



Where Are They Now: Carlos Diaz, Rosa Valdez ELC Alumni

By Cheryl Nance

Eighty-two-year-old Carlos Diaz has been a resident of the Old West Tampa neighborhood where Rosa Valdez Early Childhood Learning Center and Lab School is located for most of his life. Once his grandparent's home, Carlos has lived in a house just a few blocks down the street from the Rosa Valdez Center since his eldest son was two. It wasn't until recently however, that Carlos decided to stop by "Rosa" and reacquaint himself with the school he attended and loved as a young child. It was back in the late 1930's that Carlos' mother worked in a local cigar factory, and his grandmother used to walk him to the Rosa Valdez Center where he remembers playing games and being given a blanket

when it was naptime.

Visiting Carlos at his home recently, I found it filled with family pictures of his two sons, one daughter, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Displayed prominently on the wall near the front door is a large frame showcasing a picture of a young Carlos with his wife, Catherine, as well as their parents and grandparents. Catherine, who passed away in 2010, has her own ties to Cornerstone Family Ministries as she used to attend school at the Wolff (Center) Settlement. Carlos has actually been gracious enough to present the Cornerstone staff with a Catherine's kindergarten diploma she earned while there.

A true personification of Old West Tampa, Carlos' parents were Spanish and Cuban while Catherine's were Italian. Carlos is still a member of the Spanish social club Centro Asturiano and Catherine was a member of the Italian social club, both located in Ybor City. The two met when Carlos' older brother was dating Catherine's cousin. They were married when Carlos was seventeen and Catherine was sixteen. When I asked Carlos about his older brother, he joked they were only three weeks apart because Carlos was born on April 2nd while his brother was born on April 28th. Carlos laughed and said of course his brother's birth year was 1934 while his was 1935. I told Carlos that siblings born close together like that were called Irish twins. He had never heard that term before but was delighted to be able to add another nationality to his family.

Carlos keeps healthy by walking around the neighborhood and drinking water, which he refers to as the fountain of youth. He is a small man with a big personality who has many stories to tell about the old neighborhood, such as when the Barnum and Bailey circus used to set up on Rome Avenue, complete with the three ring tent and elephants. Carlos keeps up with current events too, making him a wealth of information for the old schools and churches that used to be in the neighborhood as well as new developments coming in. He enjoys watching Westerns on television and listening to jazz music on the radio. He attends mass at home by listening to the Catholic Radio Network.

It was an absolute treasure to meet Carlos. We spent the afternoon trying to find a home for an old set of encyclopedias and medical books he wanted to donate. The Shimberg Health Sciences Library at USF was happy to take a portion of his collection. On the drive home, Carlos talked about how important teachers are and how he doesn't understand why they seem undervalued by society. He also stressed the importance of continuing education.

If you know someone who graduated from the Rosa Valdez Early Learning Center in old West Tampa or someone who graduated from the Wolff Center Settlement in Ybor or someone who served at either of these facilities, email their information to Cathy Stone at cstone@cornerstonefm.org. We would love to feature their story in an upcoming newsletter.

To celebrate Carlos' unique spirit and other alumni, volunteers and donors ties to CFM, consider making an honor or memorial gift this holiday season to benefit the children attending the Rosa Valdez Early Learning Center and Lab School. Simply send your gift to Cornerstone via our website or mail and be sure to include the name of the person you are honoring or memorializing and the post office or email address where you would like a card to be sent to acknowledge your gift. Honor and Memorial gifts make a wonderful Christmas, birthday, anniversary, or mothers or fathers day gift. **Note: Gifts received by December 20th will be sent a Christmas card acknowledgement before Christmas.**