

# Generaciones' Narratives

<b>SECTION</b>	Chapter 3
<b>TITLE</b>	<i>Generación</i> 1961-1970: Searching for Gateways, Self-Sponsoring, Experiencing Economic Motivators, and the Expanding Role of Cubbyhole Gateways
<b>AUTHOR</b>	John Scenters-Zapico, with Fernie Alañiz, and Teresa Quezada
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<p>The participants in this chapter were primarily teenagers during the time frame when electronic devices were beginning to flood the market. With social revolution in the United States and cultural changes in Mexico as the backdrop, the participants of this <i>generación</i> recognized the future held even more changes in store for them. They remember living through the technology explosion and the ever-increasing presence of technology in every walk of life—either through their own lived experiences, or in the experiences of those around them, who in some cases became their technology sponsors. For most participants in this <i>generación</i>, their paths to electronic literacies had to be self-sponsored or sought out.</p> <p>Teachers, parents, grandparents, schools, and libraries were not there for participants in the traditional ways they had been in the past. For a variety of cultural, social, economic, and academic reasons the paths to electronic literacies were not easily accessible. This <i>generación</i> remembers typewriters as prevalent and several learned typing skills rather than the keyboarding now taught at elementary school levels. These participants sought technology gateways and maximized learning opportunities provided to them by both direct and indirect sponsors. While for some, their initial contact was economically motivated or minimized through cubbyhole gateways, and their continuing and increasing contact with and use of technology indicates they embraced the change.</p>
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### ***Generación 1961-1970: Searching for Gateways, Self-Sponsoring, Experiencing Economic Motivators, and the Expanding Role of Cubbyhole Gateways***

**John Scenters-Zapico, with Fernie Alaniz, and Teresa Quezada**

I had fears about the fact of growing up without technology. I had to look for technology, it didn't look for me, which isn't the case for most kids nowadays. (Cynthia Smith<sup>1</sup>)

Possibilities and effects of people's writing or reading are shaped, in part, by the information technologies to which people have access at any point in time. (Selfe and Hawisher 9)

The world we have known, the world of our myths and references and shared assumptions is being changed by a powerful, if often intangible, set of forces. We are living in the midst of a momentous paradigm shift. (Birkerts 18)

The participants in this chapter were primarily teenagers during the time frame when electronic devices were beginning to flood the market. With social revolution in the United States and cultural changes in Mexico as the backdrop, the participants of this *generación* recognized the future held even more changes in store for them. They remember living through the technology explosion and the ever-increasing presence of technology in every walk of life—either through their own lived experiences, or in the experiences of those around them, who in some cases became their technology sponsors. For most participants in this *generación*, their paths to electronic literacies had to be self-sponsored or sought out.

Teachers, parents, grandparents, schools, and libraries were not there for participants in the traditional ways they had been in the past. For a variety of cultural, social, economic, and academic reasons the paths to electronic literacies were not easily

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<sup>1</sup> A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



accessible. This *generación* remembers typewriters as prevalent and several learned typing skills rather than the keyboarding now taught at elementary school levels. These participants sought technology gateways and maximized learning opportunities provided to them by both direct and indirect sponsors. While for some, their initial contact was economically motivated or minimized through cubbyhole gateways, and their continuing and increasing contact with and use of technology indicates they embraced the change.

The cultural ecology of the United States for those born between 1961-70 included increasing access to television and the ability to view world, national, and local events as they were unfolding. Participants in this *generación* recall seeing moon landings, coverage of the Vietnam War, President Nixon's resignation, and cable television's proliferation to include memorable music videos, a new fusion of music and visual media, debuting on MTV. Movies also play a memorable role in participants' cultural ecologies. Depending on their migration patterns, some saw American movies in English; others saw the same movies in Juárez, either with subtitles or dubbed into Spanish. The participants also remember assassination attempts on President Reagan and Pope John Paul II, and HIV and AIDS coming to the forefront as the rich and famous either succumbed to the epidemic or announced they were HIV-positive. Cynthia Smith recalled national events that were brought into her living room, through technology:

MTV starts running round the clock videos, debuting with "Radio Killed a Radio Star"<sup>2</sup> marking the beginning of the music video era, AIDS is first identified, both Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan got wounded by gunmen, the breakup of AT&T in 1982 was probably one of the worst moments for technology and since the breakup, consumers have gone from company to company for their long distance needs.

She felt other global and national events also had an impact upon her: "Four white police officers were indicted in the Rodney King beating, Magic Johnson announces he is HIV-positive, the U.S. sends food and troops to end famine in Somalia, Steven Spielberg's 'Schindler's List' was a big movie hit, and by the mid 1990s, unemployment stood at its lowest since 1990, at 6.1%."

This *generación* stood at a turning point in their lives: they were in their late teens to

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<sup>2</sup> Although Cynthia recalls it as indicated, the title is "Video Killed the Radio Star"—an interesting commentary in and of itself regarding technology's impact on entertainment.

early twenties when technology—through video games in arcades and at home, through increasing use of desktop computers and software applications at mid-sized and small companies, and through the increasing use of computers in the classroom—began to permeate their home, school, and work environments. Technology was not yet ubiquitous but neither was it avoidable. Learners had to be self-willed, motivated primarily by economic factors and family values instilled in the participants. Although not all participants in this *generación* experienced encouragement in acquiring traditional literacies when growing up, the common thread of socioeconomic advancement opportunities in the United States, their particular age, and a mixture of the ability to recognize trends and the willingness and flexibility to explore emerging technology formed a nexus where they charted their own paths to technology gateways. This *generación* sought ways to acquire and enhance their technological literacies. They wanted technology-rich jobs and direct sponsors and often created their own micro-literacy zones in the home because they recognized the increasing presence and importance of technology for their school, career, or work, and ultimately for their own children's education. From this chapter, Cristina Gonzalez's home environment is somewhat of an anomaly, however, in that she had an early home computer purchased exclusively for her sister and her. It was not brought in as an extension of her parents' workplace; it seems to have arrived as a specific recognition that Cristina's *generación* had to be exposed to this emerging technology.

Financial capabilities continued to influence Mexicans' views toward the U.S. Cristina's family, her father in particular, illustrate the loyalty to Mexico that has also been a recurring theme in the Latinos/as participants we have encountered:

I remember my father always being very proud of Mexico. My mother, my sister, and I were U.S. citizens and my father was never interested in becoming a resident or a citizen of the U.S. He would say, "Whatever I have accomplished, whether it is a little or a lot, I owe it to Mexico. It's Mexico that has given all kinds of opportunities to succeed." My mom was not as passionate about Mexico. She was just very practical and she believed that both my sister and I would have a better future in the United States.

Cristina's parents' differing opinions are also part of the conflicting mix borderland participants have expressed. While the cultural, familial, and historical ties bind these families to Mexico, these families believe greater economic opportunities are available in the United States. As we see throughout *Generaciones*, participants and their families move to the United States for a better future and education. In this chapter,



Hugo Fuentes dramatically recalled his parents “kept telling us that they had decided and risked moving to the U.S. without knowing anyone around the area because they wanted us to have better education and opportunities.” Another element of the recognition prevalent in this *generación* is participant Andrea Ramirez’s acquisition of electronic literacy. She feels that younger friends learned to use computers “the right way,” that is, through direct sponsorship, not “trial and error like her.” Andrea’s comments indicate a longing for traditional methods to acquire computer literacy—a trend we may see limited to this particular *generación*, one that grew up learning traditional literacies in formal settings, but was thrust into a technological environment where formal classroom settings were not available and the participants were forced to either find their own direct sponsors or begin experimenting on their own and self-sponsoring at their own expense.

In this chapter, four experiences stand out: 1. Actively Sought After Electronic Literacies: Participants keenly searched for technology gateways in order to practice electronic literacies; 2. Self-Sponsorship: The increasing yet subtle role that participants serve in teaching themselves electronic literacies; 3. Economic Motivator/ed: The significant role that economic downturns serve in motivating participants to learn an electronic literacy and that family members serve in encouraging an electronic literacy is crucial for participants’ success; 4. Cubbyhole Gateway: The increasingly expanded roles that such jobs serve in helping those who would otherwise not feel they could learn and practice more advanced electronic literacies. Through it all—though the correlation between practice and benefit was unclear—they ran or were swept up with the changes.

### Migrations from Mexico to U.S.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Place of Birth</u>	<u>Migration 1</u>	<u>Migration 2</u>	<u>Current Residence</u>
Javier Fernandez	1970	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX	Chaparral, NM	El Paso, TX
Cynthia Smith	1963	Durango, MX	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX
Hugo Fuentes	1961	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX



We lived in the city in a “*vecindad*.” A *vecindad* was a cul-de-sac of single room homes all sharing one restroom which tended to be in the middle of the cul-de-sac. The restroom was a 3x3 shed where you would void into an opening, avoiding buttock contact with [the] platform. All the residents would also share a



square bathtub made of cement, where you would shower and wash clothes. The house of one room had a wood stove that served as both a heater and stove for heating food. Mom and Dad slept in one bed, while my sisters and I slept on another. (Javier Fernandez)

*Señor Javier Fernandez*<sup>3</sup> was born in 1970 in Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and grew up in Juárez, El Paso, and Chaparral, New Mexico. Javier stressed that growing up “we had very little money. We lived in a one room home, while both parents worked for slave wages. My sisters also worked since the age of nine, they cleaned houses and ironed for people that were well off.”

Though from very modest beginnings,

I mainly played marbles, trompo-top and bolero, all outside the vicinity of the *vecindad*. In the night my mom would tell us ghost stories, while we would eat hot freshly made flour tortillas with hot melting butter. When it was cold we would all sleep in the same bed. Ever since I can remember I have always been the one to go and get the buckets of water, that's probably why my shoulders are so wide.

Education in his home was self-sponsored, though his parents did encourage the value of an education. Since his parents didn't read, he read to them: “I read to my mom the Bible frequently in Spanish and I read to my dad the newspaper, until we got a TV.” Race and discrimination were embedded in his parents' outlook on life and they communicated to Javier time and time again that “as a Mexican kid I had to try harder than all the white kids, if I did not want to end up washing dishes.”

Despite being in a class with me, Javier shared only basic information, yet the recurring theme emerges of work and school as a gateway, and sponsors found through informal and social circles. Javier's job with a telemarketing company created his first cubbyhole gateway. Here he was taught to use computers and this experience instilled in him the confidence to continue learning in the workplace and in school: “When I started working at this telemarketing place was when I was first seriously exposed to computers. I was first real nervous but then I liked them. I used to shake to try and use them, but then by the fourth week I was really accustomed to them.” He now accesses computers exclusively at UTEP, where he has learned electronic literacies from an ex-girlfriend,

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<sup>3</sup> Student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.

professors, and librarians. These direct sponsors further increased his self-confidence in his abilities. Javier has become accustomed to computers in many ways and now utilizes the Internet, multimedia software, and automated graphic design and presentation software.

*Señora Cynthia Smith*<sup>4</sup> was born in 1963 in Mexico but graduated from El Paso High School<sup>5</sup> in 1981. She comes from a strong middle-class family that shaped her views toward education. Because her father is Anglo and her mother Mexican, her bicultural and bilingual experiences are unique to this chapter: “Spanish was my first tongue. My mom is Mexican and my dad Anglo with his Spanish being very broken.” After moving to the U.S. when she was five years old, her parents instituted strict language rules:

In our house, there was a rule we were to follow . . . we were to speak only in Spanish at home and all the English we wanted outside of our home. Speaking it was one thing and writing it was another. I used to write letters to my relatives in Durango [Mexico] and they would in return write back. This way I was forced to read and write Spanish. I would always be asking my mom how to write this or that and she would be glad to tell me. After I could read more, she bought me a Spanish dictionary to that I would write using good grammar to people in Mexico.

We again see a parent serving as a direct sponsor of traditional literacies. Both of Cynthia's parents were obviously involved in the family's literacy practices by instituting language rules at home, but her mother provided the guidance and tutoring in Spanish by helping Cynthia write letters and by buying her a dictionary. Alternatively, Cynthia attributed comics to helping her read: “Another thing that helped me a lot was reading comics. My mom would take us to Juárez almost every Saturday and she would buy us comics. I had fun learning to read and write this language.” As explained in the introduction, the border is a porous inconvenience to those living in the borderlands. Written material, even when not produced in El Paso, is available just across the border in Juárez and, as Cynthia illustrates, comic books, newspapers, and letters written to relatives in the homeland are all examples of alternative literacy practices that, albeit carried out in Spanish, were practiced by participants.

Interestingly enough, Cynthia had to immerse herself more fully in English to grasp it. Her schoolmates at the Catholic school where she began her path toward traditional English literacy served a negative sponsor role because they spoke her first language.

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<sup>4</sup> Student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.

<sup>5</sup> El Paso High School is the oldest high school in El Paso, Texas.





Moreover, in the third grade she recalled the cruel micro-tear zone her classmates created:

English was a little harder for me to grasp. I was enrolled in a Catholic school from kindergarten to the third grade and the people there were mostly Mexican so that did not help me learn any English. In class was when I had the most trouble. I would say things backwards, as in Spanish; you say the noun and then the adjective. This was troublesome for me because kids can be very cruel and make fun. In the fourth grade, I went to a public school and that is where I learned to read and write English more quickly because almost all the kids there were Anglos.

For the most part, participants born in 1963 were not exposed to any electronic literacy in high school, and Cynthia is no exception: “in all my years of high school, I was never exposed to computers.” As we will see with this *generación*, however, she expressed her awareness that change was on the way, both through her enrollment in a typing class and in what she knew was happening in her world:

Typing classes were the closest we ever got to technology at that time. I had fears about the fact of growing up without technology. I had to look for technology; it didn't look for me, which isn't the case for most kids nowadays. The video game [console] Atari came out and even though we never owned one, I was always intrigued with the fact of this innovation.

Educators and parents need to be aware of technology and the literacies it brings in order to make informed decisions about what they purchase for their children. Once our students and children are cognizant that a new technology exists and that new literacies accompany it, they tend to gravitate toward it. The awareness of ongoing cultural change that Cynthia shared in the introduction to the chapter also is part of her overall awareness of technological changes and the far-reaching impacts they would have on her environment. She asked at one point, “Was what we saw on the show ‘Lost in Space’ coming to real life?”

As she entered the work force she recalled that her career as an accountant revealed the important role technology occupies in this field and how she embraced it: “Technology had a place in my work, although primitive at first. I worked for an accountant and making the tax returns on computer was so much easier [than preparing them without a computerized program].” It was at this time she began “creating letters in WordPerfect and not a typewriter. I loved this. No more typing and best of all,



mistakes were easy to correct.” She recollected several cultural and historical technological events and the way people adapted to them:

During this time, many of the people around my age were experimenting with software like WordPerfect when the 4.2 version came out which was about 1986. This program used the function keys to a large extent so there were many combinations. There were cardboard templates that you would place above your function keys so that you could know what their function was, and Lotus 1-2-3, a spreadsheet program, was released in 1983. It replaced VisiCalc, which had been the first spreadsheet, which came out 1979.

Cynthia may have begun using computers and software through her work, but her awareness allowed her to embrace the changes. As a member of the adolescent *generación* living through technological changes, Cynthia can compare and contrast the speed and versatility of working with automated applications as opposed to typing and preparing tax returns manually. Because this *generación* had familiarity with previous ways of doing things, it could quickly recognize what the changes meant to them on a day-to-day working level.

*Señor Hugo Fuentes* was born in 1961 in Juárez, Mexico, and grew up in El Paso, Texas. His recollections of home left him with “plenty of stories. Growing up as a family of 8 had its challenges. Sharing one and a half bathrooms 5 boys and 1 girl.” From his parents, relatives, and siblings he learned to be bilingual and bicultural because both here and in Mexico they spoke English and Spanish. There never was a shortage of conversation or of language mixing.

Hugo’s parents learned Spanish in what could be termed traditional ways in Mexico. When the family moved to El Paso, his father learned English at his job, while his mother “pick[ed] it up after moving to El Paso via community college courses.” We see his family’s commitment to education through the reading materials found at his home. Hugo’s access to them is one of the widest we see in this *generación*. He vividly recalls the Bible, local newspapers, and issues of Reader’s Digest, National Geographic, Model Aviation, and Catholic Digest in his home.

Fuentes was an avid reader as a youth. He recalled his parents reprimanding him for reading too much, and they regularly ordered him to “turn off the lights and go to bed.” His love of reading, writing, and speech, however, made him the go-to-guy “to prepare prayers for Thanksgiving and Christmas.” When it came to education, his parents often repeated, “Never stop.” He took that advice to heart and was the first and only one of



the family's six children to achieve a college education. Hugo's teachers also encouraged him to read and he held fond memories of various elementary and middle school teachers. His access to books and his traditional gateways were always through some publicly available resource, such as his public school, local libraries, and bookmobiles.

Although public schools had provided him with traditional literacies and his recollections are of a supportive family and instructional network, he first learned about computers when he entered college. Hugo's experience may sound familiar to college-educated students his age: "We [students] first had to understand how to program before we could start using computers. I was self-motivated to use computers." Echoing a theme we have seen in this *generación*, Hugo says, "I understood the potential of what computers could do and wanted to be able to use them. Most friends and family also shared that drive."

While the digital divide is an economic one in the U.S., in Mexico, where, for all realistic purposes, only an upper class and an impoverished lower class exist, the divide is even wider and more precipitous:

Pricing of computer hardware/software was somewhat high for the economic level of Mexico a few years ago, but that has dramatically changed within the last few years. As the demand for computers has increased in the U.S. and worldwide, the pricing for equipment is going down and with Mexico's economy stabilizing and improving it is now more feasible for Mexico to join in the computer era.

Because computers were too expensive for him, he convinced his employer to indirectly sponsor him: "I had my employer buy one for me as part of my contract to relocate back in 1992." Hugo's experience also illustrates how employers for this *generación* knew these individuals carried other traditional literacies with them and could serve as valuable assets in the work sector if only provided with the appropriate tools—computers. His employer also became an economic sponsor when it purchased the computer to increase his work output.

In 2005, however, Fuentes became an indirect sponsor himself by purchasing a laptop for his son to use at college: "I could not afford the first one [home computer] at the time, so I negotiated for my new employer to get me one. In 1997 I considered the expense an investment for myself and children's education. I now consider the laptop



for son's college education a necessity for his success." In this regard he became an important indirect sponsor for his son.

Fuentes' own technology needs have changed as his proficiency in software applications and familiarity with available programs has increased. "I need a higher category," he explained. He has come to view technology now as useful for both work and hobbies. He needs it to respond to work emails and tasks such as multimedia design and presentations to his colleagues, corporate officials, and customers. In addition to work, "I have made a hobby of [recording] various DVD movies of high school band activities, high school football games, [and] flag corps performances." Hugo has learned most of the applications himself, making him self-sponsored.

As others in this *generación*, he recognized the importance of technological literacy and, like Cynthia Smith, sought opportunities to enhance his own exposure and mastery of it. His family provided a supportive backdrop for the traditional literacies that he has used and expanded upon for his own family.

### Migrations from the U.S. to Mexico

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Migration 1	Current Residence
<i>Cristina Gonzalez</i>	1968	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX
<i>Andrea Ramirez</i>	1965	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX
<i>Terry Quezada</i>	1962	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX


*Señora Cristina Gonzalez*<sup>6</sup> was born in 1968 in El Paso, Texas, grew up in Juárez, Chihuahua, and now lives in El Paso, where she works as a translator/interpreter and instructor at El Paso Community College. Cristina had many childhood memories that capture an active and happy learning environment:

When I was about six years old, I remember listening to songs on the radio and I was very much into the lyrics of those songs. I liked to memorize the lyrics and then I would sing those songs. My mom thought those songs were for grown-ups and I shouldn't like them so much. I even remember the name of the singer. He was from Argentina and his name is Elio Roca.

<sup>6</sup> Student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



Her parents encouraged traditional literacies and reinforced their educational values in the Gonzalez girls by acting as direct and indirect sponsors of traditional literacy. In Cristina's case she learned to love reading in English and Spanish. An example, she recalled "one day in particular when my father talked to me about how good it was to read. He even recommended that the first book I read be *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. I took his advice and read that book. I

remember I found it so interesting that I wanted to read other books" (See Gonzalez family library picture above). What an impact Mr. Gonzalez had on his daughter's motivation to continue reading! This is another example of literacies in Spanish that are ignored in studies such as the Whitewater study. Cristina first learned to read in Spanish, but this served as a launching pad for her continuing love of traditional literacies in English. Cristina added that her father bought two other books at the time for her and her sister: *El Tesoro de la Juventud* and *Mis Primeros Conocimientos*. 

Gonzalez also used traditional literacies for communication with peers and for her own pleasure. "At school, we were not supposed to talk in class so my friends and I would write notes to communicate without being noticed by our teachers."<sup>7</sup> She kept a diary and pasted pictures into it—a modern-day multimedia scrapbook of sorts. She also wrote poetry and even tried to write a play. "My friends and I were all expected to read and write. It was an embarrassment not to."

Cristina started Catholic middle school in El Paso, which was a difficult transition for her since she felt she did not speak English well. Moreover, she experienced a form of discrimination from her bishop in Mexico and his view of the U.S.:

[It] was a very difficult transition for me because I didn't speak English very well. . . . Later, all of us were being prepared to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. I was very excited and was very much looking forward to that. [T]he priest from the school told me that if I had been baptized in Juárez, I needed to ask permission from the Bishop in Juárez to receive the sacrament of confirmation in El Paso. My mom and I went to the Bishop in Juárez and the Bishop denied me permission to get confirmed in El Paso. His reasoning was that religious

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<sup>7</sup> Today this is practiced with text messaging.



education in the United States was very “liberal.” I was extremely disappointed and decided not to get confirmed at all. After that, I was very resentful towards the Catholic Church and gave up any plans of becoming a nun or anything of the sort.

Her new distrust toward religion only pushed her to question religion through studying religious works.

In elementary school she read the Bible “to see if what they (the nuns) were telling me was true.” This reaction is a departure from older *generaciones* who have turned to the Bible for both spiritual solace and as the only source of written material. Perhaps inadvertently, and certainly with very different results than anticipated, Cristina’s teachers pushed her into a critical thinking mode that further propelled her into traditional literacy practices. She read to discover and confirm what she was being taught in school. Cristina continued to live in Juárez while she attended school in El Paso for her secondary education.<sup>8</sup>

Gonzalez’s awareness of computers happened at home. Cristina remembered first hearing about electronic literacies from her uncle: “[I remember] hearing about it (computers) from my father and uncle that was attending college. I think I was about fourteen years old.” Her father demonstrated foresight and continued to act as a sponsor, but now for new electronic literacies:

[He] bought my sister and I a computer (about 1982). It was a Commodore. The TV was the monitor. It had kind of a tape recorder as a storage device. We did not have a printer. My uncle was attending UTEP at that time and he came to my house to help me learn BASIC programming. He brought me books. I loved the computer and enjoyed making simple programs. (See Gonzalez’s First Computer Picture above).



<sup>8</sup> It is not uncommon for students to commute from Juárez to El Paso. This occurs at all levels: elementary, secondary, and university or college.



Cristina's father played a key role as an indirect sponsor both for traditional literacy and the emerging home computing gateway. It was her father who purchased the books the daughters read and the computer she and her sister used. Her uncle was both a direct and indirect sponsor who taught Cristina specific uses for her new computer and brought her books on how to use it.

*Señora Andrea Ramirez*<sup>9</sup> was born in 1965 in El Paso, Texas, and was raised in Juárez, Mexico. In 1982 her family moved to El Paso when she was seventeen. Growing up she felt she was from a comfortable family. Her father was a grocery store manager in Juárez but when they moved to El Paso he was a supervisor at a boot factory.

From a young age Andrea experienced the gender differences her father imposed. She did "women's chores" around the home, and he made it clear she would not go to college: "When I was growing up, 'women' chores were mandatory. By the age of ten, I had to make my bed; at twelve I had to clean our room (I shared it with my little sister), make the beds, wash the afternoon dishes and on Saturdays, clean the bathroom." After graduating from high school Andrea was not allowed to continue her education because "that right was only for my brother for being a man, and because there was no money." This view had been instilled since she was a young child. "I was raised in an environment where children were not encouraged to think or aim high, or even wanting to be like someone famous or important; my parents would always point at our weaknesses and diminish our strengths." Andrea's parents' lack of encouragement and pointed negative criticism can be situated in a negative micro-tear zone form. In this case they made it clear that she should not aim to go on for advanced schooling. Andrea is one of many Latinas from the borderlands denied further education by their families because of their gendered view that education was a privilege reserved for males.

One of Andrea's jobs is a classic example of an individual in a cubbyhole. Her position only offered her an old computer, but on it she was able to learn to use very specific accounting software: "The first time I used a computer was when I worked as a secretary in a hardware store; I was doing the accounts payables and receivables. It was a very old computer, and very slow, I don't even remember the brand, but it was back in 1990." In this cubbyhole gateway, she was fortunate as a co-worker became a direct sponsor, teaching her to use a specialized accounting software application so she could carry out her duties. Although Andrea's experience came at the end of the

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<sup>9</sup> Student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



decade when the personal computer exploded onto the market, her initial exposure was economically motivated. Given her description of family educational encouragement it is not surprising that she encountered technology within a workplace setting that served as both a cubbyhole, giving the skills and self-confidence to succeed.

Andrea made an important joint decision about placing a \$2,000.00 Presario with a CD burner, 15" monitor, speakers, and a laser printer in her own home:

Me and my husband bought a computer about three years ago [from the time she was surveyed] when we realized that many of his school assignments were required to be typed. Later on, I started attending college, and it was very useful for my homework. About two years ago, we installed the Internet (an accessory that is essential now-a-days). A lot of my same age friends are like me: they started using the computer until recently in their jobs, or like me, when I started attending college.

For Andrea, access to technology was in traditional gateways, school and work; however, as we travel to more recent *generaciones*, we also see that our participants are integrating home as a micro-literacy zone. With her computer purchase, Andrea increased her access by making a private study and work hobby area. Having a computer at home created a drastically different environment for her children from the one in which she grew up. Her children see different literacies practiced and available to them. As with other participants, Andrea longs for the traditional literacy environments, yet has recognized the change computers have had on her environment and has embraced them by creating a home micro-literacy zone where her family can now learn and utilize technology.

*Señora Teresa (Terry) Quezada* was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1964<sup>10</sup>. Her parents lived across the border in Juárez while her father worked as a printer in El Paso, commuting daily across the international bridges.<sup>11</sup> The family moved from Juárez to El Paso in 1967 in pursuit of greater financial opportunities for the family and enhanced educational opportunities for Terry. She completed all her education in public schools in El Paso, including her college education at UTEP.

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<sup>10</sup> Student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes. She chose to write in third person.

<sup>11</sup> As with Adriana's school experience, *Señor Quezada* was one of the many borderland residents who live on one or the other side of the border, but commute daily for work/school purposes.





Bilingualism was initially a jolt for Terry. As an incoming first-grader at Lamar Elementary with no previous schoolwork and unable to speak English at all, the school was intimidating: “My mother was terribly nervous about my inability to speak English.

When she registered me, she indicated to one of the staff that I did not speak English. She was assured that I was going to school to learn. Whoever that individual was did a great service to my mother. Her fears were allayed that my shortcomings would be addressed.” This became a positive micro-tear zone for the Quezadas. As educators we need to be aware that even a minor soothing comment like this can have an enormous impact on students and their families.

The bilingual component of her education was one of immersion in English: “I do not remember how exactly I learned English. I remember that in first grade, we were divided into groups. My group was not the most advanced and as we learned to recognize the sounds letters made, I struggled with letters like G and C which could have different pronunciations. Sometime during the spring, I must have caught on because I was moved from the group I was in to the more advanced group that read further in our reader by the end of the year.”

Terry had a pleasant surprise that same year when she was informed that she would be able to formally study Spanish in school. She had been warned that speaking Spanish in school was strictly prohibited and punishable. Her story of integration appears better than many of the participants in *Generaciones*, who faced discrimination against them in school if they spoke Spanish. When she went home and told her mother a Spanish teacher would be coming to her first-grade classroom and teaching the class Spanish, her mother was sure it was a misunderstanding on her daughter’s part, due to her inability to speak English. At the school’s open house, Terry’s mother met Mrs. Ramirez,<sup>12</sup> the Spanish teacher, and was relieved that her daughter could speak Spanish at school and would learn more written Spanish literature, not only spoken.

As Terry learned English through school and spoke Spanish exclusively at home, she began to use the school library for outside reading. Her writing was confined to school assignments, although she did have a pen pal in Boston during the nation’s bicentennial year. She was introduced to the pen pal through a Saturday morning show—she only began watching American TV after her fourth- or fifth-grade year, when her comprehension of the language was adequate enough for her to understand the programming. “Americana and American pop culture were truly foreign to me. I could

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudonym



understand some of the physical comedy in shows like Carol Burnett or the Sonny and Cher show, but sitcoms were not something I could understand because I did not have a full grasp of the language.”

An alternative literacy practice and support occurred for Quezada at, of all places, the local public library! It was sometime during later elementary school years, fifth through seventh grades, that Terry’s mother began taking her to the main public library in downtown El Paso. It was there that she found bound “American” comic books, *Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew* and *The Three Investigators* mystery books, and craft books. “In addition to increasing my love for reading, the books were an introduction into Americana, something which I believed was critically missing from my formal education since I was a first-generation American and an only child.” The experience with “checked out” books from the library, even comics, represent data left unreported in national literacy statistics and as another instance of comics as alternative literacy.

El Paso High School provided additional gateways and sponsors. As a result of her math teacher’s encouragement, Quezada followed a college-preparatory curriculum which included six years of math, four years of English (including advanced placement English, a course designed to prepare students for a placement test to earn college credits), and four years of science. Given her course selection, the teachers were inclined to promote higher education to all students in those classes. Like Cynthia Smith from this chapter who also attended the same high school, Terry sought technology through typing classes offered as part of the curriculum. The difference is that during her junior year in high school, the first personal computer course was offered at El Paso High. It was a restricted gateway in that only upperclassmen were allowed to register for the course, and preference was given to honor students. Terry enrolled and was exposed to primitive computers and programming in BASIC:

There were maybe twelve computers in the classroom and thirty or so students, so access to the actual machine was limited. I do not recall any available printers. I remember a lot of the work as to programming was explained on the blackboard and I remember our teacher telling us that we had to be very specific in giving instructions to the computers (programming). He said if we missed a step in the programming, the computer would not take that step and our final result would fail. Although I cannot consider the class a great asset, it was a feather in my cap as far as my transcript went. It also provided me with my first opportunity to work with technology. Prior to my junior year, the only technology I had significantly mastered was typing on an electronic typewriter. I do credit that one year of typing as a great asset that serves me well to this day. Knowing the



keyboard made the transition to computers easier and has also made me a more efficient worker. When I was in high school, students had a choice whether or not to take typing. Some considered it a course for those interested in clerical positions. Now, keyboarding is taught to kindergarteners in an effort to bring electronic literacies to children.

Terry attended the University of Texas at El Paso for her undergraduate and graduate education. When she finally settled into a business degree with an accounting major, exposure to computers was limited and not fully integrated into the business curriculum. After graduating with a bachelor's in business administration in 1986, she immediately enrolled in graduate school seeking a dual master's degree in public and business administration. As a first semester graduate student, Terry's MBA advisor required that she take a course on Word and Lotus, word-processing and worksheet programs, respectively. Terry resented the need to take a "leveling undergraduate" course when she had just obtained her BBA [Bachelor's of Business Administration] but now recognizes her advisor was a forward-thinking sponsor. "That course greatly facilitated my work for the City of El Paso in the Office of Management and Budget and in my further positions within the municipality," she now admits. Graduate studies included work with mainframe computers for statistical analysis and continued use of the personal computer for word processing. Quezada also learned several accounting software programs at the time from her employer: "I worked for an accountant who worked from home and had several small business clients. He taught me the accounting programs so I could then handle all the monthly transactions including biweekly payrolls." This economic and direct sponsor spilled over to Terry's other endeavors.

As an employee with the City of El Paso, she transitioned from mainframe applications to personal computers and eventually to an internal network tying all departments together. Her co-workers directly sponsored her electronic literacies by teaching her new software applications like for the Internet, email, and Microsoft database applications and presentation software. She credits these direct sponsors to this day:

My exposure to computers and technology has not been cutting edge; however, I think I am typical of those in my age bracket—we learned traditional literacies in school and had greater access to formal schooling, but computers were an emerging technology that was not readily available even in the traditional gateways. Many of us have had to conquer our fear of "messing it up" and just had to get on the computer and try different things. I am still learning. I often

joke that I learned more about WordPerfect when I was working on my master's degree than I did anything else.

She bought her first “personal” computer in the spring of 2005, which she uses for school assignments and pleasure. The transition for computers to be seen as a means for home entertainment is fully underway by this date. This was not always the case, however. In 1986, she had purchased a Compaq computer to work on accounting for clients from home. In almost two decades, computers at home had become far more necessary.

### El Paso Born and Raised

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Current Residence
Luz Granger	1962	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX
Fernando Alañiz	1968	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX

Thus far we have glimpsed the experiences of participants who have migrated and crossed our border at least once. Now we turn to those who were born and raised in El Paso. Their experiences, despite the apparent lack of distance from the border, are not radically different from the other members of this *generación*. We continue to see their struggles with economically “poor” upbringings—no surprise given the statistics noted in the introduction—and the almost omnipresent push for a better life and increasing literacies.

*Señora Luz Granger* worked at Wal-Mart at the time of the survey and is working toward being a fashion designer. She was born in El Paso in 1962, was raised on the U.S. side of the border and considered her upbringing as one with “very little money.” Granger’s mother is from Mexico and she stressed that Luz read and write in Spanish “as soon as [Luz] was born,” so despite Luz’s being born in the U.S., her mother wanted Luz to be bilingual in order to be bicultural. Much like Terry Quezada, Luz did not learn to speak English until she entered first grade. While in elementary school, Luz read alternative literacy sources such as comic books, newspapers, and later poems and songs. Her family emphasized mastering reading and writing and valued education as a means to “going far.” Echoing the theme we’ve seen in this *generación*, education, particularly an education obtained in the United States, is viewed as a gateway to greater personal economic and financial stability. Granger’s elementary education, like most in this *generación*, centered on traditional gateways and some private literacy activities; she kept a diary, wrote poems and songs, and visited the school library twice a week.



Unlike previous participants who sought technology and electronic literacies through school or work, Luz's first exposure to computers was when her son started pre-K and she volunteered at his school. At twenty-three, Luz enrolled in parenting classes at her son's school; she entered a specific gateway in an effort to be a sponsor for her children and found the gateway worked for her as well. While the school was not a job for her, it did serve as a type of cubbyhole gateway in that it gave her the confidence to realize she could learn to be computer literate. In another instance of work and causal home computer use, the Grangers own both a laptop and a desktop computer. They also use the computers to assist their two sons with their schoolwork. In another example of cross-generational direct sponsorship, Luz credits her sons for teaching her many applications.

*Señor Fernando "Fernie" Alañiz*<sup>13</sup> was born in 1968 and raised in El Paso. Fernie's parents worked long, hard hours, and he felt the negative side effects of their hard work:

"My parents worked so much that it fell upon my older siblings to raise the younger kids, with me being the youngest of the clan. As a result, I read hand-me-down books that belonged to my older siblings, 'Mother Goose'-type books." His siblings, especially his older brother John, served as indirect sponsors by providing Fernie, the youngest, with reading materials, ones undocumented in literacy



statistics since they were hand-me-downs. (Activate video above left for Fernie's expanded commentary).

Grandparents have played significant roles for some participants in different *generaciones*. (Activate video on right for Fernie's expanded commentary). Fernie is the first in this *generación* to mention their



<sup>13</sup> A former student and coauthor in this chapter with Scenters-Zapico.



impact on him. While only his grandmothers were alive when Fernie was a child and did not read to him, he does describe them as “more storytellers than readers.” His initial exposure to oral storytelling probably impacted his own use of stories. Fernie’s mother described reading as a way to “utilize your imagination.” As we see below, Fernie seems to have combined his grandmothers’ storytelling abilities and his mother’s view of reading and began using his own imagination to tell and write his own stories.

Typical of the participants in this *generación*, Fernie’s literacy practices as a youth involved writing rather than computing:

Ever since I can remember I’ve been writing things down and then showing them to my parents. They would tell me that I had a talent for writing short stories and poetry. I wrote because it helped me gather my thoughts. If I was feeling a little down, I would write down my feelings. If I had a dream, I’d write it down. I’ve been known to wake up in the middle of the night and write things so as not to forget what I was dreaming.

Fernie’s family also instilled in him a value for education. “My parents always stressed the importance of an education, and always made sure I did my homework, but as I mentioned before, it mainly fell upon my older siblings like John to help me out with homework.

Growing up, Fernie saw his parents utilizing traditional literacy practices to a greater extent than we have seen in the other participants of this *generación*: “They not only preached the importance of literacy, but they actively read on a daily basis as well.” His father, a real estate broker, was “always writing up contracts and other legal documents pertaining to his work.” According to Alañiz,

Both my parents worked on crossword puzzles together, as well as reading passages from the Bible to each other, as my father has always been a lector at his church for as long as I can remember. My mother always kept a record book (Image right) of family occurrences and important dates including births, illnesses, deaths, shot records and graduations. As



active sponsors throughout my life, my parents have always wanted for their children to complete their college education, especially since they never really had the opportunity to do so when they were younger. (Activate video for Fernie's expanded commentary).

From his comments, we see that Fernie's household was a rich environment, a gateway, where literacy practices were carried out jointly by the adults and siblings for business, school, and pleasure.



Unlike the other participants of this *generación*, Fernie grew up speaking only English and not knowing much Spanish. Although his siblings spoke Spanish among themselves, he does not see himself as having successfully mastered the language. As a youth, he experienced the prohibition against speaking Spanish at school:

Spanish was not allowed at school, which didn't bother me much since I didn't know how to speak it very well anyway. But some of my friends who did come from Spanish-speaking households did encounter difficulties with teachers, which often upset me when I would see them get into trouble for speaking the only language they knew. I learned to speak "Spanglish" from my friends at school, which was also the norm at home.

As in Fernie's case, the social impact of the "no Spanish policy" either directly affected participants or those they knew.

One story of racism, passed along in the Alañiz family, is perhaps the most concrete shared in all of *Generaciones'* narratives. Other participants have had strong cultural, historic, and familial ties to Mexico and continued to have positive feelings toward Mexican culture while viewing El Paso as the gateway toward greater financial opportunity, but Fernie expresses no similar sentiments among his family. In fact, Fernie's father had a specific discriminatory experience that colored his view of the "land of opportunity":



## Generaciones' Narratives

My father was the only person that had an opinion about the United States when I was growing up. Apparently he had a bad experience with racism when he was growing up. He grew up in a time when Mexicans were equated with dogs. Literally, restaurants had signs in the windows that read “No Dogs, No Mexicans Allowed.” My father was a Texas state champion runner in the 1930s. He was competing at a meet in Austin, Texas, in 1938, and traveled by bus with his coach, who was an Anglo-American man. When they arrived in Austin, they walked into a restaurant to eat lunch after the long haul, but were greeted with hostility because my dad was Mexican. To this day, my dad holds some resentment towards the United States for allowing racism to exist. (Activate video for Fernie’s expanded commentary).



While up until this point we have heard of restrictions on Spanish speakers in schools, this is the first instance of overt racism in the public sphere, which occurred outside of El Paso, in Texas’ state capitol.

When Fernie was student in a class with Scenters-Zapico, the instructor saw firsthand Fernie’s zest for practicing electronic literacies. Fernie enthusiastically recalled some of his encounters with technology from the time he was about ten years old through the time of the survey:

I can remember playing the Atari computer game “Pong” when I was around nine or ten years old, around 1977-1978. Playing Atari required a game console to be attached to one’s television set. It was so exciting for me to utilize the television for something other than watching *H.R. Pufnstuf*. I also remember being introduced to an IBM-type computer in my high school typing class, around 1983-1984. The program we were utilizing involved the use of commands like “go to” to help with the composition of the programs we were required to type up in class. The monitor’s background was black with amber-like print. Fast forward ten years to 1994-1995, which was when my father bought the first personal computer in our household. It was an AST home computer with a really slow processor and a version of Windows so elementary compared to today’s XP





version, yet so innovative for its time. I was immediately taken with the Internet (AOL was our service provider at that time), and would spend hours upon hours surfing the Web. I definitely was green in regards to the online “lingo” that people were using to communicate with each another. For example, when someone was laughing “out loud,” the correct way to type that was “LOL.” I was finding a secret little community already developing as the result of the Internet, one I was



destined to become a part of as well. I say destined because now it's almost impossible or unheard of to not have a personal email account or the ability to chat with ones' classmates, friends, or even family members via the World Wide Web. I was speaking with someone from Pennsylvania using AOL Instant Messenger the same night we brought home our family's first desktop computer! That first experience with a home computer opened up a plethora of opportunities and sparked my interest upon the first flick of the on switch. It's amazing to me how much I now utilize the computer not only for schoolwork but for entertainment purposes as well. (Activate video for Fernie's expanded commentary).

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In this long quote, which spans over thirty years of technology use, we discover Fernie's fascination and engaged interest in technology.

While school provided Fernie with a technology gateway, his father served as an indirect sponsor when he purchased the first computer for the Alañiz household. Once the computer was at home, a micro-literacy zone emerged where Fernie explored the most common applications available at the time: Microsoft Works, Lotus 1-2-3 and DOS. One of Fernie's friends who served as a direct sponsor was “a Windows aficionado who helped me with the basics such as how to use the mouse, how to cut and paste, and even how to scan!”

Now Fernie sees himself as a self-sponsor. Others in this *generación* have expressed their willingness and even eagerness to seek sponsors and gateways, but Fernie emerges as the most adventurous solo techno-explorer of this *generación*, specifically indicating that he is willing to learn through trial and error by teaching himself. (Image to



right is of Fernie's micro-literacy zone) This is in sharp contrast to Andrea Ramirez's comments lamenting not "learning computers the right way." Fernie said that "it was up to me to teach myself, through trial and error, how to use programs that have since then come to exist." His experience seems to be a common one. In the conclusion to



*Generaciones*, the overall data of participants who self-sponsor is both alarming and heartening. My biggest worry as an educator is for those individuals who do not have the perseverance or ability to teach themselves. Readers of this book know the challenges of trying to learn a new piece of software or of learning to use a new piece of technology through self-sponsorship. Fernie enthusiastically sums up his initial and ongoing experiences with computers:

Since the computer's introduction into my household over a decade ago, I've been using it incessantly. Hours upon hours were spent by me just getting comfortable with the basics like mouse clicks, Internet access, getting around via the start menu, changing settings, etc. I felt that it was up to me to learn as much as I could by utilizing a hands-on approach. The rest I believed I'd learn by taking courses that were available at UTEP or the community college, which I did at both institutions. I have since begun a technological love affair with the Apple Computer company, actively using iMac and PowerBook computers for all homework and personal projects since 2002. In five short years I have become proficient with such software applications as iDVD, iMovie, iTunes, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, iWeb, GarageBand, along with Windows-based applications for Mac such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. I've become extremely engrossed with graphics design to the extent that I have since changed my major to graphic design.

Fernie is undoubtedly the most unabashed computer enthusiast in this *generación*, yet his concluding remarks are reminiscent of Sven Birkert's laments in the Gutenberg Elegies:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A book read in Fernie's class with Scenters-Zapico.



I don't think that computers should take the place of certain treasures such as a good book or visit to the library. It's the tactile experience of opening up a book and being able to smell the print on the pages that makes the experience of reading a book or the newspaper so endearing. I can render great images with my computer after downloading photos from my digital camera, but there is nothing like holding a freshly printed photo from the photo lab in your hand, still able to smell the chemicals used to bring the photo images to life. Maybe in some respects I'm an old fashioned guy. . .

I suspect that Fernie's words ring true for many of us who are living in a time of digital transition. We are not critical of hard copy, finding it comforting, affordable, portable, and tactile. Technology, on the other hand, offers other types of experiences we also embrace—if we can self-sponsor or find willing and capable direct sponsors.

### Conclusion

This *generación* lived through emerging technology, the attempts at standardization, and ultimate uniformity in the technology world. They have also seen technology seep into the world's day-to-day transactions. They are likely the last *generación* to remember what work, school, and recreational activities such as photography, hard copy catalog shopping, and letter writing were like before the advent of the personal computer. Despite their recognition of the multiple benefits of technology and how it can speed up literacy acquisition in future *generaciones*, they recognize some of technology's drawbacks. Subsequent *generaciones* will not express themselves as Cynthia Smith does, waxing philosophically that,

Industrialization increased society's capacity to produce "things." The computer has now become our central way of life. Because of all this, personal isolation may also be significant. People will either work at home or far from a "central" office. As people pay less attention to their neighbors and spend more time communicating with others online, human communities will be reshaped. Technology has forced me to be more innovative in my work. The accounting profession has changed dramatically with the evolution of technology. Spreadsheets were the best invention for us. They enable us to do jobs in minutes instead of hours or days. I believe that I would still love my profession without technology but it would surely mean more work to get the same results.



The participants in this chapter recognize their location in the technology evolution timeline and the changes the new technologies were introducing into home, school, and work environments. They began most of their literacy journeys in traditional ways. While some faced greater obstacles in their path to acquiring traditional and electronic literacies, all recognized the benefits of acquiring these literacies and thus sought available sponsors as well as public and private gateways to enable them to be a part of the change.

Technology and its evolving literacies have brought significant changes in the types of workplaces we find ourselves in. For some, the jobs of the past have disappeared; others actively seek better paying jobs, while still others find themselves in minimum-wage jobs requiring electronic literacy skills that challenge them, the cubbyhole gateways of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the experiences of these participants, self-sponsorship was a key to learning the new, evolving electronic literacies. In educational realms the experience was also similar. Students were beginning to be required to produce more and more electronic projects. To achieve this, they had to find gateways where they could access technologies and self-sponsor, or, if fortunate, be sponsored by a friend or a willing peer.