



Laura Sanchez
President's Message. Fall 2010

We waste too much time labeling “bad teachers,” when we should be putting more time and energy into celebrating the unsung heroes/heroines: teachers who inspire, give hope and enrich the lives of thousands of students.

It is true that some of us have at one time or another encountered a bad teacher. They do exist; some do not prepare students properly for their future, while others can, knowingly or unknowingly damage students' self-esteem.

Last weekend I attended California State University Los Angeles Latino Book and Family Festival, and I had the pleasure of listening to Victor Villaseñor, author of the bestseller *Rain of Gold*. He focused his lecture around his rage in elementary school. At that young age, most of the teachers he encountered kept peeling his self-esteem off, like an onion, layer after layer until almost nothing was left. If it was not his spelling that was poor it was his writing, nothing that he produced was good enough. The side effect that this had on him was dreams of revenge. Not a day went by without him thinking of ways to get even with his teachers and the school. The more his teachers put him down, the more his head spun with dreams of arms and ammunitions that he would use to bring them down. Until one day in seventh grade, Victor Villaseñor said: “...a red-haired, blue-eyed, Irish teacher gave me an A in an English essay I wrote.” As if touched by a magic wand, his faith in himself returned, he was not bad after all. Had it not been for that English teacher, *Rain of Gold* might have never seen the light of day and thousands of readers would have been deprived of the enriching experience of reading it.

There are countless heroes and heroines in the shadows that touch students' lives without fanfare or accolades. I would like to introduce you to a couple: Ann from Texas (the name and place has been changed to protect her privacy); she is a spunky, non-native Spanish speaker more than well qualified to teach AP Spanish, which she does at her high school. One day, while Ann was getting ready to go to work her only daughter called her from college to let her know she was not feeling well, Ann suggested to her to go to the doctor. One appointment led to the next, to lab work and more tests; her twenty-one year old daughter was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor. Ann was devastated; she cried and prayed. Her young daughter, her determined, focused and beautiful daughter, Ann was shaken through the core by the blow life had lashed on her. She pleaded to God to deliver her daughter. Ann, missed school three days here, another day there, to accompany her daughter to her next appointments to talk to the doctors and figure out the best way to keep her daughter alive. Ann amazes me, and the few students who know her

story; while her life was in an internal turmoil, like a cheerleader, she continued to teach without missing a beat. We should celebrate this courageous woman and teacher who inspires and enlightens her students.

Let me introduce you to Mrs. Sternal. She is a petite but strong woman, who left her comfortable post at a private, Catholic elementary school to teach in an elementary school in East Los Angeles, where the majority of children come from either broken or under-privileged homes. Mrs. Sternal's kindness, generosity and sensitivity to the needs of others prompted her to buy out of her own money, special binders for her First graders so that they could organize their homework. In addition, out of her own money again she set out to make the school environment more pleasant, buying plants, and with the help of the students growing a little flower garden in the school grounds. Parents, as well as students, witnessed Mrs. Sternal's daily love for the children and her dedication to teaching.

Thank you to all the men and women in the teaching profession who devote their time and effort to share their knowledge and their love for learning to make their students, achievers and caring human beings.