

HEAR OUR VOICES. HEAR OUR STORIES.



# OURSTORY

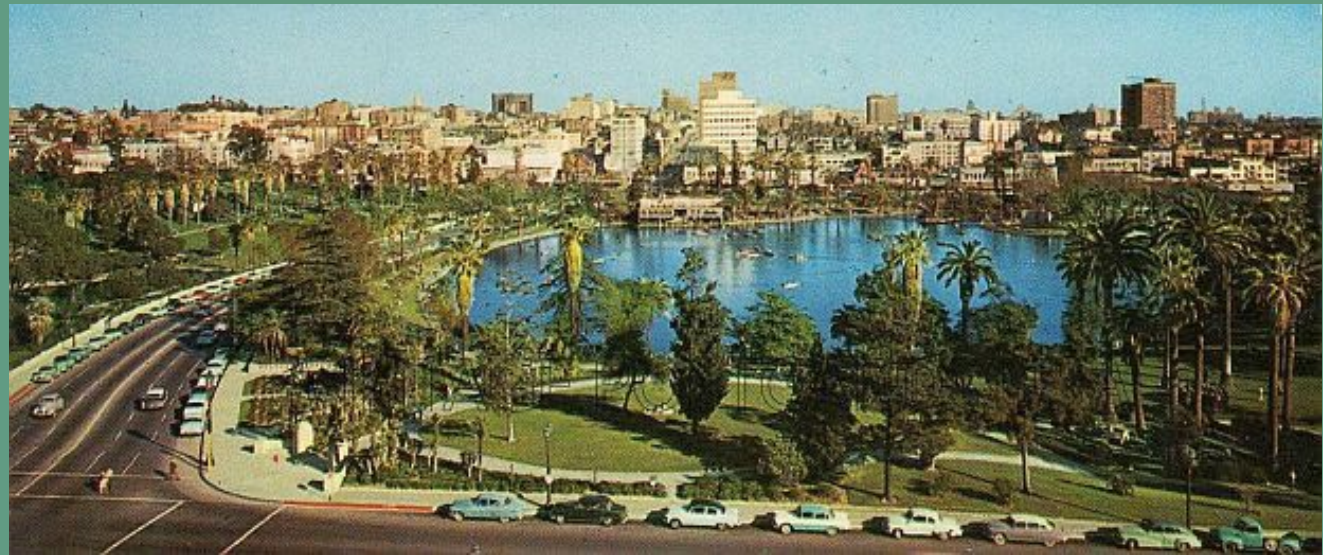
*Nuestra Historia*



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# Our STORY

## Oral History Understanding our Realities

OURstory is an intergenerational, multilingual and multiethnic oral history program that teaches ethnographic and storytelling techniques to high school students and elders to capture the real stories around MacArthur Park, told from the community member's perspective. OURstory is a project of the MacArthur Park Community Initiative (MPCI) within Koreatown Youth and Community Center (KYCC), a multiservice nonprofit that has served the limited-income immigrant population of Koreatown since 1975.

The program promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and documents marginalized narratives for preservation in public archives while also cultivating wellness outcomes for all participants. MPCI works with high school students and neighborhood elders in Los Angeles' Westlake (and its neighboring environment) to celebrate and document our stories. Our curriculum includes in-depth workshops on oral history, community history, interview skills and technical skills of transcription editing.

*Oral history is an opportunity to  
"humanize history."*



### PROJECT GOALS:

- Create an opportunity for youth to interact with a different generation.
- Bridge the gap between youth and older adults.
- Create a space to share stories and have their voices be heard.
- Create a booklet for participants and other community members.

### OBJECTIVE:

- To broaden students' perspectives on the sources of history, create a working understanding of oral history, and connect both of these topics to KYCC projects.

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- Age Range: 15 - 51
- Ethnicity: Korean & Latina
- Gender: Female
- Language: English & Spanish
- Location: Los Angeles

### TIMELINE:

- March 2021: Oral History Training
- April 2021: Recruitment
- May 2021: Orientation
- June 2021: Interviews
- July 2021: Transcript Editing
- August 2021: Booklet Development
- September 2021: Booklet Editing
- October 2021: Publication

\*While the word "homeless" is used throughout these stories, we acknowledge that words hold power and the term "homeless" shapes a person's identity based on their housing situation. Instead we encourage use of the term "unhoused", as everyone deserves the right to safe and secure housing, and should not be defined by circumstances out of their control.

# OUR *Storytellers*



*Abigail Eun*

Abigail Eun is a rising freshman at Duke University. She is currently undecided in what she wants to study, but she plans to major in Psychology, Political Science, Public Policy, or Sociology. As a community activist, she is heavily involved in multiple community initiatives. She is the president of BRIDGE, an educational program that helps middle and elementary students after school with homework, academic enrichment, and more. She is also a journalist for the Koreatown Storytelling Program, an oral historian for 'OUR STORY', and a council member for the MacArthur Park Youth Community Council. She has interned with politicians Rishi Kumar and Grace Yoo, The Civics Center, the Young Storytellers, the Salvadoran American Leadership and Educational Fund, and the Koreatown Youth and Community Center. In her free time, she enjoys painting, playing the piano, collecting crystals, meditating, going on long drives, and exploring new places with her friends. In the future, she hopes to be fluent in Spanish and American Sign Language and be a YA novel author.

Yolanda Canseco is from Oaxaca, Mexico. She came to Los Angeles 24 years ago and has lived in the Koreatown area for 20 years. She really likes her city and living with her Latino community. She enjoys parks and appreciates nature too. She really likes Macarthur Park because it was the first park that she visited when she arrived. For her, it was something beautiful and wonderful because she had never seen such a big, beautiful park with so many people and ducks in the water; it was like a beautiful dream.



*Yolanda Canseco*



Laura Kwak is an incoming freshman at Northeastern University and plans on studying environmental science. She has lived in Los Angeles her entire life and hopes to explore different parts of the world in the near future. In her free time, she likes to crochet, spend time with her dog, and find the latest cleaning practices on TikTok. She hopes to bring a cleaner, healthier environment for her community, while promoting sustainable living for all.

*Laura Kwak*

# OUR *Storytellers*



Vanessa Hernández was born in Puebla, Mexico in 1982. She has been a member and representative of the KYCC community group called Manos Unidas de Koreatown since 2019. She is an immigrant, mother of 3 daughters, and always likes to learn new things in order to help her family and her community. She is always ready to support!

*Vanessa Hernandez*

Ana Elvia Nieves Pérez is originally from the state of Puebla, Mexico. She immigrated to this country 14 years ago and has lived in the city of Los Angeles ever since. She is married and has 3 children, Leo, Kimberly and Evelyn. Ana has been involved with her community for over 7 years, hoping to make positive changes in her community for the future of her children.



*Ana Elvia Nieves Pérez*

Hannah Kim was born and raised in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Her parents were serious about education so she was able to attend magnet schools since the first grade. She will be a freshman at the University of California, Los Angeles in the fall. Ever since she was young, her mother enrolled her in Korean schools which played a big role in her ability to read and write Korean fluently. She attended piano school too, which she is very grateful for. Occasionally, she visits South Korea to spend time with her mother's family and explore the history and culture of her heritage. The parks in Korea were very clean and organized compared to the ones here. She remembers visiting parks with her family and friends. Occasionally, there would be people smoking and her parents advised her to hold her breath while they quickly walked to escape secondhand smoke. She despised it especially because she had a family member who smoked all the time. She considers her life simple and ordinary before Covid-19 hit. She has always thought of world wide crises as something that only occurs in the past, but to be able to live through one is something else. Thankfully, she is able to connect with people and focus on herself by exercising, baking, and playing the piano.

*Hannah Kim*





# OUR

## Storyteller



*Jennyfer Ruiz*

Jennyfer Ruiz is a 10th grade high school student with many aspirations in life. She is part of a youth program in South Central Los Angeles, where she has gained a lot of new skills and knowledge. She also enjoys being involved in her community. She believes that young people should be involved in different community service activities, so that youth can maintain a healthy lifestyle in various aspects of life. As a student, she is also taking college classes at CDTECH. She is a volunteer of a local community garden. She enjoys designing and painting faces. She has previously worked with the 2020 Census and in a COVID-19 campaign. She loved being part of her community, helping everyone to be counted in the census and doing everything possible so that her community is vaccinated for the health of her family and community. She is a member of Scope and Trust South, where she participates in inviting more youth to make the community stronger and healthier. She is very proud to be to be part of the OURstory project as a storyteller.

Blanca Lucio has lived in South Central Los Angeles for 11 years, where she is an active member in her community. She likes to learn different things and never gives up; she always fight for what she wants. She is a mother and wife, and has different responsibilities in her community. She is a part of a group of active Latina women called S.O.D L.A, which focuses on empowering other women to know their rights in different ways. Her priority is for immigrant Latina women to build a healthier community. She is also a member of a community garden where she grows organic vegetables for families. As she learns, she also teaches others how to garden. She is a member of Trust South LA, Best Start Metro LA, Scope, IDEPSCA, in the Women in Action group, and was a representative in the KYCC community group called MUEC, which stands for Manos Unidas con Esperanza por la Comunidad. She is also a student at Los Angeles Trade Tech, where she is learning English and computing, and participating in trainings for community organizers. She hopes to achieve everything that she sets out to do and is sure that one day she will say "I made it!"

*Blanca Lucio*



# *The Story of* **ABIGAIL**



I like the city because it is very familiar and my parents have also lived here for a long time. I have been coming to MacArthur Park for a long time, with my church or when my friends want to play basketball. However, there are many people here who do not have a home. It is a bit dirty and I don't feel safe visiting the park at night. There are many people who smoke marijuana or cigarettes, which makes me sad because a park is a place where people should feel safe and spend time with their friends, but people who smoke make the park a bit dangerous for people's health.

I want the Los Angeles government to do something and make the park safer. People in the park who don't have a house, should be able to have a house. I hope the park can become safer for children and everyone who visits. Parks are important to the community because they are breaks from the city and a place where you and your family and friends can have a fun time. It makes me sad that MacArthur Park is dangerous and dirty.

# *The Story of* YOLANDA



MacArthur Park was the first park that I visited when I came to this country 24 years ago. It was something wonderful because I had never been in a park this big and beautiful. I always saw myself living in a town where there wasn't a park this big, so when I arrived, it looked so beautiful with the water and the ducklings. Everything looked very nice, but as the years went by, I saw that the park was changing. I began to see more unhoused and more people drinking and smoking. The park was dirtier everyday and it became sad for me to see the park in this way. I would like to take my children to MacArthur Park, but I fear that they may be touching things that people sometimes throw away, such as cigarettes. I do not feel tranquility walking there, but I like the park and would like it to be cleaned because it is the park closest to me in my community.

In the future, I would like to see the community get involved in a community cleanup. There are many organizations that can participate, such as Manos Unidas, which I am a part of. We can work with other organizations and invite people in our community to support doing a community cleanup. We can talk to park managers to make changes such as games for children and signs that say "No Smoking" and "No Drinking". In the future, I imagine the park will be like it was a few years ago, very beautiful and very pretty.

# *The Story of* VANESSA



When I came to this country almost 20 years ago, MacArthur Park was a place for the Hispanic community to come together. It was a place you could go and see people playing football, selling items and chatting. It was a place for families to go, have a picnic and have a nice time. One beautiful memory I have at the park was with my family. At the time, my husband and I went with one of my girls to have a picnic with a blanket, sandwiches, and fruit. We watched the water and enjoyed the view. I spent the day talking to my daughter about my mom and dad. We liked to go and collect leaves, and I would tell my daughter “Oh, just like the big trees, when somebody comes up to you and pulls your hair, it’s the same thing when you pull a leaf.” We collected the leaves that were on the floor and played with them looking at their shapes and colors. It was a nice day for my family.



At the moment, I'm not comfortable taking my family to the park because of the smoking. One of my daughters has a history of asthma so I'm concerned because I see a lot of people smoking. We need to come together as a community to clean the park. Sometimes I see people eat a banana and then throw their trash on the ground, even if the trashcan is in front of them. A lot of people who smoke, don't put out their cigarettes in the proper place. It is dangerous for the animals and also bad for the community. Maybe we can get together to clean the park.

Maybe we can have more education for the homeless people at the park. Sometimes they are on the street and don't even know where they can get a shower, eat or have other options for places to stay. Sometimes they just need somebody to help them. I also think we need more help from the police department to keep all the people here safe.

# The Story of HANNAH



I grew up in the Koreatown area. When I was young, there were not a lot of homeless people, up until recently near my neighborhood. That is one thing I have realized about Koreatown, is the homelessness crisis. Living in Koreatown, I have felt like "I live in more of a Korean world, rather than an American world." When I go to college, I want to get out of the Koreatown community and explore other parts of the world to see different cultures and relationships.

When I think of MacArthur Park, I think that it is a good place to go and exercise, but I also think it's dangerous. I do not feel comfortable going to the park with the homeless people. There needs to be something done about the homeless, such as making facilities to support them and provide them with a home elsewhere. Even though MacArthur Park is a good place to exercise and it is very pretty, I would not go because I don't feel safe.

I really hope that our community can come and work together to keep the park clean and safe. I really want change to happen within the homeless crisis there.

# The Story of ANA



When I arrived in this country and first heard about MacArthur Park, I imagined a beautiful, clean, and safe area. I envisioned it with restaurants to eat at, as a place to have fun, and as a place for resting. But the first time I visited the park, a dog almost bit me and my purse almost got stolen! There were also many people selling on the street and alcohol sales nearby. This was very funny because it was not what I imagined, it was the complete opposite.

Within 5 years I would like to see the lake be cleaned and for there to be animals that the children can feed. I would also like to see a cleaner park with no garbage or people selling drugs. I would like to see a certain area designated for street vendors, to prevent any oil spill hazards from happening. I would also like to see no marijuana dispensaries, or cigarette and alcohol sales nearby. Park areas should be clean and safe to enjoy, not a place to do inappropriate activities. If there are places nearby that sell substances, those places can enable improper behavior at the park. For example cigarette sales, people can buy cigarettes and bring them to the park, exposing children to secondhand smoke. Overall, I would like to see this area cleaner and surrounded with stores that allow us to share and enjoy time with the family, with the children, and to buy toys.



I would invite more moms to participate in making the change. I know a few moms that I can talk to, specifically moms whose children have soccer tournaments at the park but only stay temporarily. I can speak with them and make them see that if they want their children in another type of environment, an environment to enjoy and not just visit temporarily, we have to collectively advocate for change. I would invite the mothers to join us in talking with the representatives of the area and get them more involved. In this area, our Councilmember is Gil Cedillo and we could speak with him personally or leave a letter saying why we want to have a conversation. I want the community to know that this park is their area, more than anything, and it is important for them to get involved to support us in making change.



# *The Story of* JENNYFER



I've had a few experiences at MacArthur Park that made me question its security. When I was younger, my family and I had gone through the tunnel and when we got out my brother was lost. We spent a long time looking for him and then we found him in an area with many trees. I think this happens because without maintenance and no light, the tunnels at the park are unsafe.

Another experience I had was when my teammates and I went to the park to play soccer. We were taking pictures by the lake and as we got closer, one of my teammates almost fell in. I think the lake needs more security features to keep people safe.

I participated in a project where we went cycling in the MacArthur Park neighborhood to see the streets of our community and collect data on the lack of green space. I would not change the park's surroundings, which I believe is the area of trees where the water is. However, one of the things that I would like to change would be to make the lake cleaner and make the park as beautiful as it was before. There were not many people living there before, but now I believe the park is very unsafe and does not feel safe at night or during the day.

# *The Story of* **LAURA**



I was introduced to MacArthur Park when I joined the MYPARC coalition. From my experience, MacArthur Park doesn't feel like a park, it feels more like a block of land that they didn't really know what to do with. I don't think I would really recommend MacArthur Park as it is now, because parks are supposed to feel family friendly. I feel like if you have children, you wouldn't want to go to a park that's surrounded by busy traffic and filled with a lot of people smoking. Children can be reckless and make dangerous choices, they can run off and encounter serious problems. Furthermore, the smoking occurring at the park leads to a lot of secondhand smoke. This issue is coming to a point where you're desensitized to the smoke and smell of cigarettes. It's not ideal, so I wouldn't really recommend MacArthur Park.

Adding more greenery would help with MacArthur Park's overall appearance. By planting more flowers and maybe even having more areas where people can rest, such as benches, picnic tables, or even a little playground area, the space can look a little more alive and more like an actual park instead of a random piece of land. I recently saw a group of older men fishing at the lake, while others were playing with mechanic boats. It was nice to see and an interesting aspect of MacArthur Park that not a lot of parks in Los Angeles have.

# *The Story of* BLANCA

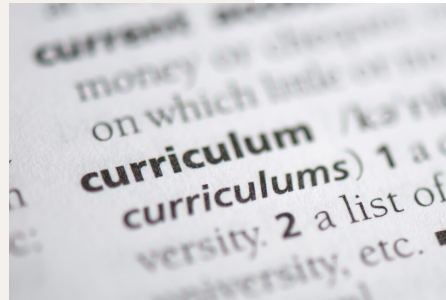


MacArthur Park impacted my life because it used to be the only green area that could be found in the middle of the community. Being able to watch my children run around the park was something so beautiful that made a difference in our lives. Sadly, the park has undergone some more negative changes. There is too much garbage, the lake has no maintenance, the play areas are abandoned, and there are too many people occupying the park using drugs, drinking alcohol and smoking. I would ask people who are involved in that park to take action. I would also ask community supporters, who have the power, to request funds and resources to be able to totally change that valuable area in our community.

Total insecurity, it is absolutely worrying.

*Our*

# PROCESS



1

## Training of Participants

Both the adult and youth participants received a tailored, oral history curriculum that was developed under the consultation from Voice of Witness (VOW). All staffs who helped with the facilitation of the interviews also participated in the 4-hour online training hosted by VOW. The adult participants received the training in Spanish and the youth received a 4-week series of the oral history, interview techniques, and transcript editing.

2

## Intergenerational Interviewing

The interviews were conducted in an intergenerational format, with 4 pairs who interviewed each other. Each pair consisted of an adult participant and 1 youth participant. 3 adult participants conducted the interview in Spanish and 1 adult participant conducted the interview in English. 3 youth interviews were conducted in English and 1 youth interview was conducted in Spanish. There was 1 all-English interview, 1 all-Spanish interview, and 2 bilingual interviews (English and Spanish). All interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom.

3

## Editing of Transcript & Booklet Design

All interviews were recorded via Zoom. The participants were given access to the video recording link. Each participant was asked to transcribe the portion of the interview that they spoke for. The transcriptions were compiled between the pairs and edited by the participants. From the finalized transcripts, an excerpt that best captured their story was selected to be featured into this booklet. The booklet design and translation was done by the MPC staff.



## Esther Lee

Prevention Education Coordinator

Esther oversees the MacArthur Park Community Initiative (MPCI) project at KYCC. She received her MPH in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention from CSU Fullerton and BS in Community Health Education from CSU Long Beach. She is a Certified Health Education Specialist and bilingual in Korean and English.

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## Evelyn Balderas

Prevention Education Specialist III

Evelyn has dedicated 5 years serving the Koreatown community she was raised in. With a Bachelor's Degree in Public Health, Evelyn values a prevention-focused approach and strives to learn and implement innovative strategies to keep her community thriving and feeling empowered. to make a positive impact for others.

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## Deisy Gutierrez

Prevention Specialist II

Deisy is an immigrant from Oaxaca, Mexico. As a single mother of 3, she grew passionate about empowering other women and has been leading change in her community for over 7 years. As a DACA recipient, she is passionate about immigrant rights.

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## Isabella Avila

Prevention Specialist

Isabella is a recent college graduate that has a passion for health and seeks to improve the quality of life for a variety of individuals. With a Bachelor's Degree in Kinesiology & Nutrition Science, Isabella hopes to apply her knowledge in the health and exercise science field to improve the health of her community.

# OUR TEAM

*Meet*



Funded under the Elevate Youth California (EYC) grant, MacArthur Park Community Initiative (MPCI) focuses on reducing the use and exposure to tobacco and marijuana secondhand smoke among youth between ages 12 to 26 at MacArthur Park. By establishing, empowering, and training a community council comprised of youth and adults, MPCI will advocate for a stronger smoke-free park policy at MacArthur Park. The community council will participate in the Changing Communities Series, a civic engagement and leadership curriculum that focuses on advocacy, community organizing, and public speaking. In addition, the community council will also participate in substance-free engagement activities, such as community clean-ups, positive messaging murals, and arts showcase event. Through youth leadership training, advocacy, and community enrichment activities, MPCI aims to mitigate the substance use issue faced by the Westlake community and promote a safer, cleaner, and more vibrant MacArthur Park.

MACARTHUR  
*Park Community Initiative*

*Let's get in touch*

680 Wilton Pl. Los Angeles, CA 90005

(213) 365-7400

<https://www.kyccla.org>

[MPCI@kyccla.org](mailto:MPCI@kyccla.org)

Instagram @mpci.myparc



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