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## The Gift of Education and Much More

By Bobby J Rigues  
[Brigues@att.net](mailto:Brigues@att.net)

With all that the holiday's means to us, the act of giving is at the center. Each year about this time, the holidays remind me of a special story. It is about a Hispanic little boy and the impact public education had on his life.

As an adult, he began his tale by describing the nervous emotions felt on the first day of school. The comforts of a small modest home were replaced with a daunting new environment. However, with each passing day, his anxieties slowly faded under the care of his first grade teacher.

As he described his experiences throughout elementary school, it became obvious family priorities created academic challenges. He quickly found himself struggling in class. Telling his story, the concern in his voice of falling behind his peers in reading and other subjects was all too real. Nevertheless, he smiled sincerely when describing the feeling of compassion shared by his elementary teachers.

Middle school proved to be even more difficult. The unfortunate experience of parents divorcing compounded the stresses of learning. He clearly articulated the hardships found at such an early age. And yet, as if describing salvation, he vividly remembered how teachers and coaches filled the difficult gaps created by life.

His story became more intriguing as he described his high school years. The growing pains of adolescence without parental stability found this teenager homeless. To hear this chapter in his life, you feared the worst outcome. From the events of an unimaginable night, what might have happened had his coach not answered his door to find a distraught young man looking for guidance? And, what if those caring booster parents had not volunteered to take him into their home his last two years? Of course, we cannot forget all the teachers that went the extra mile to help yet expected nothing less than the best from his classroom efforts.

He finished his story by describing the positive influences from caring adults throughout his public school years. He laughed at how his third grade teacher taught him to like spinach with bribes of extra ice cream. You could tell he appreciated the librarian that labored with him through every word of every line as he learned to read. Proudly, he remembered the echoing words from various high school teachers and coaches to "always do your best" – an attribute that would serve him well in life.

This story supports the fact that public schools are successful when everyone contributes and the student is found at the center. Positive teachers, coaches, administrators, community, and parents all make a difference. Twelve years filled with caring people provided this child with more than just a gift of education; it provided him with a foundation for a future. Nothing can replace a strong family support structure. But, our Texas public school system came very close.

So, what became of this one Hispanic little boy that grew up with the help from many? He went on to college and graduated. Today, he is a proud family man and a productive citizen of society. Now in his fifties, he finds the time to be an advocate for quality public schools. Making education a priority was born from the passion shared by his teachers, coaches, and community members who never gave up on him. He is thankful for the gift of education that came with much more. How do I know all this to be true? With a smile.



Bobby J Rigues Aledo ISD Board of Trustee  
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