



## Interview at Long Beach Public Library

*"...libraries are...a part of the public safety continuum..."*

Gonzalo Medina, Marine Safety Chief with the Long Beach Fire Department, tells his friend, John Glaza, how the library has been a safe harbor and sanctuary for the youth and how the library has positively influenced his life.

Gonzalo: Organizations and places like the library are very important in communities. And especially in communities where you don't have access to entertainment, or access to annual passes to Disney, or something like that, you know?

John: Right.

Gonzalo: They have a tremendous role to play there and I know that that's typically where we go and cut first. If there's general fund deficits, libraries are always hit first, but I believe they're a part of the public safety continuum, and I believe that libraries, that you can't go to a digital library. You know I'm all for having digital in libraries, but I believe that the four walls and a roof and the great staff, you know, and the programming, is all part of a really healthy and thriving community. And the communities that value that, you're going to see that reflected.

John: Tell me about your first library experience.

Gonzalo: I grew up near Main branch library. And literally, half a block or two away. And so where I grew up, at the time, you didn't have a lot of places to not interact with certain elements of the community, that were kind of, you just didn't want to be around. The only safe place, really, was the library. We had a lot of gangs. We had a lot of drugs. Very prevalent in our community. A lot of my cousins were in gangs, and so for me, you had to manage that, right? You couldn't not be a part of it, on some level, but the only safe place to go was the library. So, I found myself, for a period of years, I was literally at the library every single day. Sometimes, twice a day. I had really great relationships with the staff there, with the librarians. And, in

many ways, they introduced me to literature, to books, I mean, and it kind of gave me the ability to explore in a way that I just kind of stumbled across it. So I've always had a very deep connection with the library. And for me and my family and my sisters who ended there. And that's not just my story. I think in Long Beach, that Main branch library because of where it resides, has served as kind of like a sanctuary for a lot of youth.

John: It sounds like a sanctuary. I was thinking safe harbor, too, as well. Especially for you and some of your friends.

Gonzalo: Yeah.

John: When you think about your library experience, what did you appreciate most about your library, especially the main downtown library you lived so close to?

Gonzalo: Two librarians in particular: Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. McMillan. They both worked in the children section, but they were incredibly influential for me. You used to get an orange card. A laminated orange card which allowed you to check out books from the children section, but if you wanted to check out anything else from the library you needed a yellow card, right?

John: Mmhmm.

Gonzalo: But they were very— they facilitated me being able to have access to the rest of the library at a very young age, so they were just very encouraging that way.

John: If you had a magic wand and got one wish, what would your wish be for Long Beach?

Gonzalo: This great facility that we're in, right now, have it replicated across the city. And obviously with an independent revenue stream obviously that can really just continue to build programming and connect to the communities, and I think that's where you can make your most meaningful impact.

John: So, Gonzalo, thanks for sharing some of yourself with us, with the listeners, today. We really appreciate having you.

Gonzalo: Thank you. Thank you for having me.