**A Journey of Faith and Love
By Mary Lin Brewer, High Point Coordinator**

In 2017 and 2018 Mireya Martinez and Alvaro Torres became Citizens of the United States of America. Their story, their journey together grounded in faith and love, began almost 30 years earlier and more than 2000 miles from their “new home” in High Point, North Carolina.

He first saw her walk past him in the parking lot of the governmental complex where they both had worked for years in Colombia, South America. It was 1989 and Mireya was an economist with the National Department of Agriculture and Alvaro worked in the National Department of Statistics. They would cross paths again that year at Cenfol, an international leadership organization that supports small congregations of Christians, and this time Alvaro would introduce himself to her. By 2005 they were married, and Alvaro was a full-time pastor ministering to three congregations with Mireya by his side. For the next five years, they followed their calling, knowing that “the Lord had a mission for us” and by 2010 they sold all their possessions and were living in Kernersville, North Carolina, serving a small multicultural Christian congregation. Soon thereafter, Pastor Chris Lockhart with The Crossing Church in High Point invited them to form a Latino church, and Iglesia Latina born. Today Mireya and Alvaro minister to their 40 members as they would care for their own family and are active volunteers in many High Point community organizations.

When they arrived in North Carolina, Alvaro and Mireya realized they needed help with English. They attended classes at Forsyth Tech and GTCC and learned about Reading Connections in High Point. Mireya began with her Reading Connections tutor in 2013 and Alvaro was attending Carolyn Flynn’s Reading Connections ESOL class at the High Point Public Library. Soon they were both ‘vested’ members of Carolyn’s class, which continued to grow and ultimately moved to St. Mary’s Episcopal Church just down the road. That was six years ago, according to their teacher, Carolyn Flynn, who on the day of my visit, was using newspaper articles to discuss the National Emergencies Act which was enacted in 1976 and used by President Bush after the 9/11 attack. I am delighted to report that this U.S. citizen learned a few things thanks to Ms. Flynn and her talented, inquisitive class.

Mireya and Alvaro would go on to teach me how they became U.S. Citizens from 2015 to 2018. Now, armed with stronger English reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills, they attended citizenship classes and ultimately, their “Interview”. Alvaro finished first, but as he describes it, “the Lord had another plan for me.” A few months before his Citizenship Naturalization Ceremony, Alvaro was diagnosed with lymphoma that required three months of radiation and chemotherapy. His doctor would not allow him to be in public for his Oath Ceremony due to the cancer, so he received a private ceremony earlier in the day. “It was so very special. Very, very special,” said Mireya. Alvaro reports that he is now cancer free, and adds, “I know the Lord loves me. I have thousands of testimonies!”

Then, on July 4th (yes, JULY 4th), 2018, Mireya attended her Naturalization Ceremony at Old Salem. Carolyn Flynn, honored to be present, describes the entire experience as “moving” and “life changing,” and adds that she will “never see the Fourth of July the same way again.”

As my interview with Mireya and Alvaro ended, I was struck by how much they had taught me in this brief encounter. I was in awe of their amazing teacher, who they spontaneously announced in unison as if on cue, “we cannot live without Carolyn Flynn!”

It is hard to not be dazzled by this rock-solid Reading Connections organization that has touched so many lives for over two decades here. But today it is Mireya and Alvaro who are the diamonds. It is their faith, their love, and their commitment to one another, and to our great country. And so, as we read about our country’s challenges and governmental differences, let us take pause and celebrate Alvaro and Mireya’s true journey of faith and love….and continue the good work, together.