

# Reward Your Soul: Help Seniors in Philadelphia's Latino Community

By William R. Cruse

The isolation of these past 18 months has been one of the most humbling and stressful challenges of our lives, but also an opportunity to reflect on what is most important and fulfilling to each of our souls. During the pandemic, volunteering with SeniorLAW Center to provide legal assistance to the Spanish-speaking members of our city's senior community has reawakened my affection for Latin America and its culture.

My initial connection with Latin America began after my sophomore years of high school, when I went on my first exchange program to Latin America. For three months, I lived with a host-family in Punta Arenas, Chile and attended school there. I returned home with a passion for the region and a deep-set desire to return there. The next summer I volunteered with the non-profit, Amigos de las Américas, and traveled to the Dominican Republic to work on a public health program in that nation's poorest region bordering Haiti. For three months, I lived in a shack, without water or electricity, and spent my days constructing latrines to help prevent the spread of cholera and other maladies. I continued my passion for the Spanish language in college. I spent a summer in Buenos Aires, Argentina interning for a law firm and matriculated to La Universidad Autónoma de Madrid for my junior year. After college, I remained connected to the region, working for a Latin America-



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focused investment banking group.

Through Blank Rome's longstanding partnership with SeniorLAW Center, a nonprofit organization that seeks justice for older people by using the power of the law, educating the community, and advocating on local, state, and national levels, I have been able to reconnect with my passion for the Spanish language and Latin America. I have been able to specifically focus my work with Spanish-speaking elders and the Latin community by providing important life-planning legal services for low-income seniors in the Greater Philadelphia area.

Since starting this important work, I've counseled and served clients who came from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Columbia, and other Latin American countries. I have heard remarkable stories from even more remarkable people, including the story of a Mexican couple who lost their ranch in Sonora Mexico to narco-gangs and the Italian-Uruguayan woman who left Italy for Uruguay as a girl because of the World War II to only flee that country for the U.S. decades later in the 1970s because of a military coup and dictatorship.

I joined the SeniorLAW Center's board of directors a year ago where, in addition to my fiduciary duties as a board member, I focus my efforts on trying to find ways to expand outreach in the Latino community. I encourage my fellow lawyers who have proficient Spanish speaking abilities to join and volunteer for SeniorLAW Center. It's not only a great way to continue practicing the Spanish language but also a means to help and connect with – or reconnect with – the Latino community. Whether or not you speak another language, join us in this work to move justice forward for those upon whose shoulders we all stand. Visit [www.seniorlawcenter.org](http://www.seniorlawcenter.org) for more information or contact Karen C. Buck, executive director at [kbuck@seniorlawcenter.org](mailto:kbuck@seniorlawcenter.org).

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