

TEACHING AT LMU
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In the fall of 1997, I returned from a sabbatical to LMU to teach two courses that I had taught many many times before. I was searching for something to look forward to.

IF you were to have asked me about my philosophy of teaching then, I am not sure I could give a very good answer. But all of that changed after a strange dream I had that put my thirty years of teaching into a simply prospectus. The dream started on my front lawn where I was doing my usual circus acrobatics with my kids. From across the street came a sweet request. “fahder (her spelling), Can you throw me in the air?” Her father Manuel worked long hours as a butcher and didn’t have the hours that I had as a professor. I tossed her in the air. Then a second little request, higher fadher, higher fadher. I was thrilled to see beautiful five year old Little Cathy float through the air letting out squeals of delight as she soared above the tree branches and saw her house and neighborhood from a new point of view. Higher Fadher and soon I was throwing her 10-12 feet in the air. I knew I had to be there to catch her over and over again. As she grew older, I knew that throwing her in the air was no longer appropriate and when I saw her, I longed for the days when she was flying high above me.

Little Cathy would often call me Fahder, “I need help with word problems, can you help me?” She would come to the house and I would help her for a couple of hours and we would laugh about how I would throw her in the air. At other times she would say, I’m having trouble with Physics. So once again, we would work for a couple of hours.

Then It occurred to me! Something that I should have thought about all along. I was still throwing her in the air but in a different way. Cathy Madrid received her degree in Engineering at Santa Clara.

Then it occurred to me, that is what we do at LMU. We toss them in the air! Giving them a view of themselves and the world that otherwise they would not have.

For the past twenty five years, I have held office hours every Tuesday and Thursday from 9-12. Often my own children would come by my office and see me sitting in my office alone with no students. They would ask, “Why don’t you go to the gym, Lair, or do your own thing?” I never had the right answer until now. I must be there to catch them. Their dreams are as precious as “Little Cathy.”

Occasionally, there were the students that didn’t want to be thrown in the air, for example Sonia Castillo. She was one of many students who had received the top grades throughout the years because of their native ability alone. But as the material got more difficult, she could no longer automatically get A’s on the tests. But I knew that if she were to succeed at the next level, in graduate school she had to learn to work harder, persevere, and work through Her frustration at not being able to solve the problems as easily. Hint...:, Try Again...Polish your solution, REWRITE.!you missed the case a < 0. ! REWRITE!... **NicelyDone!**

Several years later, Sonia Castillo received her PHD in Biostatistics becoming one of the few Hispanic women ever to attain that degree. At her celebration dinner after graduation her father kept running up to me, hugging and kissing me. I was embarrassed at first and then one moment locked in time he hugged and kissed me and said, "I know it was you!" I said, "It was your daughter that worked so hard!" He said again, "No, I know it was you!" Then a moment that locked in time, he hugged, kissed me, and lifted me in the air!

"When You Lift Up Others, You Lift Yourself"

I never felt prouder of my profession as a teacher and never felt prouder of what can happen in my country. And so I guess my philosophy of Teaching is simple: "Toss them high (There is no substitute for knowledge), be there to catch and encourage them. For the journey to knowledge is often difficult and fearful, so toss them """" in the air again."