

Preface



All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories

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Preface

I am in my 45th year as a professional educator. With the coming year and adding the four years of professional preparation at the college level, it will be an even half-century of my life that I have dedicated to education.

I have always taken my profession very seriously. So much so, that most of my colleagues consider me a very serious, humorless, perhaps even a dour, individual. That is fine. During these fifty years, I have dedicated myself to a very serious, oftentimes vicious, struggle for the educational rights of children.

In defense of children, I have had frequent confrontations with my colleagues and superiors in the educational hierarchy. I have taken on the educational establishment: teachers, principals, superintendents, colleges and agencies. I have challenged the experts, and I have kicked the sacred cows and stepped on the holy books of education.

On behalf of minority children, I have fought verbally with mayors, councils, commissioners, business leaders, chambers of commerce, directors, judges, legislators, governors and presidents.

I have done this in my simple belief that in a free society, all children are entitled to equal educational opportunity. In a free society, educational success should be determined by individual traits such as capability, interest, willingness and the investment of personal effort. Success should not be determined by group traits such as ethnicity, gender, geographic location, family wealth or social class.

The fundamental purpose of education is freedom. A person is not free if the person does not have freedom of choice. Freedom of choice is a myth unless there are feasible alternatives from which to choose. Therefore, the fundamental role of education is to create and maintain feasible alternatives from which the individual may choose.

In my bicultural existence, I have selected two heroes, two historical role models, whom I have presumptuously tried to emulate. The first is Thomas Jefferson whose entire life was dedicated to the creation of a democratic society in which all persons are equal. I have tried, very modestly, I must add, to live up to his oath, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of men."

On many occasions I have sat before the statue of Thomas Jefferson in the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., and asked for God's guidance in my opposition to educational policy and practice that I considered tyranny over the minds of children.

My second hero is Benito Juarez, the Zapotec Indian who against all odds, became the greatest leader in the history of Mexico. He expressed his philosophy in a simple statement which would eliminate many of the world's greatest problems if accepted and followed worldwide, "*El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz* [Respect for the rights of others is peace]."

The seriousness of my professional life has been paralleled by extensive humor in my personal life. I enjoy a funny story and a food joke. At times these two traits have intersected. This literary effort is an effort to reconcile these two sides of my personality. It is an attempt to present a continuum of moods, from all humor to all seriousness.

The first chapter deals with the lighter side of my life. It consists of personal anecdotes from childhood to adulthood. The second chapter consists of anecdotes where humor and professional seriousness have intersected. Chapter three consists of professional topics addressed in a lighter context than in my professional publications.

I have enjoyed writing these materials; I hope that the reader will enjoy reading them.

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