



LWI LIVES

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Hispanic Heritage Issue

LWI Lives is a regular electronic publication of the “Faces of LWI” Committee, which explores and communicates the emerging identity of LWI and its members. We have in common the commitment to being the best legal writing professors that we can be. But we are multi-dimensional people with different strengths, interests, curiosities, and gifts. By profiling individuals in our community, we hope to expand and develop our understanding of who we are and what we aspire to be.

This issue honors Hispanic Heritage Month. Hispanic Heritage Month occurs not during a typical calendar month, but from September 15-October 15. The timing of the month is significant, as September 15th honors the day in 1861 that five Latin American countries, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, declared independence from Spain. Mexico and Chile also declared their independence from Spain in September, on the 16th and 18th of 1810, respectively. While we began observing Hispanic Heritage Week in 1968, in 1989, President George H.W. Bush became the first President to call for a full-month celebration of Hispanic Heritage from September 15-October 15.

In this issue, we are pleased to celebrate two individuals—Charles Calleros and Yordanka Valdés Delionado—whose Hispanic heritage and identities enrich the lives of their communities daily.

Charles Calleros: Enjoying the Rhythm of Life

(Continued on page 2)



By Michael Rusco

Talking with Professor Charles Calleros about his life and career stirs up many comforting emotions. His warm baritone voice, friendliness, and strong sense of empathy leave you happy to hear how full and rewarding his life and career have been, both for him and for those around him.

Yordanka Valdés Delionado: Strengthening the Village

(Continued on page 5)



By Kathryn Falk Campbell

Somewhere between Cuba, Spain, Venezuela, and the United States, immigration papers shortened Yordanka Valdés Garcia’s name, and made it Yordanka Valdés. But it does not seem that anything or anyone could shorten Professor Yordanka Valdés Delionado’s vision and reach.

Contributors to this Edition:

Kathryn Campbell
Brooke McDonough
Michael Rusco

Charles Calleros

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The story starts in California. Although he was born and lived in Sacramento for his first 10 years, Calleros's strongest childhood memories are from Aptos, a small town on the edge of Monterey Bay. "Our house backed up to a forest and we were five minutes away from the ocean.... It was a fabulous place to grow up, ocean and redwoods within a mile of each other."

Calleros's father immigrated from Mexico and worked as a factory manager. His mother worked as an administrative assistant at a community college. "Dad was loving and caring, but with high expectations. He had an off-the chart work ethic and gently passed that to [Calleros and his older brother, Jim,] with mandatory chores around the house."

"Mom was very kind and thoughtful. She would influence us by promoting introspection with questions rather than laying down rules.... She was an English major in college, fond of slipping in an English lesson at the dinner table, such as the difference in pronunciation between 'wail' and 'whale.'"

"Dad would take us to William Land Park in Sacramento every Sunday, to give Mom some down time. The trip usually included the zoo and Vic's for split hotdog sandwiches."

It was in his small local high school that he first discovered what would become one of the great loves of his life—the drums. Starting with the snare, Calleros went on to play in rock, blues, and Latin bands. "As a youth, I was painfully shy.... The thing that brought me out was music and playing in a band. I don't think I could have gone into education unless I came out of my shell. I think it helped me be a little more creative and take some risks."

In 1993, Calleros joined a 12-piece rock and soul band that performed regularly at the premiere blues club in Phoenix, the Rhythm Room. Over the last 26 years, Calleros has recorded three studio albums with the band, currently called "The Repeat Offenders." The band's latest album—titled "Flight Risk"—is Calleros's favorite. He retired from the band in January 2020.

Calleros attended college at UC Santa Cruz where he majored in Economics. "It was largely policy oriented, rather than highly quantitative, which allowed for a fair amount of writing on issues that were and are debatable. Good training for law school."

He attended UC Davis Law School. "I chose UC Davis Law School because it was named after MLK and featured a sculpture of him at its entrance. In my view, King's nonviolent campaigns embodied great courage in the quest for social justice, and I was inspired by his oratory."



A young Charles in his father's arms, with his mother and brother.



The Repeat Offenders, performing with Charles on drums and his wife Debbie (far right) singing backup.

Charles Calleros

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In 1981, after some notable clerkships, Calleros was approached about teaching at Arizona State University. He applied and was hired to teach Contracts and Civil Rights. When he started, ASU's casebook professors taught legal writing in certain small-section classes. "After I was hired but before I started, I wrote to the dean and requested the small section of Contracts, which came with the assignment of teaching legal writing. I explained that I thought that legal writing was the most important course in the curriculum."

With the exception of visiting at Stanford for a semester and Santa Clara for a year, Calleros has spent his entire career at ASU. He has straddled the skills-casebook divide most of that time, mainly teaching Contracts and Civil Rights in addition to writing and Academic Success Program courses.

Calleros co-authors *Legal Method and Writing* with Professor Kimberly Holst. The book will soon be published in its ninth edition. He has also authored two other texts and dozens of articles, including a contracts casebook.

As Calleros reflects on his teaching career, he recalls, "[w]hen I started teaching, Michael Olivas at the University of Texas started an organization called Latino Law Professors. Every year at the AALS meeting, he would organize a dinner at some restaurant. He would joke back then that [the number of Latino law professors [was] so low that it was dangerous to have everybody in the same room, because if there was an accident, the entire population of Latino law professors would disappear. It really was a small group. We could sit around a single table in the early 80s. Then later the numbers became impressive."

Calleros has loved every minute of his teaching career. He's also loved how law teaching has allowed him to spend more quality time with his family than law practice would have.

"Debbie was a partner in a law firm when I had a semester-long visit to Stanford to teach contracts. She took some leave from her law firm to come with me and our two very young children.



"She had already seen at the preschool level the influence teachers had on kids.... Once she was away from the law firm and had some time to reflect, she saw that it would not work for the kids and me to be off visiting their grandparents every summer while she was taking depositions in civil litigation. So she retired and switched to teaching 5th grade, which facilitated the family traveling during the summer."

And travel they have. Early on the family took lots of road trips, always including trips back to Aptos, CA and the grandparents. This last June, Charles and Debbie continued that tradition by joining their oldest son, Alex, and his husband Alek, for a road trip to several national parks.



Charles and his wife Debbie. The couple recently celebrated their 39th wedding anniversary.

Charles Calleros

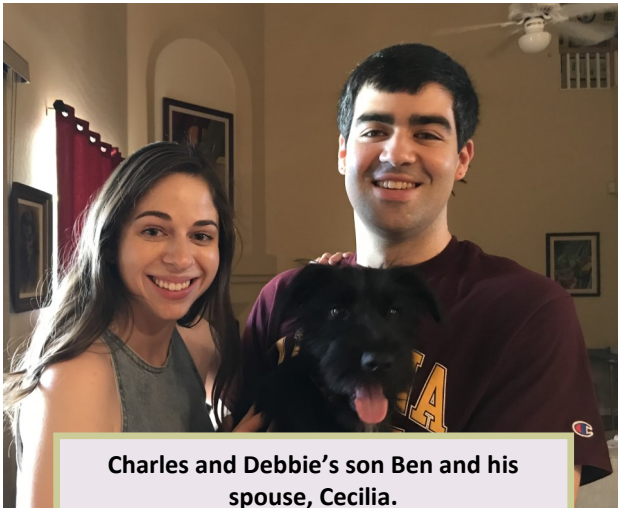
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Since 2002, Calleros has taught at the University of Paris every May or June, as part of the French school's common and comparative law program. "From there we would visit other parts of France or Spain, or the British Isles. Sevilla, Spain is our favorite. There is something so comforting about it. The restaurants, the food, the people. It's just a place that we really seem to bond with."

As his retirement approaches, Calleros spends a lot of time planning how to pass the baton and what he wants to do with the next two years. One goal is to grow ASU's Academic Success Program, which he now directs. "The best thing that I could do at this point in my career, the most value that I can add, is to bump up this ASP program."

Calleros will retire in 2023 after 43 years of teaching.

To get in touch with Charles, you can email him at:
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Charles and Debbie's son Ben and his spouse, Cecilia.



Charles and Debbie's son Alex and his spouse, Alek.

Yordanka Valdés Delionado

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This first-generation American, Harvard Law School graduate has a heart and mind for raising up other strong and bright young people through mentorship, teaching, lawyering, and family. None of us can succeed on our own. And Yordanka has both benefitted from the “villages” around her, and paid it forward by becoming a central figure in the villages of many others. It takes a village, and the village is strength.

Teaching now at Florida International University College of Law, as Assistant Professor in FIU’s Legal Skills and Values program (don’t you love the name FIU gave this course?), Yordanka has found a place where she can bring all of her considerable talents—and her considerable heart—to bear.

Of course there is so much to this extraordinary woman that must go without saying because of space constraints. But three major things stood out about Yordanka when we talked. The first is that she cherishes and nurtures her Hispanic identity and community. The second is that she is a formidable, accomplished, and committed lawyer and law professor. And the third is that she treasures and nurtures her family.

Yordanka’s professional resume is remarkable. She graduated from Harvard Law School in 2000, has clerked for two federal judges, has written and litigated as an associate of an outstanding firm (Hunton & Williams in Miami), tried ten jury trials as Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and brought this exceptional experience and talent to FIU College of Law to teach lawyers-to-be how to do what is important. As she builds her own professional standing, she consistently mentors and supports others, especially former and current students.

While she serves her communities, Yordanka is also a mother committed to her family. We had a good talk about the balancing that women do to fulfill their roles in the profession and in the family. Her sense of it is that these are not roles that are thrust upon us; we are fortunate indeed to have both professional gravitas as well as the love and focus of family. But our profession and society have not always made it easy to recognize the crucial role of motherhood when it comes to fellow lawyers. I told her that when I was a young lawyer, the men in our large firm never hesitated and never had pushback for going golfing on a Thursday afternoon, but the women felt embarrassed or ashamed to leave early to pick up

the children from childcare or school. I asked if it was the same for her. We agreed that it seems women still struggle with “dual roles.” Many of us feel that we cannot devote the full measure of our attention and time to both a serious profession and to family. Everything suffers when we cannot do any one thing with full focus.

However, Yordanka is finally at a place in her life where, “I think I can finally say ‘family first’ without having to apologize to the profession.” She notes that there seems to be more dialogue about this tension now, and more well-informed allies in the profession to support all our colleagues, whether parents or not. She smiles when she says, “And I am more than fortunate to have a husband who recognizes this challenge and supports me fully in meeting it.”

John Delionado and Yordanka Valdés met in law school. Their marriage is one of mutual support and respect. Before the children were born, Yordanka clerked for one federal judge, and then was working in a firm. John had become an Assistant U.S. Attorney. Yordanka wanted to try cases too and saw that, “he was having so much fun!” So, Yordanka made the move from private practice to federal practice, and she flourished. From 2003 to 2006, she tried tough criminal cases in the Southern District of Florida, many involving narcotics and firearms, and she wrote briefs for the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. This allowed Yordanka to hone her skills.



Yordanka, John, their three kids, and chihuahua Chico, the wonder rescue!

Yordanka Valdés Delionado

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She particularly appreciates learning about the immigration and habeas corpus issues she briefed, and she took to “teaching juries” naturally.

She smiles again when she says that the ability to balance work and family became a focus after the first two babies of three—Isabella and Johnny—came along in 2003 and 2005. “I credit Judge Cecilia Altonaga (S.D. Fla.) with providing another federal court clerkship from 2006 into 2008.” That gave her a path to work on the balance that she felt was best for her at the time. At that point, to find a professional like Judge Altonaga (also of Cuban descent) was exactly the part of the village Yordanka and the growing family needed.

In 2008, when her clerkship was completed, the pull of family was still a priority. She was welcomed by a supporting group, including fellow Harvard alumna and Cuban-American Angelique Ortega Fridman (now Dean of Students FIU Law, member of the founding faculty at the FIU College of Law and former member of the College’s Legal Skills and Values faculty). Dean Ortega let Yordanka know about the opportunities available at FIU Law, and felt Yordanka would be a great fit. She was right. “The fun of jury trials—teaching juries—and the fun of teaching law students was a lot alike!”

Yordanka has been teaching at FIU Law in various capacities since 2008, beginning full time in its innovative Legal Skills and Values (LSV) program. After the birth of Jake, her youngest, she took a short break, then returned in consistent part-time and visitor positions. She credits Marci Rosenthal (Co-Director and Professor of the 1L two-semester LSV program), and David Walter (Director of the mandatory “LSV 3,” an advanced Skills and Values semester), as well as the FIU administration, for making sure she fully remained part of FIU Law’s family.

Professor Delionado lights up as we look at photographs of the family. The love is palpable even on Zoom as she tells their stories. (She has great stories about everything. I want to write a book to tell all her stories.) Isabella, 17, a high school senior, loves ballet, and excels at French, engineering, and art. John (Johnny), 16, is a high school junior who loves soccer, history, and government, and has interned with the Miami City Attorney. Jake, a seventh grader, also loves soccer, and gravitates towards math (“he’s a numbers kid”).



Jake (12), Isabella (17), and Johnny (16)

All of the kids have learned Spanish. “It is important to me that my heritage is a part of their upbringing, including their ability to speak Spanish—which they study at school and practice at home.” That language ties this next generation to their culture and heritage. And of course, there is Chico the Chihuahua, Protector of the Pack, the Little Lion, miraculously rescued with only road rash after being hit by a car and homed with the Delionados. The whole family pitches in, including Yordanka’s mother, as the family navigates the logistics of travel teams, school activities, and social time.

I was impressed at how well and how intentionally Yordanka both “felt-through” and planned her return to full-time, to allow herself and her family to test and settle into each transition. In a twist of fate,

Yordanka Valdés Delionado

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she returned to LSV as regular full-time faculty in 2019, just in time for COVID and Zoom in Spring 2020. Still, Yordanka says she can't help but approach all her teaching tasks with excitement and pleasure. Her students and the law give her tremendous energy and drive.

But family and work are only part of the story and the village. Yordanka gives of herself in all her endeavors ("not as much as I'd like"). Her Latin identity and the platform Harvard and FIU offer allow her give back effectively and consistently in the community setting as well. Only three of her many community activities are (1) mentoring, supporting, and providing network opportunities and fun through her chapter of Harvard Law School Women's Alliance; (2) mentoring through the platforms that Harvard and FIU offer, especially to Latin Law Students; and (3) providing opportunities for first generation students ("I have a soft spot for these," she says) through the Harvard First Generation Association.

That soft spot is not a surprise. When we are strengthened and molded in the fires of cultural identity, it is only natural that those origins become both an important part of the village necessary to our own growth, and a key part of the community we intuitively and compassionately reach out to so that we can "give back."

When Yordanka Valdés Garcia was only six years old, her family finally completed their "paperwork" so that they could leave Cuba. "You need to escape because you cannot speak freely. You know the reality of living in fear." Ever positive, Yordanka begins to tell me about the fun family trips, the nurturing and intelligent home she grew up in in Cuba. While she prefers to "remember the good things," and it is apparent that part of her strength comes from a positive, constructive focus, I cajoled her into describing what "living in fear in as a child in Cuba" meant to her. For a family to pick up and leave the country, there must be something important happening.

She remembered seeing what she thought was a big parade coming down the street in her neighborhood. She was excited and told her mom, "Parade!" Then she saw the fear in her mother's eyes, as her mother quickly pulled her into the house to get away from the mob. The mob threw things at the house and family, shouting "traitor!" and other frightening things, to protest the family's decision to leave the country. "Those in Cuba who could not escape had to become a part of the neighborhood mobs who told on and attacked non-sympathizers. These were members of the Comité (the committee). There was always someone watching."

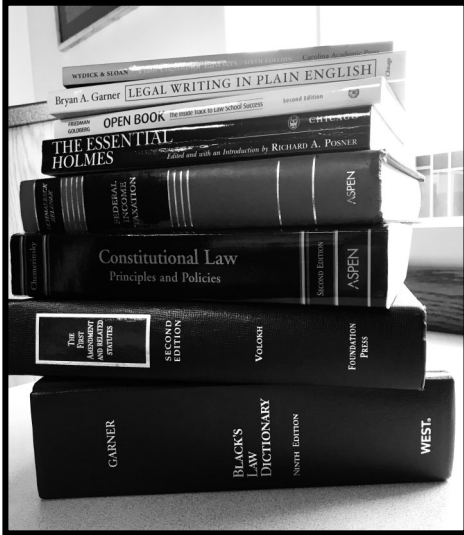
But finally, the family escaped Cuba. While the goal was always the U.S., they arrived first in Spain, in 1981. Because of U.S. immigration requirements, the family spent two-and-a-half years in Spain, and another two-and-a-half in Venezuela (mostly following other parts of the family). Finally at eleven years old, Yordanka and her family arrived in Florida. And the upshot? "I cannot tell you how I have loved the opportunities here. I have lived the American Dream."

As immigration requirements tightened again recently, Yordanka recognizes and sympathizes with the DACA Dreamers who also seek the same opportunities that her other mentees enjoy. She remembers the fierceness of the debate around Elián Gonzalez while she was at Harvard Law School, and recalls the shared frustration that she and her fellow Cuban Americans at Harvard felt over the manner in which that played out.

"As an Assistant Professor at a law school with a very diverse student body, I have an opportunity to mentor all students and specially those with background and experiences similar to mine." She approaches teaching, networking, and mentoring with "the excitement of a newbie." And her advice to her students? "I want them to approach their own worlds with that same excitement. I let them know how to be comfortable and feel confident in their work."

This professor who loves the practice and theory of law, her community, and her family, has benefitted from having support along the way; she can now lend her support to those who she mentors. Her own hard work, strength, and determination are the ingredients of her success, and she encourages those around her with the same determination. Her final note to her students and family: "You have the ability to succeed, flourish, *lead*."

To get in touch with Yordanka, you can email her at ydeliona@fiu.edu.



LWI Lives Selection Process

The LWI Lives Committee is organized into three teams, and each team is responsible for selecting, proposing, and writing the three profiles in each issue. To ensure a diverse newsletter, teams propose individual names to the Co-Chairs, and the Co-Chairs review the suggestions to ensure a wide range of coverage over time.

If you have someone in mind who we should put on the list for a future newsletter, please feel free to email any of the committee members listed below. If you could include a note explaining why you think the individual's profile would be particularly interesting, it will help us in developing priorities.

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