her to attend the preschool, but when we got here, she was qualified to enter first grade.

ML: So she went to Midland Park?

M: Midland Park. She went there and I told my husband, "I want to stay here. I want the kids to go to school. I do not want them to waste time," and his cousin said, "Look, just cross the wire fence there's the school, you do not have to go far." That's what I liked the most—that they lived so close to school. We just made a hole in the fence and the children could pass through it. And I said, "I like it, the children are very close to the school." They even had an afterschool program; we paid twenty, twenty-five dollars each week and they kept our two children until we picked them up after work at five or six in the afternoon. I said, "I like this program, let's get a place to rent close by," and my husband said, "I have the money to rent, but we'll see first if we'll fit, if we want to stay here," and so we stayed.

That trailer park was big. It's big and there are still people living there now. I enrolled the children because I did not have to drive or anything. I just crossed the street and enrolled the children; the little one in the CD and the girl already in first grade.

ML: What about the little guy? What was he was doing?

M: Well, they were both going to school.

ML: Both of them went to school?

M: Both of them. While I was at home I waited until two o'clock in the afternoon to pick them up. They advised me that as soon as I started working, enroll them in the afternoon program. I think Midland Park School helped me a lot; there were bilingual teachers and there were teachers I cannot forget who were such good people.

ML: Do you remember the names of the teachers?

M: Yes, especially the name of one who I could not find because she moved. She went to another state, but I carry it in my heart. When I think about my daughter's childhood, I automatically think about her. I hope that God would protect and bless her because she helped me a lot. Her name was Collins, Ms. Collins—the only name I remember. The last names are very difficult to remember.

ML: Was she an English teacher? English as a second language teacher? Or was she the classroom teacher?

M: She was the English as a second language teacher and she was the one who helped the children participate in the ESOL programs to improve their English skills.

ML: Yes.

M: And she's such good people. There must be a picture of her somewhere here.

ML: Did you also start attending the English classes in Midland Park? Or not yet?

M: No, not yet. I enrolled the children and when I went and they welcomed me and told me, “We are getting all the second language children and they will take a test. If they pass, they will be in regular class. If not, they are going to take an hour or two in these classes so that they can improve their English.” My daughter said to me, “Mommy, I do not need it, I know English,” she was a little girl, only five years old, but very active. I liked it and the little one was a little bit slower, but I said, “Do not worry, everything will be fine. If your sister can do it, she will help us.”

I always said, “Look, if she can, she will help us.” Then the girl started to go and within a few weeks, the teacher called me, so I went to go meet her. They had a little trailer, tiny in the back; it was like a mini library, beautiful. I remember, when my little girl went in there that was her whole world. She liked to be in there. The teacher said to me, “I want you to listen, because your daughter already reads English perfectly and speaks very well. She is going to need one hour of class and then we will reduce the time.” There was another teacher, he was an assistant, and his name was Mr. Hagy, but I do not remember his last name. I just know his first name.

ML: That is his last name. His name is Chris Hagy.

M: Chris Hagy, he was there. He was very young. I do not know. I think he was still not married and he also spoke a little Spanish, but he helped the children with the English pronunciation and I was very pleased that they were always over there. And Ms. Collins told me, “Never, never get discouraged, because your daughter is very intelligent. I do not want the other girls I know, girls that I have known for years to be jealous. I'll tell you a secret, your daughter is very intelligent,

she has the potential to be in the honors classes; do not say this to the other mothers, but your daughter is going to go very far," she said.

I'll never forget her phrasing. I looked at my daughter and she was so small. "Mommy, I can," said my little girl. But I always treasured the phrase she told me: "Your daughter is going to go very far, but I do not want other mothers to be jealous, your daughter is very intelligent." I said, "Well, thank God," and since then she has attended school there. There she studied first and second, until sixth grade, she stayed there.

Margarita, Interview by Marina López, October 26, 2016