

StoryCorps interview at NCSU Libraries

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Saul Flores tells his friend and librarian Marian Fragola about his interactive digital photo exhibit "Walk of the Immigrants" at North Carolina State University's James B. Hunt Jr. Library. Saul was a student at NCSU before the library exhibited his work. He explains how his family background personally connects him to the plight of undocumented immigrants.

Saul Flores: My mother, my father were undocumented throughout my entire life. They were always working; they were always struggling. I remember going to work with my mother—so at the time, I was maybe four or five years old, and I remember watching my mom scrubbing floors for the first time. I remember the burn of breathing in bleach, and seeing my mother scrubbing and crying at the same time. And I was like, this is our story. This is our journey. And it's through my relationship with the library where I learned to speak. I felt for the first time that I had a voice for my communities.

Marian Fragola: You took these beautiful photographs on your walk, and I love having them at the library because sometimes I'll just walk by the screens and you know, there will be the dog with the tortilla—which is one of my favorites—or these beautiful children. And so I'm just curious—what sort of arts inspire you?

SF: I love the power of story and the "Walk of the Immigrants" was a journey I made across Latin America. I walked across ten Latin American countries: Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, Mexico, and the United States. And creating that photographic journey which I documented adversity, poverty, hunger, architecture, culture. And once we finished the actual journey, NC State Libraries hosted the first exhibition.

MF: You brought your parents in to see the exhibit. I just remember the look on your face when you were showing your parents around. Can you talk about why that was important to show them the exhibit?

SF: To this day, I think that was probably one of the most beautiful and reassuring moments of my life—not just to me, but to my family. I mean, there are millions of immigrants in this community, in our nation. There are immigrants from all over the world—from Latin America, from Asia, from Western Europe, Eastern Europe. And the library really came to me and they were like, you know what? Your mom's important. Your father's important. You're important. Your story is important. And being the son of undocumented immigrants and having been voiceless throughout my entire life, to really show my mother and my father that people care and people care about their sacrifices? I know it really meant a lot for my mother and my father.

I know that I'm in an incredible position to speak and to really advocate for the awareness that these immigrant communities need.