

15th Anniversary of Paseo por El Westside

EDITOR'S NOTE: The July/August 2010 issue of *La Voz de Esperanza* reviewed the first Paseo por el Westside that took place in May, 2010. The issue also included reflections by the family of Josie Merla Martin who joined elders at the Casa de Cuentos, 816 S. Colorado to share photos and stories of growing up in the Westside. Her first interaction with other westside elders was an emotional homecoming for Josie who had lived most of her life away from her beloved Westside. The photos and stories of the elders eventually gave rise to projects like *En Aquellos Tiempos: Fotohistorias del Westside*, the Paseo and soon, the opening of El Museo del Westside. This year the annual Paseo por El Westside takes place on May 4th celebrating 15 years. Josie's family's reflections follow:

Cathryn Josephina Merla-Watson,

(then) 30: As the youngest, I have had the great privilege of learning about my family history through the "Casita" de Cuentos or House of Stories. This history not only bears witness to my own heritage, but also the rich and diverse cultural history of a wider Mexican American community—a community whose vital genealogies have been too often ignored by "official" archives and Texas history books. What I love about San Antonio is how I can walk around downtown or the Westside and literally point to places and things that give definition to my sense of self, my own sense of history. The testimonios of my mother and abuelita reflect what the Casa has meant to us: Note: Catie, Josie's granddaughter is now an associate professor at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in McAllen with a focus in areas of Latinx literary and cultural studies and gender and critical sexuality studies, among others.

Cynthia Eloisa Spielman, (then) 54: So much of who we are is rooted in places. I can show you the house in which my mother was born, Roy's Ice House, that would play the "crazy lullaby" we would listen to at night. I can sit in what is left of the plaza where we would sit with my grandmother and eat raspas in the hot evening watching the fountain. It is the same with our stories. We are defined by our memories. But, where are they? What book do we check out of the library or buy at the bookstore? What school textbook do we have that tells us our own longings, our fears, our anger, our love, our culture, our historias? At the Casa de Cuentos through the recording of oral histories and through the picture banners of *En Aquellos Tiempos* we tell of our past and we shape our future. ¶ For us, the Casa is an intersection of personal relationships and feelings and the larger politics of space, history, and community. These stories are not only about preserving the past

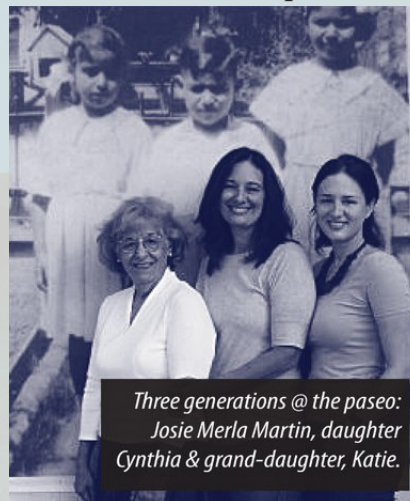
but about articulating our communities now, and in the future. Narrative as urban planning challenges us to listen for what is important, for what is envisioned for a community instead of the rigid city planning techniques imposed on us now. The important work of documenting history, preserving it digitally, as living testimonies, is vital to the future of our community. The part of the West Side my mother was raised in, the part I could have come home to, has been destroyed by the City. It is even more important now to work and fight to preserve what we have left of the West Side community: Note: Cynthia is now a grandmother, herself, and continues to work as a community and neighborhood activist.

Josephina Merla Martin, (then) 79: I have lived to see

the community I love so much destroyed as our history, memories, and culture has been cast away cruelly and disrespectfully by "urban renewal." It seems that now when you watch the news or read the papers the bad things that happen in the West Side are magnified not always talking about the love and pride and closeness of its people. There are wonderful things that happen in this part of town and many of us share these stories with our children and grandchildren at the Casa de Cuentos. Where else can people of all ages, but especially the older generation like myself that have so many memories and stories to tell come together?

Stories of lost people and places, stories of

discrimination and violence, funny stories of how we use to eat street tar, stories of herbal medicines—of our grandmothers, stories of our neighborhoods. Our hope is that today's generations and generations to come will know and feel the pride there is in being from this very important historical and vital part of the city: The West Side. Many of the storytellers still live in the West Side and many, like me had to leave, but we always come back. It is amazing that I have sat across from someone that went to the same schools that I or my siblings went to 75 or more years ago. I wish we had more time here to tell you some of these stories but you can always join us at La Casita lovingly kept alive by the Buena Gente of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center now on the 2nd Saturday of every month at ten in the morning. Call us at 210.2280201 to find out more! Note: Josie, along with dear friend, Isabel Sánchez (both now deceased) were inspired to start an elder group called the Corazones of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center to continue collecting photos and stories of Westside life. Her stories and other Corazones' stories have been preserved in print, photos and song in the book, *Still Here, Homenaje al Westside de San Antonio* available at the Esperanza.



Three generations @ the paseo:
Josie Merla Martin, daughter
Cynthia & grand-daughter, Katie.

Paseo por El Westsid



Josie Merla Martin enjoyed many a Paseo with her family until her passing in 2023.



Jacinto Madrigal, a *yerberero*, spoke about his plants and their healing qualities at multiple Paseos since 2010.



Antonia Castañeda, PhD, took on the role of *escribana* encouraging folks to write letters.



As part of the neighborhood walking tour in 2010, Chialfredo Forastello in his 90s, spoke in front of his historic home. He passed shortly after.



Aurora Olguin served up raspas while her husband and daughter got in on the fun.



Guadalupe Olguin sliced up watermelons at the first Paseo in 2010 and participated in many a Paseo until he passed recently, in 2024.



Maricela Olguin bites into a slice of the watermelon that her father masterfully cut at the first Paseo.

e: Hace Quince Años



Rita Vidaurri, *La Calandria*, celebrated her birthday at the first *Paseo* wowing the crowd with her magnificent voice. She passed in 2019.



Eve Ybarra, *La Reina del Acordeón*, was featured along with her *conjunto* band at the first *Paseo*.



Imelda Arismendez, coordinator of *MujerArtes*, was involved with the first *Paseo* and thereafter until her passing in 2017.

Paseo por el Westside, which commemorates *National Historic Preservation Month*, first took place on Saturday, May 22, 2010 at the *Rinconcito de Esperanza* located on the corner of Colorado St. and Guadalupe St. in the Westside of San Antonio. The event included walking tours of the Westside including the “pink building” on Guadalupe St. that was saved from demolition and is now remodeled. The cultural heritage and history of the Westside was highlighted with an exchange of plantitas with noted yerbero, Jacinto Madrigal; a comida of old style enchiladas; raspas scraped off of a block of ice with natural fruit syrups; the grinding of corn on metates and the washing of clothes on washboards. *MujerArtes*, Esperanza’s clay cooperative (now housed in a new building) was present and scribes brought back the art of writing letters. Música with Eva Ybarra, Rita Vidaurri and *Los Músicos* livened up the backyard of the *Casa de Cuentos* as did *El Pachuco* telling bilingual jokes while 82-year-old Doña Ester, an original *maromera* of *La Carpa García* shared *dichos*, *chistes* and *recuerdos*. Children’s activities included jump rope, paddle ball, marbles, *trompos* and walking stilts. Fifteen years later, it’s 2024 and many of our *buena gente* who were there in 2010 have passed. We miss them dearly. This year, we celebrate a soft opening of the new *Museo del Westside* and much more! Join us on May 4th for the 15th annual *Paseo por El Westside*.



Imelda Obledo DeLeón (left) and Angie Merla prepped the homemade enchiladas at the first *Paseo* and continued as *buena gente*. Angie passed in 2021.



Left: Rodney Garza, *El Pachuco*, shared bilingual jokes and stories at the first *Paseo*.



Below: Esther G. Robinson, original member of the *Carpa García*, performed for the crowd in 2010. Sadly, she passed in 2011.



Isabel and Enrique Sánchez enjoyed dancing at the first *Paseo* and thereafter donating their time and talents each year until their respective deaths in 2021 and 2023.



Araceli Herrera, *buena gente*, demonstrated the use of the *metate* grinding corn as Cynthia Spielman observed along with Araceli’s grandson.