

Story Map: A Community's View Of Its Past, Present, And Future

By Bia Gayotto

Since early in my career I've been using an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of documentation, fieldwork, performance and collaboration to translate the complex relationships among people and places. Over the years my artistic practice evolved from collaborating with friends and colleagues to members of diverse communities worldwide. Unlike my previous video installations where I explored a sense of place and cultural identity by interviewing and filming residents in their own environments, this time I wanted to tell stories from inside out, through the voice of its own inhabitants.

During Fall 2015, I approached Bolton Hall Museum in Tujunga to propose a project that I was working on. Director Regina Clark kindly received me and included Little Landers Historical Society

members Sheri Smith, Bill Skiles, and Gerardo Barrientos. After reviewing, they believed the project fell within the scope of their mission statement "...to collect, preserve and display artifacts, records and landmarks of the history generally of Rancho Tujunga area" With the support by a grant from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, I offered a four-part workshop called STORY MAP, a multigenerational collaborative community project that investigates the physical and cultural landscape of District 7 including Sunland, Tujunga, La Tuna Canyon, Lake View Terrace and Shadow Hills.

Our understanding of place is informed by what we bring to it: our past, present and future expectations, hopes and disappointments. Through an open call to people who either live or work in District

7, participants were invited to bring items that illustrated their past, present, and future views of their neighborhoods. To cover the relationships between memory, reality and imagination, each week we focused on a topic including an introduction, residents' past memories, their current experiences and hopes for the future.

It often takes time to connect and gain people's trust. Two months prior to the workshop I started networking, attending neighborhood council meetings, going to local business and organizations asking their permission to hang and distribute flyers. My simple "ethnographic strategies" of interviews, observation and fieldwork allow me to bond with people. Through my work I've been fortunate to meet and collaborate with a wide array of people both in the US and abroad, whom I would not

have met otherwise. No matter where I go, it's amazing to see how citizens can be so receptive and willing to share their stories. I couldn't have asked for a better place to make this project as residents of Rancho Tujunga area were so welcoming and devoted to their community.

A total of 51 people attended the workshops and 19 participants, who were present in one or more workshops, brought a total of 46 items. STORY MAP allowed me to meet incredible groups of people and learn about their unique stories and multiple points of view. In alphabetical order (by first name) they were: Al Timins, Christian Kasperkovitz, Cle T. Borman, Corey Stein, Craig Durst, Dawn Jenkins, Don Ray, Gail Carlson, Lili Singer, Lloyd Hitt, Marlene Hitt, Meredith Kiyomura, Michael Callahan, Pat Kramer,

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STORY MAP

Pat McArdle Potter, Regina Clark, Sheri Smith, Scott Froschauer and Vanessa May. The items they brought were as fascinating and diverse as can be. Printed material included photographs, catalogues, stereo view cards, newspaper articles, library card and a poem. Participants also brought 3-D objects including a badge, beaded necklace, moisture control, signature book, piece of old tree, rock from a local mountain, seed packets, hat, service dog, stuffed bird and a potato chip in the shape of a heart, to name a few. The final large-scale map made in collaboration with graphic designer Yuju Yeo mix past, present and future stories. It is so remarkable to see how these stories reveal the importance of place and relationships with who we are as people.

STORY MAP brought people together for a positive dialogue

and exchange. "I enjoyed the project immensely and wished for it to continue on a long term basis" said Marlene Hitt, and "I learned so much about my community during this workshop. Besides being an important asset to our history, Bia made it fun through engagement," Pat Kramer added. By changing the role of the public from a passive observer to an active collaborator, participants had an important voice contributing to a collective view of their city. The result is a "living archive" that furthers Bolton Hall Museum's mission of collecting, preserving and displaying artifacts of the local history.

A wrap-up party on October 16 ended the project on a sweet note. The collective energy was warm and positive, completed by a wonderful performance by Kate Fredericks, and her talented McGroarty ukulele students, accompanied with delicious chili by renowned chef Al Timins.

Ground Breaking for Mission College



10 years ago Nina Royal had a vision of a Mission College satellite in our community. The original plan was to have the college open up at the old KMart building which due to some technicalities did not come to fruition. Nina Royal kept calling and pushing the college to open up in our community and with the new Assemblywoman Patty Lopez, who has attended the college herself, Sunland Tujunga finally is getting a college satellite at the Commerce Shopping Center.

Dr Perez, master of the ceremonies, informed all that classes will begin first week in February for the spring semester from 8am to 11pm 7 days a week, with 40-45 computer stations, smart books and multi purpose facility.

If you are interested in getting specific classes please go to their website and take the questionnaire.

