

Entre vecinos

Por Luis Melodelgado y Nora Haenn

Hace 17 años Angélica Alvarado salió del bachillerato con una especialidad en química orgánica y planeaba estudiar para auxiliar de enfermería. Aprovechando la invitación de su hermano decidió descansar por un año, y visitarlo en Carolina del Norte. Aquí ella eventualmente se caso. Ahora vive con toda su familia, esposo y cuatro hijos, en Bear Creek. Suyo es el salón de belleza Gely's 45 West St. en Pittsboro, ciudad donde ella dicta una clase de español conversacional. Cuando la visitamos, se encontraba ocupada cuidando su bebé de un mes: Estefanía. Mientras charlábamos, llegó su hija de 4 años, Sofía, junto con su prima y compañera de pre-escolar, Nataly, quienes corrían de un lado para otro en sus mallas preparándose para salir hacia su clase de Ballet.

Los clientes de la cooperativa Chatham Marketplace quizás recuerden a "Gely," como es familiarmente conocida, pues solía trabajar allí. En ese entonces, muchos clientes la buscaban para mejorar su español. Viendo la necesidad, ella voluntariamente les propuso: "Con 3



personas, estudiaríamos los viernes". En sus clases de español ella enfatiza la lengua con la que creció, no el español anglicanizado que, como ella opina, tiende a prevalecer entre los hispanos en los USA. Ella invita a los interesados en sus clases a llamar al teléfono: 919 799-3315. En la secundaria ella fue maestra de alfabetización. La experiencia adquirida entonces ahora le permite planear sus sesiones usando como modelo las clases de inglés que ella recibió en Carolina del Norte. Angélica comenta que cuando chamaca en el 'Cobach' a ella no le gustaba el inglés: "siempre traía buenas calificaciones, pero solo porque quería salir rápido del asunto". Sin embargo, antes de salir de México su postura al respecto cambió

diametralmente porque escuchó a alguien que había vivido en la Gran Bretaña: "En los EE.UU. debes aprender su idioma, y unirse con la gente de allá." Cuando llegó, tomó tantas clases de inglés como pudo.

Ella siempre había imaginado ser su propia jefa. En la escuela comunitaria CCCC Gely recibió el Certificado de Cosmetóloga. Poco después abrió su salón de belleza (Gely's), donde ella atiende hombres y mujeres, con tarifas bastante accesibles. De lunes a jueves con cita; y los viernes y sábados entre las 9 a.m. y 5 p.m., ella atiende a quien sea. Mucha de su clientela ya está establecida, pero si usted decide visitar su estética no deje que le sorprenda la atmosfera bilingüe y de alegría familiar. Esta profesional, jefa de hogar, insiste que sus hijos deben aprender el español. "La gente joven necesita conocer su cultura", ella afirma. En este sentido, Angélica evoca la postura de la Asociación Nacional para la Educación Infantil, NYEC, quienes opinan que la preservación de la lengua del hogar beneficia el desarrollo intelectual de los niños.

Luis y Nora son residentes de Chatham County. Los intereses de Luis son la escritura y el teatro. Nora enseña antropología con énfasis en asuntos mexicanos en NCSU.



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In our neighborhood

By Luis Melodelgado and Nora Haenn

Seventeen years ago, Angélica Alvarado had just graduated from a Mexican high school where she specialized in chemical biology. Planning to become a nurse's aid, she took a gap year. She joined her brother in North Carolina to study English at CCCC. Then, Angélica fell in love, and now a Bear Creek resident, Angélica runs Gely's Salon in Pittsboro, hosts a Spanish-language conversation class, and cares for her family, now grown to include four children. We caught up with this busy mom while she was caring for her youngest, one-month old Estefanía. While we spoke, 4-year-old Sofia and her pre-school cousin Nataly ran around in pink leotards, on their way to ballet class.

Patrons of Chatham Marketplace might

remember Gely, as she's known, from her time working behind the Deli. So many customers asked for help with their Spanish, she finally responded, "If you get together three people, I'll volunteer every Friday." The group started out with five members and is now taking a hiatus (but she says people interested in participating should call 919.799.3315). Her high school required that students volunteer in some capacity, and Gely chose literacy programs. The conversation group is a return to her teenage years, but now with a twist. She models the group after the English classes she found most helpful to her learning. She admits that as a young person learning English in Mexico, she didn't like the topic: "I always did well, got good grades, but that was because I never wanted to see the material again." This changed when she came to the United States. Before her departure, Gely received sensible advice from a friend who had traveled to Britain: "You have to learn the language, and you have to join the people there in their everyday lives." In the United States, she tried out classes at area churches and at CCCC in both Pittsboro and Sanford. In her own conversation groups, she emphasizes the Spanish she learned growing up and avoids the Anglicized Spanish that, she says, tends to prevail among Latinos in the United States.

At CCCC, Gely also earned a degree in cosmetology. While working part-time at Chatham Marketplace, she decided to become her own boss and opened her salon at 45 West Street in Pittsboro. She charges \$12/haircut for both men and women. Appointments are available Monday through Thursday with prior arrangement. Walk-in hours are Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Many clients are people she met at the Market. If you go, be prepared for a cheerful family atmosphere that is fully bi-lingual. Baby Estefanía needs attending to, and the outgoing Gely insists her children speak Spanish. Young people need their history, she says. In this, Angélica echoes the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which supports parents teaching children their native tongue as a way to boost children's overall learning.

Luis and Nora are Chatham residents. Luis is a translator with interests in theater and writing. Nora teaches the anthropology of Mexico at NCSU. Email: wordxchange@yahoo.com

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