

Bookjoy! Día to Celebrate 25 Years

A Visit with Founder Pat Mora

BY ALLISON GRASSEL

It's no surprise that passing along her love of literature—or “bookjoy!” as she calls it—has always been important to Pat Mora, award-winning author and literacy advocate.

In fact, she compares her love of reading to her love of ice cream: “When you love ice cream, you want everyone else to like it. You think, ‘Oh, that’s delicious,’ and you don’t want anyone to miss the pleasure.”

That palpable passion is what led Mora to create Children’s Day, Book Day, also known as *El Día de los Niños*, *El Día de los Libros* (commonly known as Día), in spring 1996. She is eagerly anticipating the initiative’s twenty-fifth anniversary in 2021.

Years ago, when Mora learned of a holiday in Mexico where they celebrated children (*El Día Del Niño*), she thought, “We have Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. We need kids’ day too, but I also want to connect all children with bookjoy, the pleasure of reading.”

Día is a day centered around the promotion of children and literacy. Mora gained the support of friends at the University of Arizona, which grew rapidly. The Tucson Chapter of REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, quickly became her next supporter as they decided to co-found Día with Mora. The two worked together and planned their celebrations for the very next year.

The first celebrations were held in April 1997. Every year since, Día is celebrated on or around April 30.

Since 2004, ALSC has been the national home of Día. In addition to ALSC, Día has gained the support of many librarians, educators, and organizations, allowing the celebrations to



spread throughout the country. Mora says, “These supporters were essential. After all, I am one person trying to write, and that was a real boost that other people shared that commitment.”

Mora is amazed and humbled by the creative minds of those organizing Día celebrations. “I get excited when people want to join the initiative. It’s easy to say, ‘I think children are important,’ or ‘I think reading is important,’ but when I sense that a person or an organization really wants to invest in making this dual goal a national tradition, that excites me.”

Mora believes the best way to excite children about Día is through creative outreach efforts. She feels so strongly about this that in 2000 she created the Estela and Raúl Mora Award, named for her parents, which is given to the group that creates the most imaginative and creative Día celebration each year. Winners receive a \$1,000 First Book Marketplace credit and publicity for their efforts. Last year’s winner was the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Alabama in Mobile; honor winners were Andress High School Library in El Paso, Texas, and Anaheim (CA) Central Library Children’s Room. A list of the past winners can be found online at www.patmora.com.



Allison Grassel is a student at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, studying English, psychology, and Spanish, and she hopes to pursue a career in journalism.

A Story about Alzheimer's

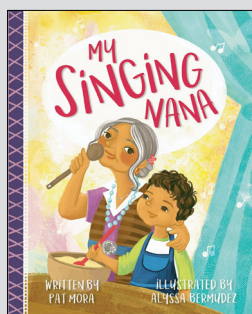
Pat Mora's newest book, *My Singing Nana* (Magination Press, 2019), thoughtfully takes on the topic of Alzheimer's disease, as seen through a child's eyes.

In her author's note, Mora says, "In their eighties, both of my parents suffered from dementia. I was encouraged to write this book by my sister, Stella Henry, who cared for our parents at the end of their lives. For over thirty years, as a nurse, administrator, and co-owner of a nursing home, she helped thousands of families deal with challenging health issues."

In the book, Billy and his Nana have a very close relationship, but he soon starts to realize that Nana is forgetting some things; along the way, he learns that this does not change the love that they have for each other.

The book allows children with family members experiencing memory loss to better understand a confusing, but increasingly common, concept. The story exudes Mora's belief that the most important thing that families can give their children is love, which teaches children to love in return.

The book teaches that togetherness is one of the most important things in life, and despite any obstacles life brings, those who love each other are "always *amigos!*"



Mora believes the most successful Día celebrations are centered around two things: (1) the creativity of the outreach and (2) the energy of the organizers. Their passion becomes contagious and draws children and families in, which is one of Día's goals.

Mora encourages all schools, libraries, publishers, and organizations committed to children and literacy to become involved. "Ideally every school and every library is working with its diverse families to make sure that all of our young people experience bookjoy. That's the dream," she says.

Mora hopes that everyone—no matter age, race, or gender—will feel comfortable in the library. She hopes that Día will continue to draw families into their local libraries and help them both to celebrate our children and to create a love of literature that compares to her own love.

"One of the benefits of Día is not only that it increases family reading and family emphasis on reading, but also that it can be a way for libraries to attract and serve members of the community who, for complex reasons, may never have felt at home in the library," Mora said.

For more information and tips on planning a Día celebration, visit <http://dia.ala.org> or www.patmora.com/images/planning-booklet-complete.pdf?pdf=booklet. &

For more on Día celebrations, see page 30.