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Citizen Edith

- It's been a longtime coming, but new citizen Edith Goff-Youngblood made it to the polls and cast her first vote in an historic election.



Edith Goff-Youngblood with Maggie Cook, customer information agent and volunteer voter registrar, share a patriotic moment. Cook registered Goff-Youngblood on her break.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Nov. 4, 2008) At 8:30 a.m. on Election Day, Nov. 4, 2008, Edith Goff-Youngblood waited in line at 116th Street Elementary School. Goff-Youngblood, who was sworn in as an American citizen on August 28, was about to cast her first vote.

A nearly 30-year employee of Metro, Edith Goff-Youngblood, a senior customer service officer, was seven years old when she and her family fled the dissipation left by Hurricane Hattie in her native county of Belize (then British Honduras.)

Her parents, maternal grandmother, three sisters and two brothers, traveled by bus all the way through Mexico and the southwestern United States to Los Angeles, where waiting relatives helped to relocate the family.

Her father, a former policeman in Belize City, and her mother established a life for their fledgling family in Central Los Angeles, residing next door to the relatives who welcomed them to California.

As the family took root in their adopted country, citizenship was prized by the siblings as a rite of passage when they reached the legal age of 21. But for the young Edith Goff, it wasn't so easy. "I took the longest route of all my family," she said.

A career, marriage and responsibilities imposed a web of commitments. And then came a snaggle of bureaucratic mishaps. Clerks couldn't verify her identification. Her legal name was the same as her mother's. Documents had to be verified. "Applying for citizenship became a series of stops and starts for the last seven years," she said.



Edith Goff-Youngblood emerges from the ceremony with a flag and an engraved certificate.

Her fortitude was rewarded Aug. 28, when Edith Goff-Youngblood stood with some 18,000 others at the Los Angeles Convention Center to be sworn in as an American citizen.

After the ceremony, the new citizens were ushered out of the arena armed with a flag and certificate of citizenship. Edith made her way up the ramp and into the Los Angeles day, where she was cheered by a contingent of co-workers, family and friends organized by her boss, David Sutton, Director of Metro Commute Services.



Edith Goff-Youngblood took this photo at her citizenship ceremony at the Los Angeles Convention Center, where 18,000 new citizens were sworn in Aug. 28.

Among them in spirit was her friend and co-worker, Maggie Cook, who was waiting for the new citizen back at Metro Headquarters. Maggie, who just happens to be a volunteer voter registrar, had already enlisted Edith to sign on the dotted line as soon she became eligible to vote.

"I wanted to cry, I was so proud of her," said Cook. "One hurdle after another, she stuck through it."

It was on Sept.11 that Edith actually registered to vote. A group of friends and supporters, including Edith's sister Alice Goff, gathered in the Metro Café where Maggie Cook was set to register the new citizen.

Maggie Cook registers Edith Goff-Youngblood to vote cheered on by sister Alice Goff, at left, supportive boss David Sutton,



and friends
Marie Tervalon
and Bertha
Bruner.

It was as big a triumph for Cook as it was for Edith. "I've been wanting to register Edith ever since we met," said Cook. "I've been waiting for this moment." So intent was Cook's mission that she even beat out Edith's sister, another active volunteer voter registrar and president of AFSCME Local 3090, for the honor.

Cook, who has registered hundreds over the years in her volunteer work for a number of civic and union organizations, shares the eager anticipation of the freedom to vote with the new citizens she registers. "More than 90 percent of new citizens vote the first opportunity they can," she said. Although she didn't personally register everyone in the region, she proudly points out that Los Angeles County has more registered voters than 30 U.S. states.

Asked if citizenship has changed her life, Edith points to the small details, such as filling out applications that ask if one is a citizen. "I can finally check the 'yes' box!" And, she is applying for a U.S. passport, another feat most of us take for granted.

But first and foremost is voting. "I've never voted before, anywhere. I was a child when I moved here so this is thrilling," she said, adding, "I'm excited about the candidate I'm voting for!"



Intern Julio Nunez and Edith Goff-Youngblood rally around the flag after voting for the first time on Election Day.

For Goff-Youngblood, issues of the economy, health care, education were motivating factors in the voting booth. "It's the ability to make a difference," she said.

Back in the office, Edith shared this moment with intern Julio Nunez, a native of El Salvador, who became a citizen some three months prior to Edith.

The two had promised to vote in the morning and share what each

experienced at the polling place. Nunez, pleased and proud, congratulated

Goff-Youngblood. "We compared notes before we voted and checked on each other afterwards," he said. "I am happy to be voting."

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