



The Story Behind the Display

Deep roots. Shared traditions. Stories that connect generations.

Some objects are more than pottery, bowls or colorful masks. They hold memories of family, traditions passed down through generations, and the people who help shape who we are. For One91 Community Education's Hispanic Heritage Month display, **Alicia Martinez-Moran** generously donated pieces from her personal collection, sharing cultural treasures that tell a deeper story of heritage, family and belonging.

Growing Up Connected to Her Roots



Alicia was born in Del Rio, Texas, and moved to San Diego, California, as an infant, where she grew up surrounded by the traditions of her Mexican heritage. Like many children growing up between cultures, she remembers navigating what it meant to belong.

Growing up Hispanic and speaking only Spanish at home, she sometimes found it difficult to identify with the mainstream American experience. Her home, family and cultural community shaped her sense of belonging, grounding her in traditions that remain meaningful throughout her life.

Family was central to her childhood. With large families on both sides, gatherings were a regular part of life. Birthday parties with piñatas and cakes, Easter outings to the park, and meals shared with extended family created lasting memories.

Language was an important part of those experiences. The women from Mexico who helped care for the children while their parents worked spoke Spanish, so Alicia and the other children communicated with them in Spanish, too. These women brought their own traditions, recipes and ways of preparing food into the household, passing along cultural knowledge through everyday interactions.

Alicia remembers learning to make tortillas, beans, rice, fideo, carne asada, tamales, enchiladas and tostadas. She especially recalls the fresh salsa the women made for the children, using tomatoes, garlic, onion, oregano, salt and pepper instead of the hotter chiles used in salsa for

adults. Served with beans, rice and freshly made tortillas, these meals became treasured memories of the food, language and people that helped shape her childhood.

The Stories Behind the Pieces

Alicia's appreciation for Mexican art led her to collect the colorful masks featured in the Hispanic Heritage Month display. During trips to Tijuana, Mexico, she discovered the masks and immediately fell in love with their vivid colors and distinctive designs. She purchased several, even gifting some to others who appreciated them.

Some masks feature animal faces, suns and moons, imagery Alicia associates with the traditional spiritual worlds of the Aztec and Maya peoples. Their bright colors and symbolism resonated with her, reminding her of her cultural roots and personal identity.

The pottery in the display carries equally meaningful memories. Alicia donated traditional vessels she calls *jarros*, which can be used to hold water or flowers, along with small bowls. She purchased some of these pieces from a young man from Guadalajara, Mexico, whose family owned a pottery store where they made and sold their products throughout Mexico.

For Alicia, the bowls and vessels also bring back memories of the women who helped care for her. She remembers seeing similar items used to hold salsa, serve food and share meals when visiting their homes. These familiar objects connect her to the people who influenced her life and the traditions she grew up with.

Her love of Mexican art extends beyond the donated collection. Alicia describes herself as a collector of Mexican Revolution art and admires the work of José Clemente Orozco, known for his paintings depicting revolutionary figures and movements, including the Zapatistas. She also appreciates artwork featuring cowboys, charros, suns and moons, incorporating these themes into the art and décor she collects for her own home.

Visits to museums in Tijuana further deepened her appreciation for pottery and art connected to Indigenous cultures. Seeing these beautiful works and recognizing their historical significance made her own collection feel especially meaningful.

Culture, Color and Connection

Alicia is drawn to traditional pottery, floral patterns and vibrant colors, particularly bright yellow and turquoise. She sees these colors reflected throughout Mexican culture, including in the foods families prepare and serve.

From orange rice and brown beans to red tomatoes, green avocados and colorful salsas, food is a celebration of color as well as flavor. For Alicia, preparing and sharing food is about more than the meal itself. It is a way of carrying traditions forward and sharing something meaningful with others.

She hopes visitors to the display will recognize familiar elements of Mexican culture and appreciate the traditions that may be present in their own families. She also hopes the display

encourages people to learn more about Hispanic cultures, whether their family roots are in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru or elsewhere in Latin America.

Most importantly, Alicia wants young people to see their heritage reflected and valued in their community.

"I think it's wonderful that other people who see this will feel understood, known and appreciated by our culture tonight," she shared. "I hope they feel proud of who they are."

A Legacy Shared Across Generations

The display is especially meaningful because it brings Alicia's personal history into the community where her family continues to make a difference. Her daughter, Lori Cherne, and granddaughter, Emily Cherne, both work for ISD 191. Their family connection adds another meaningful layer to this story, reflecting how heritage, memories and traditions connect generations—and how those connections continue to be part of the One91 community.

Through Alicia's generosity, students and families can experience pieces of Mexican art and cultural history while learning about the memories and traditions behind them. Objects that once held a place in her personal collection now offer opportunities for others to learn, reflect and connect with their own family stories.

Alicia's message to young Latino students extends beyond the display itself. Whatever path they choose in life, she encourages them to recognize the difference they can make in the lives of others.

"Whatever you do in your life ... everything that you do means something to somebody else," Alicia shared. "So when you pick something to do, just know that you're helping, you're gathering, and giving part of yourself to them."

One91 Community Education is grateful to Alicia Martinez-Moran for sharing these treasured pieces and the stories behind them. Her collection reminds us that heritage lives in the language we speak, the food we prepare, the art we cherish and the people who pass traditions on to the next generation.

Our roots tell our stories. Sharing them helps our community grow.