

Jovita Lobato

Her Legacy: First Mexican-American person to graduate from Fort Collins High School and Colorado State University

In 1995, Jovita Lobato was honored at the 13th annual El Centro Achievement Awards Ceremony hosted by CSU for her achievements in teaching and inspiring students to follow her example. 1,095 Hispanic students enrolled at CSU that year. Jovita was born in 1908 to a Fort Collins migrant family who worked in the sugar beet fields; they did everything they could to send Jovita and her brother Salvador to school, where they became the first two Mexican-Americans to graduate from CSU.

Jovita paid for school by working as a cook at the Northern Hotel. She immersed herself in extracurriculars at CSU via the Newman Club, the Cosmopolitan Club, and Pi Gamma Mu, and finished with degrees in economics and sociology with a minor in education. She graduated midway through the term and went home to help her family put her brother through school.

Jovita's mission was not only to teach, but to inspire people like her to persevere. Jovita has talked about the isolation she felt as the only person of color in her high school and college; while she enjoyed school, she certainly felt the effects of that marginalization. There are no identifiable pictures of her in the senior yearbooks for either Fort Collins High School or CSU. While the omission isn't provably malicious, it does speak to a pattern of invisibility that people of color endured in the 1930s that Jovita would have been a part of.

Jovita would go back to school to earn a master's degree in psychology from University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA in 1963; she went on to teach at schools in Colorado, New Mexico, and New Jersey until she retired at age 75.

“Tie your wagon to a star. Otherwise you might not get anywhere.”

Written by Melissa Allbrandt, Archivist, Editor, and Writer