

Gem Among Us

An Inspiring Memoir of Philadelphia Lawyer Nelson A. Diaz

NOT FROM HERE, NOT FROM THERE

by Nelson A. Diaz, Esquire

241 pages

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Autobiographies can be self-serving, name-dropping and otherwise laudatory, an attempt to place a life in a good light, especially in rags-to-famous cases.

This memoir by Philadelphia lawyer Nelson Diaz transcends the usual fare, is a fascinating read on many levels and is absolutely inspiring. The title comes from the perception of many of us toward the heritage of those of Puerto Rican ancestry, and is echoed by present Puerto Ricans.

Diaz was born in New York City, and was raised by a single mother who had recently arrived from Puerto Rico. His childhood was poor, and he spoke only Spanish until a few years into elementary school. He was not a good student, and was pushed into a commercial high school in his neighborhood, although he was good at numbers and thought about becoming an accountant.

With his efforts, and a recognition of his talents by others, he got into St. John's College and Temple Law School, and then into the practice of law in 1972 and otherwise, as to which the following is a brief list:

- Worked at WolfBlock LLP, Blank Rome LLP, Cozen O'Connor and Dilworth Paxson LLP before retiring
- Held a White House fellowship
- Headed the Spanish Merchants Association and other minority group leaderships
- Sat on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, and ultimately as administrative judge of the trial division

- Served as general counsel to HUD
- Served as a Philadelphia city solicitor and public defender

As he tells his story, he effusively thanks those who helped along the way, particularly Peter Liacouras, Carl Singley, Henry Cisneros (who contributed an introduction to the book), and several now deceased partners at WolfBlock. He also credits his faith and family.

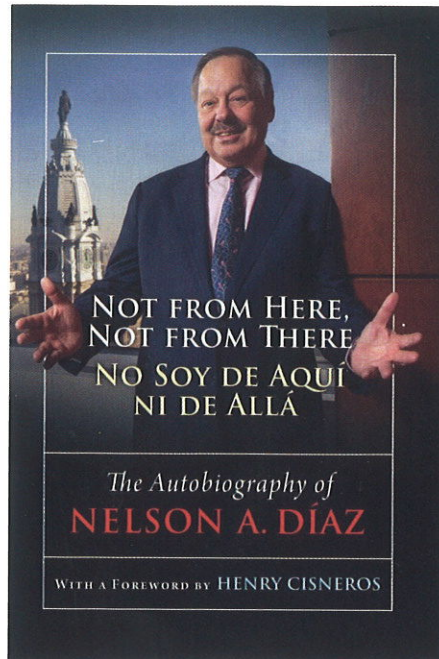
What particularly impressed me was his acknowledgment of how much he had to learn at every point in his career, and how much he learned from those who worked with him. One portion which I found compelling was his relationship with, and description of, the character of Vice President Walter Mondale, to whom he was assigned for his White House fellowship. When Diaz accomplishes something, or participates in history, he

lets you know, and when he blunders, he tells you that also, and how he learned from it.

His memory is exhaustive, his appreciation of American democracy is strong, his efforts on behalf of all minorities are powerful and his devotion to Philadelphia, his adopted city, is amazing.

I have known Nelson for more than 40 years. Disclosure - as president of the Philadelphia Jaycees in the mid-1970s, I had the honor of giving Nelson an award as Outstanding Young Leader (unless I missed it, not mentioned in the book).

In short, it was a pleasure reading this book - Nelson Diaz is a gem among us. ■



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