

## A Brief History of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros*

### *An Acorn Germinates*

Since 1925, *Día del niño*, or the Day of the Child, has grown as an annual celebration throughout Mexico. This day recognizes children, pays homage to their importance in society, and endorses their well being. Pat Mora, a Texas native and nationally recognized author of children's books, first heard of this Mexican tradition during a 1996 interview for a public radio program. As so often happens, the wheels in her head began to turn as one good idea (*Día del niño*) bred another one (*Día de los libros*).

Mora began thinking that promoting literacy went hand in hand with supporting the well being of children. She suggested the idea to Latino faculty and staff at the University of Arizona and they, in turn, contacted the local chapter of REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking (<http://www.reforma.org>). MANA del Norte, a woman's group in Santa Fe that is part of MANA, a national Latina advocacy organization (<http://www.hermana.org>), endorsed the idea. Grass roots support for a celebration linking language and literature to *Día del niño* grew.

Oralia Garza de Cortés, manager of the children's department at San Antonio Public Library at the time, immediately offered her support for the concept. With her considerable national voice, she promoted the concept of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* through REFORMA's national newsletter and with the newly formed NLCI, the National Latino Children's Institute (<http://www.nlci.org>).

Through the work of these individuals and organizations, an almost pure example of the old adage "from tiny acorns mighty trees grow," *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* became a reality on April 30, 1997. Both the governor of New Mexico and the mayor of Santa Fe issued proclamations marking the event and reiterating the founding principles.

From its inception, the goals of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* have extended beyond a single April 30 observance and called for a daily commitment of:

- honoring children and childhood;
- promoting literacy and the importance of linking all children to books, languages, and cultures;
- honoring home languages and cultures, and thus promoting bilingual and multilingual literacy in this multicultural nation, and global understanding through reading;
- involving parents as valued members of the literacy team; and,
- promoting library collection development that reflects our plurality.

### *The Tree Grows*

From that first metaphorical acorn, Pat Mora's idea to link literacy with a celebration of children, *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* has put down national roots. Both MANA and NABE, the National Association of Bilingual Education (<http://www.nabe.org>), joined REFORMA to promote this day nationwide. Pat Mora and her siblings instituted the Estela and Raúl Mora Award to give

both recognition and monetary support annually to a library's celebration of *El día de los niños/Día de los Libros*.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation provided early financial aid by awarding NABE a planning grant in 1998 to establish a national campaign focusing on publicizing *El día de los niños/El día de los libros*. That funding continued four years later when the Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to ALSC, the Association of Library Service for Children (a division of the American Library Association). ALSC produced a tip sheet for librarians wishing to begin *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebrations and a brochure for parents outlining outstanding titles of interest. The brochure is available at [www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/eldiadelosnios/eldiabrochintro/eldabrochure.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/eldiadelosnios/eldiabrochintro/eldabrochure.htm).

### ***The Tree Produces Offshoots***

Many celebrations across the United States focus on various aspects of children's well being through *El día de los niños*. One of the most prominent (first realized in 1998) is spearheaded by NLCI. Although these *El día de los niños* celebrations may well include a literacy component, they are broader than the *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebrations outlined in this tool kit, which is directed particularly towards librarians.

### ***Texas Sprouts a Limb***

Celebrations of *El día de los niños /El día de los libros* began in Texas in 1997. A year later, under the supervision of Jeanette Larson, then Director of the Library Development Division at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), the staff of TSLAC created an Informational Booklet aimed at helping librarians create their own *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* programs (<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/projects/ninos>). These literacy events grew and expanded throughout the state due to the support of enthusiastic librarians.

In 2000, the first annual Estela and Raúl Mora Award was awarded to the Austin Public Library. The El Paso Public Library received the 2001 Award. Not only have Texas libraries participated in *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebrations, they've done so with distinction.

In 2003, the Texas Library Association (TLA), a vigorous and active supporter of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* events, applied to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for funding to increase awareness of *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* programs. TLA's work will expand the number of public and school libraries currently participating in *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebrations; make available materials useful for developing and publicizing a program locally; and, develop materials that can serve as models for local programs.