

FILIPINO POTPOURRI

By Jesse T. Reyes

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – What does it mean to be a very good teacher? □ Of course credentials, knowledge, critical thinking, and all other faculties of intelligence are important. □ However, a great teacher - if I must say – should be much more than vouchers, experience and intellect.

I believe they should get to know their students individually, advocate for education in the community, and can pinpoint exactly when and why they decided to become a teacher.

How many of us can look back on our education and formative years and remember a particularly enlightening moment, when a teacher, or coach, or mentor opened our eyes and change the direction of our lives?

I am quite sure almost everyone can recall a special individual – a kindly second-grade teacher, a tough but caring coach, an idealistic history instructor – who went beyond the call of duty and left an imprint on us for the rest of our lives.

These are the teachers students remember decades later - the ones who go the extra mile, who made a difference.

Now, let me deviate for a moment: □ I always like to think that one of the greatest pleasures any of us can have in life is paying homage to those we admire. □ I'll let the words of the great painter Vincent van Gogh, in a letter to his brother Theo speak for me in this regard: □ "Admire as much as you can; most people do not admire enough."

Unfortunately, admiration is something we are in desperate short supply of these days. □ We tend to diminish, rather than to enlarge, to minify, rather than magnify, whatever is good. □ Just look around you – especially television news – it sure makes the good small and the bad as large as possible, on the theory that the surest way to attract the greatest attention is to frighten and alarm.

A siren turns more heads than birdsong does, after all, and that is as it should be, provided that the danger of which the siren warns is real. □ The trouble is that, very often now, the danger isn't true. □ This is the age of false alarm, deliberately sounded by people who are in the crowd-gathering business.

On the other side, however, for representing the heart of teaching is a young, great Filipino-American teacher who set off away from the sirens and the crowd and the pitchmen and the barker for whom those throngs had been assembled, to find antidotes to the pervasive illness we didn't even know we had – "medicines" in the form of quiet, truthful, beautifully told and shaped teachings and instructions about the best in all of her students. □ This she did hundreds of times (I'm quite sure) on classrooms, for heaven's sake – which is like saying that – without raising her voice, she somehow managed to make herself heard on the other side of the entire school and its community.

On this particular edition, it is my honor to pay tribute to one of the most outstanding offspring (an educator) coming of a fellow "kababayan" (townsman) from our historic hometown of Sta. Ana in old Manila, a peer alumnus of that beloved educational institution there, the Villamor High School, an equal US military veteran and Navy shipmate Ernie (VHS '63) and Zeny Parrish – that I have been privileged to know in my life.

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) named Shirley Parrish Miranda '07 (MEd) (Yes, she is the daughter of Ernie and Zeny Parrish!) - one of its five teachers of the year at its 25th annual A Salute to Teachers event. SDCOE honored 44 educators for their commitment to teaching and learning, representing their exceptional efforts and celebrating the 26,000 public teachers in the region.

During the program, co-hosted by Sherri Shepherd of “The View,” the top instructors were congratulated in videos from the likes of Jay leno and artist Wyland.

Finalists were selected based on student achievement, teaching philosophy, familiarity with current education issues and community involvement. To qualify for the county competition, each finalist was required to write an essay.

(The winning teachers will go on to compete for the statewide title later this year.)

A former software engineer who created business and web applications, Miranda had a thriving career prior to entering the classroom.

As an extracurricular, she volunteered as director of the Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair and found a growing passion for mentoring students.

Eventually, she decided to pursue a second career as a teacher, and she hasn't looked back.

And the rest is history, as we all like to express it.

Returning to the same high school she attended, Miranda teaches statistics and computer science at Morse High School. □ As a Morse alumna and a first-generation college graduate, she understands some of the challenges her students face. □ She encourages them to seize opportunities and not be limited by their zip code. □ Particularly at the beginning of the year, Miranda spends time building community in her classroom, imparting her wisdom from industry and sharing life lessons.

To establish trust in her classroom, Miranda greets students at the door every day, and then thanks them as they exit.

“It is a small gesture that is often overlooked, but is an important component in building relationships and respect with my students, both important aspects of education,” she explained.

The tradition was inspired by a student who told her she was the only teacher to speak to him the entire year.

“It simultaneously broke my heart and made me happy,” she added. □ “Respect and relationships help close the achievement gap with at-risk students.”

Indeed, Miranda is so masterful in making connections with students in a way that gets them excited about learning science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). □□ All of Miranda’s students also participate in the Greater San Diego Science Fair. □ She encourages them to pursue inquiry based projects on any subject matter. □ Projects have

ranged from examining bacteria at the department store makeup counters to creating particle board from reusable materials.

Teaching computer science, Miranda weaves in relevant issues into the curriculum including cyberbullying.

Miranda assesses her students daily, and groups them together for mentoring. □ She forged a partnership with University of California (UC) San Diego, which allows her to bring in professors, professionals and students with work in her class.

She also serves as Junior Class Advisor and AP Stats Club Advisor. □ She is a teacher fellow and advisory board member for the University of California, San Diego's California State Summer School for Mathematics and Science (COSMOS), and the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair Advisory Council. □ She also served a term on the Computer Science Teacher Association Board.

Multi-talented, Miranda is also a novelist, who is working on her fifth book in a young adult series called "Bits and Pieces" about the power of friendship overcoming obstacles.

In talking to a great many teachers – I say that no matter where they taught, whether at the wealthiest private school or in the most severely impoverished community, one word came up consistently. □ That word was "love."

"I love my students," they would say (Miranda, included), and sometimes their eyes would even fill with tears. □ I remember one teacher told me she was quitting at the end of the year because her school was so dysfunctional but begged me not to tell anyone because she loved her students so much she couldn't bear for them to find out.

□ Another wouldn't stop showing me photos of her former students, long since grown with children of their own, as proud of their accomplishments as any parent.

Look, I'm not saying skills don't matter, that teachers just waltz into the classroom and just hang out with a full heart all day. □ Great teachers are masters of the techniques they need to reach the students in their classrooms, though those skills are extremely different depending on the student's brilliance, trust levels and emotional needs.

Watching Shirley Parrish Miranda mentor, her calling was loud and clear - she's truly a master at the top of her profession and indeed at the very heart of great teaching.

Congratulations again, Shirley! □ You absolutely inspire us all! □ We are all so proud of you!!!

And thank you for all you do, in spite of everything, to change the world one child at a time.

Mabuhay!



SHIRLEY PARRISH MIRANDA – SAN DIEGO COUNTY 2015 TEACHER OF THE YEAR



TEACHERS OF THE YEAR SHIRLEY PARRISH MIRANDA AND BENJAMIN BURKHEAD AT THE 2013 DISTRICT AWARDS