



December 26, 2010

Cuban immigrant has had quite an education

By MARTA SILVERBERG

I was born Marta Cuellar Oms in Havana, Cuba, in 1947. My father was an officer in the army of Fulgencio Batista and my mother worked for the Red Cross. On Jan. 1, 1959, the Batista government was defeated and Fidel Castro came into power.

Seven years later, my father, one of my sisters and I petitioned the Castro government for permission to leave the country. I was sent to the interior of the country and fertilized the sugar cane plantations. On Dec. 18, 1968, my lucky number came and I left Cuba.

We landed in Miami. We were processed and given the option to relocate. We were able to rent a one-bedroom apartment in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. My father and sister soon decided to move back to Florida, because they could not stand the cold weather.

I stayed in Philadelphia, thinking that what I needed was not warm weather but to find a way to realize the American Dream. I soon enrolled in the Nationalities Services Center, a place where recently arrived people learned English as a foreign language. In three months, I outgrew the center and was sent to Temple University.

At Temple University, my teacher Ellen Silverberg was a graduate assistant in Spanish. It was through her I met her brother, Michael. We fell in love and later got married.

I applied and was awarded a full scholarship to Rosemont College on the Main Line just outside of Philadelphia and graduated with a degree in Spanish literature. I then went to graduate school at Temple University and earned a degree in Latin American civilization and culture. I taught in the Philadelphia public schools.

While I loved to teach, I did not feel that students were getting the education they deserve, because of the nature of the educational system. I felt that since I could not change the system, I should leave and continue my education and then teach in an institution of higher learning. I began teaching Latin American history at Glassboro State College.

Soon, I realized that in order to get a permanent position, I needed to obtain a doctorate. To do so, I needed two more years of schooling. So I began researching other career paths at local universities. This led me to a program offered by Temple University in the School of Business Administration that trains future hospital administrators. Health was my second passion, so the transition was not a difficult one to make.

I obtained my second master's in 1978, with a concentration in health services.

I began my health-care career at Cooper Hospital in Camden as assistant vice president. From there I held several positions in hospitals in the Philadelphia area. In 1995 I was recruited by Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan as associate hospital administrator, responsible for all the women's and children's programs.

In 2003, I became the executive director of the Monmouth Family Health Center, a federally qualified health center located in Long Branch.

The center's mission is to provide high-quality, comprehensive, affordable, culturally sensitive and

linguistically appropriate primary and preventative health-care services to the residents of Long Branch and surrounding communities. The center is open to anyone in the community but primarily serves the low-income population and those people without medical insurance. We have a sliding fee scale based on ability to pay and provide services in internal medicine, pediatrics including newborns and adolescents, podiatry, obstetrics and gynecology and dental services.

During the past seven years the center has grown from 29,000 patient visits per year to more than 50,000 and doubling the number of employees working at the center.

Additionally, we opened a Women's Wellness Center and are in the planning stage to expand our services to three locations in the Long Branch public schools. The center is operating in the black.
