

Blood, Sweat, and Tears *by Ana Gonzalez*

Since I can remember, I have wanted to study and be an important person. Unfortunately, I did not have many opportunities growing up in Mexico. My parents were very poor and they didn't have any opportunity to study, either. They didn't know how to read, write, sign their names, or do basic mathematics. I studied first to sixth grade in my town, but for middle school, I had to walk almost twelve miles each day. Half of those were at noon when the sun was strongest and it toasted my skin while my knapsack hung heavy on my shoulder and my old shoes supported my tired feet. Sometimes I walked in rainy weather along a muddy way. When I walked home in the evening, the dark of night made me scared. I had almost no time to do my homework because I had to help my mother wash the dishes from a whole day and wash my two old uniforms. I also had to take care of my little sister. When we had food, I prepared my lunch because I didn't have money to buy it in the school. Sometimes when I had nothing to eat in the school it was difficult to learn. Sometimes I didn't do my homework because I didn't have money to buy the material to complete projects. However, I finished middle school and I graduated with good qualifications.

I talked with my mother and I said, "Mom, I want to study. Please let me go to more school," but she didn't want to let me go. She said, "We don't have money to pay for your school." I answered, "That's OK, Mom. I can work and study at the same time. I would like to be an independent woman, buy everything that I need

by myself, and let my money grow. I don't like when people take advantage of us because they know more." But she didn't believe in me and she told me, "You are a girl. You are going to get married and your husband is going to give you everything you'll need." I knew my mom was wrong, but I could not do anything at this time.



I still remember my father's eyes when I asked him about school. He said to me, "I wish I could afford it. If I had all the gold of all the world, I would give it to you because I love you and I know you are very talented and you want to do good things. Always remember it is most important in life to be an honest person. I'm very sad for you, and I love you with all my heart." I answered, "Yes, I know. And I love you, too." We hugged each other and I understood my father needed my help bringing some money to the house. So I dedicated my life to work. I worked with my father, cleaning houses or doing what was needed. I always did honest and decent work, following the wisdom of my father. I did this for five years, but the situation in my house was not tolerable for me and I couldn't bear how difficult life was for my family. The love that I felt for them pushed me to decide to travel to a big city where I studied for two more years without any support from my mother. I was living in my cousin's house. I was working as a cashier eight to ten hours a day, six or seven days a week. I was also studying at the same time from Monday to Friday, four hours a day and seven hours on Saturday. I was offered many promotions in my work, but I never took

them because my school schedule didn't permit me. I never had time to rest. Sometimes I didn't sleep so I could do homework. I took the reins of my own life and I never did anything bad. I was on the list of the ten best students in school so I

I still remember my father's eyes when I asked him about school. He said to me, "I wish I could afford it. . ."

had good grades when I quit my work. My boss didn't want to let me go. She said I was an excellent person and employee. I felt very proud of myself for everything I did in those two years.

I wanted to attend the university but was too late for the registration. I decided to work

one year, save my money, and continue studying the next year. But my plans changed. I got married and came to live in the United States.

I didn't know any people here—only my husband and his parents. I didn't have much support from them to study. I went to English classes with my father-in-law for about three weeks. Then I learned I was pregnant and I couldn't continue going to school.

Since my child was born, I have dedicated my life to him. Right now I have to drive for one-and-a-half or two hours each day to go to school at the Marine Avenue Adult Center where they have a Family Literacy Program. I also need to keep my house clean, prepare food, and give quality time to my son and husband. I feel I need a longer day to do everything, but the most difficult for me is to concentrate and learn. My father died in Mexico this month and I worry about my mom. Maybe I will have to work again so I can send money and help my family. It is difficult to be a woman with a dream of education. It is sad to think that maybe I won't continue coming to my current school.

Ana Gonzalez received 11 years of education in her native Mexico. She is now an adult student in Los Angeles, California.

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?

by Barbara Carreira

Who am I to take on the world
when I am unable to read?
Who am I to help others
when I am so much in need?

What effort would it take
for knowledge to be mine?
What cost would be involved
to learn to read one line?

When can my secret be shared
and shame be erased?
When can being illiterate be
something to be faced?

Where do I turn for help
with my desire to learn?
Where then, do I go
to improve the wages I earn?

Why in a world so advanced
must a woman struggle in vain?
Why when I reach out
does no one hear my pain?

AND

How am I to teach my child -
when I lack the skill?
How am I to change her path -
if not me, who will?

Barbara Carreira began writing poetry in junior high school, but this is one of the first times she has shared her writing with the public.