One of the best feelings in life is sharing something you work so hard on with someone, and having them really appreciate it. Carlos Santana, a contemporary Mexican American rock, salsa and jazz guitarist, once said “The most valuable possession you can own is an open heart. The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace.” To me, someone that really represents these words is Carlos Tortolero, creator of the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago Illinois. This museum has been visited by many who have a great desire to learn about and view various works done by Mexican artists and artifacts from Mexican history.

Carlos Tortolero came to Chicago from Mexico as a small child. Throughout his career he worked as a story teacher, counselor and administrator in the Chicago Public Schools System. He dealt first-hand with kids who were “up to no good” in 1982 when the idea for a museum that would present the Mexican culture in its current perception was first conceived. This gives evidence that Tortolero really understood what peaceful people were like, and gave him clues as to how he could help them and their knowledge. In 1982, he and several friends started National Museum of Mexican Art with just $900. In the beginning, the museum had no permanent home, consisting of a series of cultural events and art exhibitions in temporary spaces. The group started with hiring various dancers to perform folkloric dance performances and small exhibitions featuring religious Mexican art.

Tortolero really had big things in mind for the museum. He wanted to “Teach non-Mexicans what we really are like so they understand and honor us. To connect with them.” This quote really expresses the peace and understanding Tortolero really wanted out of the people in his community and his world. He wanted everyone to have a better understanding and greater knowledge on Hispanic culture. By creating a museum that represents the great works of Hispanic artists, people can gaze upon the work that has been done and really have a sense of respect for the culture, and respect truly is peace.

Today, the museum has a permanent home in the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago. It feature various works and also includes a program of arts education, performance and community initiatives. Every October the museum has the nations largest Día de los Muertos, also known as Day of the Dead exhibit. It is the only Latino museum accredited by the American Association of Museums. Tortolero was recently honored by the Illinois Humanities Council for “enhancing the public’s appreciation for and understanding of the humanities.” This was a very well deserved award and really proves that knowledge and understanding is power, just like your instrument of peace.

Carlos Santana’s quote can really relate to Carlos Tortolero. Tortolero started a museum in hope of appreciation from others and a better understanding of other cultures and their artwork. As we begin to understand and become more aware of other cultures than our own, we become more powerful and peaceful people.