



CSUF grad meets personal hero at Comic Con

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At Comic Con International: San Diego, there are people dressed as super heroes and actors who play heroes in TV and movies.

And then there's U.S. Rep. John R. Lewis (D-Ga.).

"He's a real life American hero," said Mark Garcia, a recent Cal State Fullerton graduate.

Lewis, 73, is a longtime member of Congress and known for his civil rights advocacy.

He is a Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and is the only living keynote speaker from the historic 1963 civil rights march in which Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Lewis was at Comic Con last month to promote his new book "March," a three-part graphic novel about his life and role in the civil rights movement.

"This is another way, another method of reaching people and telling the story and making it come alive," Lewis said. "This book is especially for the young and the not-so-young to remember this time and part of our history."

Lewis said he wrote the book after recalling a 1958 comic book, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story." It told the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was sparked by Rosa Park's refusal to sit in the back of the bus.

That 14-page comic book was instrumental in bringing him and other young people together teaching them about the important lessons of non-violent protests, said Lewis.

Garcia said when he saw Lewis was attending Comic Con; he just had to meet him.

He felt a personal obligation to meet the Georgia congressman after listening to him speak last year at Cal State Fullerton. Lewis was a keynote speaker during Cal State Fullerton's Black History Month celebration last year.

So on July 18, Garcia got up early and was the third person in line, just to assure himself a seat in what would be a standing-room only crowd of 100 attendees at the panel.

Garcia said his father in 1965 was a member of the U.S. Army 720th Military Police Battalion that President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered to Montgomery, Alabama to protect Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Lewis and thousands of nonviolent demonstrators as they marched to the state capital to fight for their voting rights.

Garcia said his father told him that the troops guarding the demonstrators were very nervous that day. The scene was tense as anti-civil rights demonstrators also came out to protest.

But the Army didn't want any blood to be shed, so the M-14 rifles the guards were armed with did not contain any bullets.

"He told me, at a young age he didn't realize the impact of his protection of the marchers and that he was honored to have protected their right to vote," said Garcia.

Garcia shared his father's story with Lewis before the panel started. Lewis thanked and hugged Garcia in gratitude.

"This is a dream come true for me," Garcia said of the moment. "I think my dad would be very proud."

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