Snapshot: Raquel Ortiz

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Q: *How did you get interested in library and information science?*

I grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I came to the States in 1984 and got a degree in the social psychology of language for multilingual people at Harvard. I worked in libraries as an undergrad at Harvard with great librarians who enjoyed their work and encouraged me to explore the profession. After college, I enrolled at GSLIS, where I took a course in legal information sources and really liked it. It was then that I realized I wanted to be an academic law librarian, but you have to be a lawyer to do that. So I found a job at the Harvard law library while I thought about going back to school in law. In 1994 I started at Suffolk University Law School, while working at Harvard and going to school at night. I finally finished my law degree in 1998 and the next year I started working at BU's Pappas Law Library as a reference librarian in electronic services.

How would you describe the connection between who you are (your personality, character, what drives you, what you care about) and your chosen career?

I'm friendly, outgoing, and I love helping others. What drew me to reference work specifically, was my interest in solving puzzles, in reading mysteries, and in doing research.

As a kid, did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a doctor when I was growing up, but later in college I found that I didn't like science as much as I had in high school. I always liked gathering materials for projects. I didn't know at the time that librarians help others do just that and they get paid for it!

What do you like best about your job?

The best part is teaching: training people how to do legal research. Teaching combines all the things I know. Some of my job is like solving mysteries: you start with some information, some of which is accurate or not, complete or not, then you fill in the blanks. In law, there are never "yes" or "no" answers: in law the answer to any question is, "It depends."

Who has influenced you the most in your life?

My parents. They're lifelong learners and they've inspired me to continue to learn.

What is a passion of yours?

Visual arts, especially photography. I do a lot of professional learning, technology especially. I'm always looking for ways to simplify how things are done. If you asked anyone who knows me professionally, one of the words they would use to describe me is "overcommitted." Variety is the theme in my life. I think that's the reason I'm overcommitted, because I like variety. I like change, to do different things.

Let's say you believe in former lives. Who would you have been in a former life?

A detective who dances and who's an artist on the side. Seriously, I love dancing, mysteries, and art, so I think that I must have done those things professionally in some previous lives.

What are you reading right now?

I just started *Bloody Secrets*, a novel by Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, who has written a series of mystery books about a self-described Cuban-American Princess who happens to be a private detective.

What's an aspiration of yours?

I would love to be the director of the Harvard Law Library someday. That's where I started as a law librarian, and I'd love to retire from my career there.

If you could pick one object that represents something you care deeply about, what would it be?

A seashell. I grew up in Puerto Rico, going to the beach year-round. I love the sights, smells, and sounds of the beach. I could sit there for hours and not notice time go by.

If you weren't doing what you do now, what would you be doing?

Working with people — that's important to me. Maybe I'd be a professional organizer. I can't decorate to save my life, but I can organize anything!

What would you definitely not be doing?

I'm not a skilled craftsperson. I should not be allowed anywhere near a hammer.

Raquel Ortiz teaches Legal Information Services *at GSLIS and is the head of reference services at the Pappas Law Library at Boston University. She has taught for the Massachusetts Bar Association and Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education, is a research consultant for a non-profit organization in Cambridge, and is the president of Law Librarians of New England. She lives in Newton.*