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The Brandenburg 300 Project

Honors

Guadalupe

Guadalupe represents a desperately poor young boy, a street kid, whose name I do not know, who displayed integrity, honor and dignity equaling the highest levels I have ever seen.



Since I don't have a picture of the young man who inspired this selection, I honor him with this picture of me at the Vernon Elementary School from the late 1980's. Some of these kids families are from the same area as "Guadalupe."



Brandenburg 21: Guadalupe

When I think of Mexico, I think of this true story that happened at the

Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

The company I worked for had a windfall and gave each of the employees thousands dollars to give to charity as we saw fit. I was sent to Mexico City to help with a project. I had some particularly deep and important events (first kiss, and presence of God) occur to me at Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City when I was a teenager. I decided to quietly leave the money in the collection plate at the Church for their work in helping the poor. I changed the dollars to the largest peso notes I could get.

When I lived in Mexico City in the 1960's the Church was open twenty-four hours a day. In the 1990's, when I arrived after a long workday it was almost midnight. I found the Church closed and ringed with fences and gates.

Two emaciated street kids maybe seven and ten years old, wearing rags, begged me for some money. I looked at them a moment. I thought of my father, who was desperately poor and equally emaciated growing up. I thought of myself living on the streets of Los Angeles in my mid-teens. I gave him all the money. It was enough to feed a family for years.

Without looking at the money the older boy and his young friend thanked me, and walked down the stairs away from the Church. About half way down the stairs he looked at the bills and stopped cold. He stood there a moment, clearly stunned. He thought about the money and struggled with himself.

He turned around and walked slowly back up the stairs to where I stood watching him. He put the bills in both hands, extending them out to return the money to me, thinking I had made a mistake. He needed to do the right thing despite his impoverishment. His dignity, born of the great kings of the Aztecs and Mayans, demanded it.

I said, “I know how much it is. It is for you.” (“Yo se, es para usted.”)

He offered me the money again. I smiled. He smiled.

He ran skipping and laughing down the stairs and into the streets.

I know bad things can sometimes happen in these circumstances, but I hope and pray and trust he did something special.

For me, it was a privilege, an honor to be schooled in dignity and integrity by such a person. I got more than he did out of it.

I don't have any picture of this young man, so on the website and videos I will be using pictures from my time volunteering at the Vernon Elementary School where I saw something of similar inspiration. I included this in my Keynote Speech at the California State University, Monterey Bay 2013 Commencement:

“I leave you with the story of the most beautiful thing I ever saw. It was at the Vernon Elementary School, which my company had

adopted. The most impoverished school in the district, in the middle of the dirtiest air in the United States. We provided programs and all kinds of stuff for the children. The kids loved it and I loved it too.

One day my wife Martha and I went over to the school, and the students in the Special Education class took us into their room to see a dance they had prepared. They closed the door, and positioned themselves on the empty floor. A young girl whose body twisted permanently to the side, and a challenged boy who beamed as he stood straight and proud, prepared their beginning position. Several other groups of kids also combined to make their bent bodies part of iconic arrangements ready to move in time with the music. The teacher put on an angelic toy piano version of “White Christmas.” And they began to dance. It was the most beautiful dance I have ever seen, and not because they were challenged kids, it’s because it was just beautiful. They achieved what every artist seeks – a perfect moment.

I found out the teacher, this hero, had looked through hours and hours of ballet and other dance videos, to find world-class choreography that used the positions that her students were born to. She showed these kids the beauty in their bodies, where society was telling them they were too different to matter, and they did it, they found the universal beauty in themselves.

Ladies and gentleman, if you can find in yourselves the beauty and the honor and the joy those children found, and the wisdom and love of our magnificent teachers, you will make your mark, you will raise your family, and you will seize this opportunity with all the fire and

passion that brought you to this day, and that will propel into your future. Congratulations and blessings to all of you.”

(The Teacher's name is Adriana Moran)